Ref "M" - **Statement from the Met. Ex-Staff Sergeant (now promoted to Master Sergeant) concerning the weather briefing given to the pilots of B-17 A-9338**

Sometime during the late morning October 31, Colonel Upham and Colonel Fair came in and asked about a flight along 22 or 2400 hours local that night to London, and at that time a Captain, who had been on duty longer than I, told them the flight did not look good. A great deal of bad weather along the Trrhenian (sic) Sea and the Italian mainland did not promising for flight that day. They requested to be cleared for flight that night. I had no more direct contact with any of the crew until 2200 the night of the 31st when the navigator came in and talked over the route and looked at the weather situation. We worked out a winds forecast for him at the proposed altitude of 10500 ft all the way. During the evening I prepared a cross section for the only possible route that could be made, i.e. Rome, Istres, Paris, London. Sometime about midnight, the pilots came back for the weather briefing; at the same time, Captain Steigner, the Sation Weather Officer, arrived and listened to the complete weather briefing. The first thing I remember distinctly of being mentioned was flight direct from Naples to London. I ruled that pout immediately because the flight over the Alps under the existing synoptic conditions was practically impossible according to my knowledge. I told them the weather I had on the cross section for the route as I had drawn it up gave them very bad weather all over the central part of Italy, the Island of Corsica, and the Tyrrhenian Sea. They were not satisfied with that route and tried to determine an alternative that they liked, one went down southwest to Elmas (Cagliari) and along the west side of Sardinia and Corsica into Marseilles, from Marseilles on up through France to London. I do not remember everything that was said as we talked for about an hour and forty minutes. Various routes and the weather on these routes were discussed. The one I had a cross section on seemed to be the best route they could take. The only difference we made was that instead of going direct to Porretta they would bisect the southwest leg of the Pisa range at a point midway between Pisa and Porretta, the due west to Istres then north to Lyon, across Auxerre, Paris, London. As near as I can remember the weather situation that night, there was a low centered somewhere in this area, approximately between Sardinia and Naplea, or Corsica and Rome – definitely in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The circulation is counterclockwise around the low and up east-westerly over France. There was tending to be a flat pressure gradient over the central and southern part of France, tightening up again over northern France, and the circulation over London was generally east northeast. There was a distinct cold front from the center of the low oriented south to southwest across Sardinia and down into Africa west of Tunis. There was a structure similar to a front but which could not be definitely called a front oriented east west from just north of Naples through the central part of the Italian peninsula. Along the cold front through Sardinia and all through the east west situation through Italy was various severe thunderstorm activity and had been all that day. The belt of weather had moved northward by midnight from over Naples but was within 20 to 30 miles north of Naples. The thunderstorms were very severe and close together. The fact was brought out to the pilots that during the afternoon we had two reports on the severity of these thunderstorms. One pilot I do not remember, but the other was Major Wood, at that time pilot for Lt. General Lee, a very conscientious pilot. He had taken off from Marcianise on his way to Rome. He made 15 miles in the thunderstorm which was more than he could take and landed at Capodichino. The fact that he had been up in the thunderstorms and could not take the storms was stressed to the pilots. Because of these thunderstorms along the cold front and knowing the bad weather over these areas and this section of the Mediterranean, between Sardinia and North Africa, I did not think it was advisable to go southwest to Elmas. It was best to go northwest to a point midway between Pisa and Porretta. As near as could be determined from what I had to work with, once

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they bisected that Pisa range there would be little if any thunderstorm activity to Istres.

Question by Captain Parker: From your memory of the synoptic situation, what would you think that the pilots would have encountered in the mountainous areas along the French-Italian border had they been blown off course in that area?

Answer by M/Sgt Kable: An area extending roughly 100 miles south and east of the Alps and along crests of the highest peaks should have has terrific thunderstorm activity, tops unlimited, due to the fact on the east side of the low this circulation was picking up very warm moist air and moving around counter clockwise and as soon as it hits the line where it starts upslope thunderstorms build up from orographic uplift, in addition to the lift encountered over the cold air which was seeping down through Istres and the Rhone Valley. The orographic lift 10 to 15,000 feet will increase the intensity of the thunderstorm activity.

Signed: Torrance E. Kable
M/Sgt
Station Weather Office

Before: Clarence Parker
Captain
Member Aircraft Accident Board
20 October 1947.

Comments: Kable appears to be a conscientious met expert who tries to finds a reasonable solution to this serious weather problem which the B-17 pilots seem determined to face. Under the circumstances, his route would have kept the plane out of trouble, and at the low altitude (10500 feet MSL) indicated on the Flight Plan.

It would appear that the massive amounts of circulating warm air being sucked in from the northeast and moving anticlockwise were likely to be pushing the aircraft into the heart of the thunderstorm. Considering the terrain altitude and the "unlimited" cloud height, the crew were almost certainly flying on instruments in zero visibility. The anticlockwise circulation was also driving them further east than they thought.