

# Extracts from Major Jack Reed's diary

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April 4, 1944

We docked at Greenock yesterday and boarded the train at 16:30. Rode all nite and arrived at Stoney Cross about 18:00 tonite. I must say it's quite a place. Much better than we expected. We have a large well equiped field and good barracks. Each flight has a separate barracks. I have mine all together. But the payoff is that we are flying P-38s. They were already on the field when we arrived. They have been flown over from the states and now every darn one of them has to have engine changes. Maj. Crossen (Group Exec) and Griff who were on the advanced party jumped the gun on us and have about two sweeps each. Maj. Crossen got two confirmed on his first trip. An 88 and a 109F. Rumor has it that about four of us will be sent to Italy for about 3 weeks to get some experience before the invasion starts. Seems like old times to get back to making a cup of tea in your room before going to bed.

April 6, 1944

We are gradually getting organized. Have an excellent field to operate from. It was originally a glider field and has plenty of runway. Over 7000' for the long one. The dispersal areas are strung out for miles with 38s in every nook and corner. We have 85 assigned to the Group with 25 to each of the squadrons, and we will use 4 ships per flight making a total of 16 per Sqd. on Ops. We are in the 9th Air Force and will do ground support and dive bombing and strafing. It's going to be a rough war when this invasion starts. I don't care especially for a 38 but in this Air Force there are two groups of P-51, 2 of 38s and the rest are 47s and for support I think the 38 is far the best for the job. Have been getting cockpit time today and learning the mysteries of the 38. Have also regular ground school classes which include a lot of aircraft recognition, which of course is very important. The Italy deal fell through but instead they are sending about 15 of us to another outfit to do a few sweeps before we become operational. They want us to go after we have had two hours in a 38 which I think is just asking for it. But still if I get a chance I won't turn it down. I have been out of circulation too long. They have cancelled all overnite passes in preparation for the invasion so I guess won't have a chance to look up any friends. Morale is good and C flight looks awfully good to me. However, only time will tell.

April 11, 1944

Jimmy Peck was killed tonite. He was up testing a new P-38 which had been assigned to him. He had been up about two hours doing about everything in the book and overshot the runway coming in to land. When he opened his throttles to go around the left engine failed and he spun in on the perimeter track. Needless to say it's pretty hard to take because Jim was my closest friend. I met him in London in 42 before we transferred. We transferred together, went to Africa on the invasion and went back to the States together. Over there we were in the same group and joined the 367th together to come over here. Jimmy had the British D.F.C. and Bar, the American D.F.C. and had done most of his fighting on Malta during the Blitz there. He had seven confirmed, five probables and four damaged, without ever picking up a hole in his kite. Jim was deeply respected by everyone not only for his flying but also his disposition. He would gripe from morning until nite about something and would soon have everyone else griping with him. He was

the 329th and 444th, was standing about 50 yds from where it happened and was the first man to him. Jim was thrown clear when the ship hit and exploded. He was not burned but had a bad fracture of the skull and even though Doc had some blood which he had been saving for just such an emergency, Jimmy died about twenty minutes later on the way to the hospital. The time was 08:50 p.m. At least I have the satisfaction of knowing that everything possible was done because Doc knows his business. When we were in the States Doc and Jimmy and I used to plan great things when we got to London. Doc went to school here so we all had something in common. Naturally we struck up quite a friendship so it isn't too easy for Doc either. That's all.

April 25, 1944

Tony Levier, Lockheed test pilot, came in last nite with a special P-38. Had a lot of new mods on it, so today the boys are really going to town on their ships getting them fixed up like his. Single engine procedure seems to have everyone a bit worried, me included. Out of four single engine landing attempts we have lost four ships. However, after watching the show put on this morning by Levier on single engine I am convinced it's a matter of knowledge of the ship, fast reaction and confidence. He was rolling into his dead engine on the deck, vertical rolls off the deck and almost everything else you can think of. Phelps moves up to flight leader in C Flight and Petersen to assistant. That puts Phelps in line for his Captaincy and Petersen for First Lt. Glad to see them get it. They are both darn good boys. Wish we had more like them. They assigned us fourteen new pilots yesterday, 3 of which I checked out at Concord on P-39s. Since they have been flying 38s and have about 100 hours they are extremely cocky so guess will have to let a little wind out of their sails.

