

BASE WEATHER STATION  
CAPODICHINO ARMY AIR BASE  
APO 512, US ARMY

Naples, Italy  
3 November 1946

SUBJECT: Circumstances of Weather Briefing of Pilot and Co-pilot of B-17  
Army-9338.

TO: Commanding Officer,  
Capodichino Army Air Base  
APO 790-G, US Army

1. At the request of Colonel D.W. Goodrich, the following description of the circumstances surrounding the weather briefing of the aircraft in question is given. A preliminary request for information as to weather to be encountered by the B-17 with an intended time of departure of 0000Z, 1 November 1946, destination Bovington, England was made by Colonel H. H. Upham of M/Sgt T. E. Kable, a qualified forecaster of this Detachment, during his shift of duty on the afternoon of 31 October 1946. At that time it was stated that a low pressure centered in the Tyrrhenian Sea was causing overrunning warm moist unstable air just North of the point of departure with severe thunderstorm activity between Rome and Poretta. Further information was given that a cold front to the West of Capodichino, in the Tyrrhenian sea, nearly on Sardinia, which precluded a flight to the West of Sardinia then North to Istres. Information was given that the weather from Poretta to Istres and North to Bovington was not prohibitive for flight.

2. At 2330A, 31 October 1946, the actual briefing for the flight occurred with M/Sgt Kable having a AAF Form 23-A completed at that time. Both Colonel H. H. Upham and Colonel F. L. Fair were briefed by M/Sgt Kable with this officer present.

3. The weather picture given earlier in the day had materialized as predicted. The presence of severe thunderstorms over the Tyrrhenian Sea and adjacent Italian mainland had been verified by the following debriefing of this Officer by two arriving pilots.

a. Major D. M. Kessler, Senior pilot and Chief Pilot of the Capodichino Army Air Base, upon arriving, 1654A, this field from Rome reported to this Officer that immediately after take-off from Rome he had encounter a heavy rain shower which reduced visibility to practically zero although he estimated the bases of the clouds at 3000 feet MSL for he was still not in the clouds at his flight level of 1500 to 2000 feet MSL. He immediately leveled off and went out over the sea at low level flight, then returned on course breaking out of the raining shower in a matter of a few minutes. He reported lightning but no turbulence to a dangerous degree.

b. A phone call from Major J. M. Wood, a pilot for Lt. Gen. C. H. Lee, was received by this officer shortly before Major Kessler's departure from the forecasting room. Major Wood's request was for weather from Marcianise to Rome. At this officer's suggestion, Major Kessler spoke to Major Wood telling him of the poor terminal conditions at Rome and stating that he, Major Kessler, would not care to make a flight to Rome at that time. Major Wood landed at Capodichino at 1808A and from his debriefing of this Officer, it was learned that having encountered a violent thunder shower with accompanying lightning, rain and heavy turbulence shortly after taking off from Marcianise which is without AAF Weather

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surface observation service and without a radio range.

4. To give a clear picture of the possible severity of the type of thunderstorm likely to be encountered enroute, Col. Upham and Col. Fair were told by this officer the complete experience explained above. As a result and because our teletype communications had given us no information for several hours previous and, our radio intercept information was not the latest, this officer telephoned the Pisa AAF Weather Station and received their 2400A, 31 October 1946 surface, weather observation. The unusually poor telephonic connection precluded any lengthy general discussion of weather conditions at Pisa. All that was learned after at least twenty minutes of effort at the phone was that at 2400A, 31 October 1946, Pisa's surface observation was, 3500 ft, broken sky with seven mile visibility, and that there had been no low ceiling or showers for the previous two or three hours, that Rome's observations for the same period, as received by Pisa, had been equally good.

5. Col. Fair's reaction to the reports of Major Kessler and Wood was that, due to the long-distance airport of his, Col. Fair's flight, they could afford to climb to the comparative safety of 15000 ft MSL, whereas due to the short distance of the Rome-Capodichino and Marcianise-Rome flights that had encountered such adverse weather, those flights had not been able to afford to such a high level.

6. M/Sgt Kable forecasted that at this proposed flight level of 15,000 ft MSL and along a flight path leading directly from Capodichino to a point midway between Poretta, Corsica and Pisa, Italy, it would be possible to remain out of most clouds. This officer added that, there would be much lightning and some help from a new moon to aid the pilots in ascertaining the position of dangerously buildup clouds on course at 15,000 ft. MSL

7. M/Sgt Kable emphasized the presence of icing and turbulence in all clouds between 7000 ft and 15,000 ft MSL. As much as it is permitted of weather personnel, both this Officer and M/Sgt Kable attempted to infer that the weather was such that we were not happy to see the flight go at all.

8. All possible routes were discussed in detail with complete consideration given to terrain and forecaster weather conditions. It was completely ruled out by both pilots to attempt to pass over the high build-up of violently dangerous cumulonimbus with accompanying icing and turbulent conditions. The final decision of the pilots was to fly at 15,000 ft. MSL directly to a point midway between Pisa, Italy and Poretta, Corsica. After picking up the Pisa radio range, they then had decided to fly directly on course to Istres, France; to Lyon, France; to Bovingdon, England.

9. The exceptionally fine professional attitude of both pilots reflected by their questions and final conclusions reached in an un-hurried and most deliberate manner, allayed the initial apprehension of this officer to the extent that upon their final departure he had no doubt that the flight would be successful. M/Sgt Kable however, made the statement after their leaving that, if he had known the pilots personally, or, they had been of lower rank, or, possessed lower pilot priority, he would have told them, the flight was most foolhardy.

/s/ John M Steigner  
/t/ JOHN: M: STEIGNER  
Captain, Air Corps  
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