THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 1944

New Y

Life of a Gunner

By Ernie Pyle

IN ITALY, March 9.—Most of my time with the 47th Group of A-20 Boston light bombers has been spent with the gunners. All the gunners are sergeants. Each plane carries two. They ride in the rear compartment of the plane.

The top gunner sits in a glass-inclosed bubble rising above the fuselage. The bottom gunner sits on the floor during take-off, and after they're in the air he opens a trap door and swivels his machine gun down into the open hole.

Due to the nature of their missions and to the inferiority of German fighter strength in Italy, the A-20 gunners seldom have a battle in the air. Their main worry is flak, and that's plenty to worry about.

The gunners live in pyramidal tents, four and five to a tent. Some of their tents are fixed up inside even nicer than the officers'. Others are bare.

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The gunners have to stand in chow line, the same as other soldiers, and eat out of mess kits. Now and then they even have to go on clean-up detail and help pick up trash throughout their area. They must keep their own tents clean and stand frequent inspection.

I found them a high-class and sincere bunch of boys. Those who really love to fly in combat are the exceptions. Most of them take it in workaday fashion, but they keep a fanatical count on the number of missions flown, each one of which takes them a little nearer to the final goal —the end of their tour of duty.

Ordinarily a gunner goes on only one mission a day, but with the increased air activity of late they sometimes go both morning and afternoon, day after day. There are boys here who arrived only in December and are already almost finished with their missions, whereas it used to take six months and more to run up the allotted total.

Life in the combat air forces is fairly informal. In several days on this field I've seen only one salute. But that's all right, for the air forces don't need the same type of discipline that less specialized branches require.

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The enlisted gunners and the commissioned pilots work so closely together that they feel themselves in the same boat.

Gunners don't like braggarts, either among commissioned officers or their own fellows. After I got to know them they told me of some of their own number who talked too big and of some with the bad judgment to tell "whoppers" even to the gunners.

One night I sat in their tent with five gunners for about three hours. After I had been with them some time, their natural reserve in front of a stranger had worn off, and we talked and talked about everything under the sun and about what men think and feel who are caught in the endless meshing of the war machine.

One by one they told me of the experiences they had been through. Every man in the tent was living on borrowed time. Every one had stayed alive at least once only by a seeming miracle. Several had been badly wounded but were back in action again.

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When I started to leave they said apologetically: "We're kind of ashamed. Here we've been doing all the talking, when actually we wanted to hear your experiences."

And I tried to say: "People like you saying things like that! Just one of your ordinary missions is more than everything I've seen put together."

And they said: "Well, anyhow, you don't know how much we appreciate your coming and talking with us. We don't get to talk to anyone outside very often. It has meant a lot."

And as I followed the twisting path by flashlight back to my own tent among the grapevines I couldn't help but feel humble and inconsequential before these boys who are afraid and yet brave, who yearn for something or somebody to anchor to, who are so sincere they even want to listen to the talk of a mere spectator at war.

Fleming Penicillin Pioneer

Discoverer Is Continuing Research

By S. J. WOOLF,
NEA Staff Correspondent.

LONDON, March 9.—Entombed in a small, glass, hermetically sealed tray is the ancestor of most of the penicillin in the world. I held it in my hands the other day when I went to see Prof. Alexander Fleming at St. Mary's Hospital. For he is the bacteriologist who discovered that this mould which he so carefully treasures is the source of one of the most powerful antiseptics known to science.

As the small, soft-spoken Scotsman sat in his laboratory, which looks more like the rear room of an old-fashioned drug store than the birthplace of a great medical discovery, it was hard to realize that he is the man who is responsible for the cure of several dread diseases as well as for the great advance in the treatment of wounds during the present war.

Heretofore present infection made it unwise to close any war wound before six hours. With penicillin closure can be started at once.

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In telling of his discovery, Prof. Fleming said: "Some 16 years ago I was working on some bacterial cultures. While doing this the cover of the dish in which they were being grown was removed. A few days later I noticed that a spot of mould had formed. A mould spore in the air had fallen on it and grown there. But I also noticed another thing. This was that the cultures nearest the spot of mould had disappeared, while those at some distance kept growing.

"I had been working with bacteria ever since I had been graduated from St. Mary's Hospital. I was always on the lookout for antibacterial agents. So it was perfectly natural that I should investigate when I noticed this.

"Accordingly I grew more of something else: It was practically the first antiseptic I had tested which, although it stopped the growth of bacteria, did not affect white corpuscles.

"Now. this was most important. For the white blood corpuscles themselves are germ killers, and most antiseptics are as destructive to their allies in the war against disease as they are to the bacteria causing the disease.

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Notwithstanding the eminence Prof. Fleming has attained, he still remains the unassuming farmer boy who was born 50-odd years ago in Darvel, in Ayrshire, Scotland.

Most of his time is spent in his laboratory developing penicillin, for he foresees powerful new derivitives as a possibility in the future.

Holding an ever-present cigaret in his square-tipped fingers, he pointed out that, while the new drug is effective in many diseases, it is powerless against some. He also added that the technique of its administration was still a subject for experiment.

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Although he likes to row and swim, he has little time for either these days. He is also tremendously interested in art and has tried his hand at painting. In