May 9, 1944

Finally became operational today with a bang. They gave us two sweeps right off the bat. Got up at 5:30 and plotted the first mission which got off about 8:00. It was in simple fighter sweep into France in the Cherbourg area. I didn't get to go because I haven't my new ship yet. This afternoon we had another fighter sweep and I managed to chisel a ship from the 392nd. We went in at Cherbourg, swept inland about 80 miles and then over as far as Brest. We were at 18,000 and spotted one bandit on the deck but that was all. It was about a 580 mile trip. Coming home we fired our guns in the Channel and my wing man (Lt. O'Donnell) of the 392nd caught a ricochet in his left engine and it quit. We (my flight) stood by and I got a vector and brought him home on one engine. In making his approach he forgot his wheels and the tower gave him a red flare. He tried to go around but a 38 will not fly on one engine with flaps down if your speed gets below 120 m.p.h. When he opened his throttle to go around it pulled in to the left and into the trees. The ship hit the trees and exploded. I of course was very close watching him and I couldn't see how he ever had a chance. The good Lord was really riding with him because he stepped out of the wreckage with not a scratch except for a cut on one hand. I still can't believe it. It is almost exactly the way Jimmy Peck went in. I asked him later how he ever got out and he said he just sat there and surveyed the wreckage for a minute until the ammo started going off and then he got out and ran like hell. After that he will probably live to be a ripe old age.





Jack Reed and Jimmy Peck

Jack is 'admiring' Jimmy's lucky watch!

May 12, 1944

Had our fourth mission today, the second I have been on. We went in and brought the bombers out after they had bombed. It was quite a big show as far as our part was concerned. We along with the 474th, another 38 outfit, brought them home from the German border. Their target was Leipzig. Not very much excitement. Quite a lot of flak and a few scares but we were not bounced. Some stuff flew around us but didn't make any passes. Too far away to identify. Col. Dale was leading and did an excellent job. He has been loaned to us to lead our missions for awhile. For myself I would just as soon he would lead all the time. Col. Young and Maj. Crossen haven't the experience and I am afraid that if we ever do get bounced with them leading it's going to cost us. Col. Young seems to have the idea that all you have to do is crawl into a ship and lead but being here before and flying behind some damn good leaders I know it isn't as simple as that. Plotting and working up these missions and then flying them on top of that is quite a job. Got up at 03:00 a.m. this morning so pretty tired tonite. Must put this down before I forget it. The ship I was flying hasn't any relief tube and my kidneys are notoriously weak. Well today I just could not hold it any longer so I just had to let go in the cockpit. To say the least it wasn't a pleasant trip and the crew chief took an extremely dim view of the whole thing. Needless to say I cleaned the ship up.

May 23, 1944

Today has been quite an eventful day. We started off with quite a simple escort mission about 8:00 this a.m. We went in about 75 miles behind Paris to escort out some B-17 and 24 (about 300) which were hitting railway marshalling yards in that area. Weather was pretty bad and we had to climb out on instruments and also let down on them. I was leading Green section in Fido Sqd. (392nd). We would go in pick up a box of bombers, escort them out to the French coast and then go back in after another bunch. On all these missions we take spare ships as

far as the French Coast to fill in when anyone drops out. Lt. Lezie was a spare and when he started home he called in for a vector (we were over a solid overcast). Obtaining one he flew the course given him but did not know his compass was out. When he was where he decided was home he let down through and came out over Cherbourg which is one of the heaviest flak concentrations in France. Consequently he got the hell shot out of him but managed to get home o.k. In the meantime my No. 2, Lt. Ross, called me while we were still in France and said he was in trouble. We covered him until he got his engines started again and decided to head for home. About 10 minutes after we had crossed the French coast coming out he called and said he was o.k. so I decided to let down through the overcast and go home on the deck. We went into cloud about 10,000 and broke out underneath at 8,000. After breaking out looked around and only had one man with me instead of four. Lt. Ross and Capt. Hollingsworth were missing. I circled a couple of times and tried to call them. Got no reply. Supposing they had gone back on top I went on home. This was about 10:30. By twelve thirty they were still missing so took one man (Lt. Rankin) and went out to App. the area I had let down in and set up a search. After about 30 min found a large oil slick on the water and saw a large wheel and tire floating in the water which I identified as a P-38 wheel. After searching for another 30 min finally made out a dingy with a man in the water beside it. No sign of life. Called Air Sea Rescue and they sent out a couple of spits to escort us as we were only about 10 miles off the French coast and also a Walrus flying boat. Meantime we saw another body in the water which we eventually identified as a man floating in a Mae West. No sign of life from him either. By the time the Walrus got there we were getting low on gas so headed for home. They picked these boys up and we were later notified that one was dead when they fished him out and the other only lived a short while. So we have lost two damned good pilots. The only thing I see that could have possibly happened is that they ran together while we were in cloud. We just had another mission tonite. Our first bombing mission. The boys were out bombing targets of opportunity and some of them got shot up pretty bad. Three of them landed here on single engine and a number of them landed at emergency fields on the coast. Pretty damned expensive I'd say. What a day.

May 27, 1944

Took a few days off and went to London. Thought I would look up a few old friends but there doesn't seem to be any left. Most of them are either P.O.W. or are dead. Of the few left Wally Coombs is now a S/L at Mill Field, Eric Haubjoern my former wing man is now W/C flying at Westhampnett and Gover and Young are both Majors and have gone back to the States. I wish now that I hadn't gone. When I got back today learned that Bill Jones got it over France on Wednesday. Tried to get him to go to London with me but he wouldn't. He had already been to Berlin on a five hour mission and had no business going out but Bill was eager. They went over to beat up an airfield and flak got him about 3000 ft. He rolled over on his back to bail but no one saw him get out. But I refuse to give up hope because it's hard to see a man in a chute particularly if there is a lot of excitement. Bill always said if he got it low that he would get out on his back and the boys said the ship looked like it was under control even though it was burning badly. What a hell of a life. Sometimes I could almost quit. I won't have any friends left pretty soon. Col. Mallory was down from

IX A.F. tonite to get a full report on the two boys I lost in the channel the other day. Seems to be a discrepancy in time between us and Command and they are raising hell about it. My conscience is clear but I wish we could have gotten to them sooner.



June 3, 1944

Had another bombing mission this a.m. It was my day in Ops so I couldn't go. The boys went out and hit railroads and locomotives. They cut all the tracks in one area and knocked out three engines. Quite a few of the boys got shot up. Lt. Blomer hit a power line and came back on one engine with half his wing gone and wires wrapped around his ship. Did a nice job. There were about three others who came back on single engine. These damn strafing raids are expensive. Tonite I was briefed on the invasion so now I am grounded until it actually starts.

June 5 & 6, 1944

Have been waiting for some time to write about this. Yesterday afternoon at 4:00 the invasion started. I had been briefed previously but didn't know when it would actually start. The boats set out across the channel at 4:00 yesterday afternoon and landed this morning at 06:30 for the American landing and 07:15 for the British landing. This was called "H. Hour". The landing was made between the Cherbourg Peninsula and LeHarve on about a 50 mile beach front. Our job is to protect the shipping in the channel from the English coast to the French coast. Quite a simple job, but an important one. We ran our first mission last

nite at 10:30 to 12:00 and nine missions today of 1:30 min. duration. We are landing about 51 divisions of troops in that area and almost every aircraft in England is doing some sort of job. The heavy bombers literally knocked Dunkirk and Calaise off the map. This morning about an hour ago Halifaxes towing gliders went over almost in an endless stream. The aircraft passing overhead today has been terrific. A group of P-51s just went over loaded up with bombs and a group of B-24s are just returning and this has been going on endlessly since early last nite. The P-38s are doing shipping cover with six groups. The P-51s, Spits and Typhoons are doing low cover and dive bombing in the assault area. P-47s are providing high cover in and behind the assault area. Then there are various groups and wings standing by in readiness in case they are needed and they are also doing submarine patrols. A-20s and B-26s are laying smoke on the beaches. They are dropping airborne infantry and equipment by the thousands in behind the beaches who in turn are working out toward the beaches. This morning they landed two engineering outfits who immediately set up emergency landing strips for our boys if needed. The amazing part about it is that we have neither seen or encountered any enemy opposition of any kind up till tonite. In combat Ops I have a direct line to Command where the Controller is for our sector and was able to get all the latest info from them as it built up. There was a terrific amount of hun activity in the Cherbourg area this morning and it was thought for a while that they would counter attack, but guess they changed their minds when they had a look. There is a solid stream of landing craft going and coming between England the the assault area and supporting them on either side is over 800 warships. That sort of gives some idea of the size of the force. I worked all nite last nite and up until noon today plotting courses and setting up missions so have been sleeping all afternoon. Hope to really get in some flying tomorrow. We are all holding our breath to see what the hun is going to do. We know he has a terrific force in that area but so far has made no effort to use it. All we have managed to see so far are the warships shelling the coast and the heavies bombing various areas. I also forgot to mention that when we have completed our last mission of the day the R.A.F. mosquitos equipped with G.C.I. take over and patrol all nite.

June 7, 1944

Situation about the same today. Our beachheads are established and the boys have taken "Caen" and a strip about 10 miles inland. We did another

every time the 190s would poke their nose out these guys would jump on them. They finally nailed them both. The Warmwell boys flying 38s went out this morning doing dive bombing and strafing and lost eight, so that doesn't sound so good. But so far our losses have been very light. There were quite a few boys sitting around in the channel in dinghys this morning when we went out. They were all picked up. I have heard it estimated that we are using 11000 aircraft on this show. Frankly the thing that has worried us most is fear of collision, there are so many ships in the area at once.

June 11, 1944

Right now they have us at an absolute standstill. We haven't even been off the ground for two days. The weather has been very bad but they have had us standing by in cockpits at the end of the runway in case anything should pop. So far no ocap. The 37lot (P-47s) got five 190s day before yesterday. One boy got three and two others one each. One of the guys split esed at 5,000 and the 190 dived into the ground before he could pull out. The 47 hit some trees but got home o.k. We have an advanced landing ground in France now. It's on the Peninsula and we can land and refuel if necessary. That helps a lot. Talked yesterday to some of the paratroopers as they came in. They didn't have very much to say except that it was rough. They dropped them about 6 hours before H hour so I guess it was rough. A lot of the fields that the gliders landed in were mined so that wasn't any help. Tried on a couple of 2000 lb bombs on my ship today for size. The damn things are as big as an engine. We will start carrying them soon. Can't say I particularly relish the idea. 4,000 lbs is as much as a B-17 carries and this damn P-38 is supposed to be a fighter. Wonder what they will think of next to put on it. Carrying 2 x 2000 lb bombs and loaded with fuel the ship will weigh over 23,000 lbs.

June 12, 1944

We did a shipping cover mission this p.m. Saw lots of boats and aircraft but all ours. Went in to the beachhead just north of "Caen" and picked up two cruisers who had some bigwigs (Churchill) on board and escorted them back to the Isle of Wight. Rather monotonous but it's better than sitting on readiness as they have had us doing for the past week. Or I should say three days. We were over the Peninsula going out and there was a lot of activity; dive bombing and strafing. Saw a hell of a big dogfight going on to my right. Don't know who or what it was. Definitely recognized some P-47s but that was all.

June 20, 1944

The group was sent over to Cherbourg on beach cover and the boys got their first chance to land in France on the A.L.G.s. They made the rounds while there and brought back German helmets and anything else they could get their hands on. They were worse than a bunch of school kids.

June 21, 1944

We had a big show today. Last nite we were ordered to Warmingford to remain over nite so we knew something was in the wind. We took off from there this morning about 07:30 and went to Berlin. We were escorting 7 C.W. of B-17s and 24s. The entire mission was instrument with the exception of a few clear spots between Hanover and Berlin. Anyway, we took off and climbed through the overcast and set course for Denmark, our first check point. We had no way of knowing our exact position on top of the overcast and we caught a hell of a lot of very accurate flak over the Fresian Islands. Just bouth of Sweden we turned south and went down to point of R/V which was just outside Berlin and from then on we really started to catch flak. I have been in this war quite a while but never have I seen so much and such accurate flak. They just simply put it up in clouds. If you turned left it followed you, if you turned right it followed you. If you dived they lowered it. I have never seen anything like it. I know what these bomber boys mean now when they say "flak happy". That stuff will drive you nuts.

Anyway, they split our group and squadrons in every direction but most all of Rebel Sqd. (393rd) made R/V with the bombers and then we sat and watched them take the flak. I saw them nail one box squarely and those boys really had it rough. Two of them went down in flames and the rest were shot all to pieces. There must have been at least 700 bombers and they were strung solid for 150 miles. Just as far as you could see there were bombers. They hit propoganda units, Gestapo Hq. and all Military Hq. in Berlin. With that many bombers it must have really been important. It should be very interesting to hear the results. As far as we know not a single fighter outfit hit any enemy fighters. We really expected to today, but there you are. They must be saving them for something. We didn't lose anyone over there but we lost two ships on landing here, both pilots o.k. We were airborne for 6 hours and 15 min. which is a hell of a long time to sit in a fighter. My fanny is sure achng. We had no more than landed when they alerted us for a dive bombing mission down by Paris. The boys who didn't go this a.m. are out now. They are after railroads and bridges again.

June 22, 1944

Today we really got it. I thought yesterday that we had really seen something but today they just shot us all to pieces. We went over to bomb the tip of the Cherbourg Peninsula where they have the hun cornered. It's only a strip about 5 miles wide and 25 miles long but the amount of flak concentrated there is almost beyond comprehension. Every town, farmhouse, trees, etc., is loaded with light and heavy flak. The mission was to send in 12 groups or 36 Sqd's. 5 min. apart and bomb them completely out but I don't feel we were very successful. We lost nine pilots and of the 48 ships we sent out only 13 are still fit to fly. Engines shot out, rudders and fuselages shot away and the rest filled full of holes. My wing man and myself got away o.k. but one boy in my section was on fire and had to bail in the channel about 10 miles off Cherbourg. We circled him for 3 hours but there were so many boys in the channel who had bailed Air Sea Rescue just couldn't take care of all of them so we lost him. Boy by name of Wedul. Really a fine lad. Two other boys who were in front of me exploded and went straight in, some of the others crash landed in allied territory and about five or six came home on single engine and one of those had to crash land when he got home. Maj. Smith who was Group Ops Officer is missing\*, the 394th lost 6 and the 392nd 1 and 393rd 1. I dropped my bombs on a flak battery and strafed another one but it was pretty futile. We were on the deck in the bottom of a ravine and they caught my section in a cross fire. Out of the 12 groups who went in all of them sustained heavy losses. So I don't think it was worth it. Got up about 5:00 a.m. and went up to London to pick up maps for this show and while I was there the hun sent over some of their rocket glider bombs. Got a first hand view of one that hit very close to where we were. They are catapulted from the Calais area and are aimed and timed to land in London. They go very fast and the whole airplane is about a 3000 lb. projectile. You never know where the darned things are going to land.

\*Found two months later killed.

June 23, 1944

Released all day today trying to get enough ships in commission to run a mission tomorrow. Out of 48 we sent out 37 were either lost or damaged.



June 25, 1944

We provided cover for two Naval forces bombarding Cherbourg. They literally blasted that place off the map. Weather was extremely bad and the boys were flying instrument most of the time. The 393rd lost two boys who crashed on the Isle of Wight trying to get home. One was Lt. Liotti who was on his first mission and the other was Capt. Pierce. Liotti hit on the Isle of Wight and Pierce hit and exploded in the water just off shore. But we also had some good news for a change. Bill Jones showed up all o.k. at British Hq. in France. He has been missing about a month now. The boys are really tickled pink because Bill is extremely well liked. It made me feel so good because deep inside something kept telling me that he was alright. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

June 26, 1944

Have been grounded all day today due to weather. This p.m. went over to Ibsley to look over the set up where we are moving on Sat. Sure is strung out but at least we will live in houses with bathrooms. Col. Young told me tonite that I was to use discretion in picking the missions that I fly and lay off the tough ones. I am the only operations officer and there wouldn't be anyone to plot if I were lost, but it made me feel rather funny. This sure is a screwy war.



Jack Reed completed his tour and returned to the States in October 1944