

A-36 INVADER

This new and powerful fighter-bomber
terrorized the enemy in Sicily



Before setting out on their missions, fighter-bomber pilots get instructions from their CO, Col. Stevenson.

By Sgt. PETE PARIS
YANK Staff Correspondent

NORTH AFRICA—One of the many unpleasant surprises that greeted Axis troops in Sicily was the appearance of the new and powerful A-36 fighter-bomber, nicknamed the Invader. Its work over Sicily was a vital factor in the swift advance of the Allied troops.

American flyers taking the A-36 into action for the first time raised hell with enemy supply lines in low-level attack, both bombing and strafing. They soon earned for their plane a reputation such as the Stuka had in the early days of the war. The A-36 has become the plane most feared by ground troops.

Built by North American Aviation, this ship is a dive-bomber version of that company's P-51 Mustang fighter. The A-36 can climb at the rate of nearly half a mile a minute, with a ceiling of 30,000 feet. Powered by a 12-cylinder Allison engine, it has a flying speed in excess of 400 miles an hour. Its normal diving speed, with the four hydraulic dive brakes extended, is 450 miles an hour.

Ranging far behind the enemy lines, the Invaders have smashed truck convoys, bridges, lines of communication, power lines and radio stations. After they have dropped their bombs from the racks in both wings, they become low-altitude fighter planes. An A-36 pilot is protected by armor plate and has six .50-caliber machine guns—two synchronized to fire through the three-bladed propeller and two in each wing.

At dawn the planes streak out over the Mediterranean from this hot dusty airdrome deep in the Tunisian hills. At dusk they return with new stories of Axis trucks blown up and Axis supply lines cut.

Here are brief summaries of a day's work

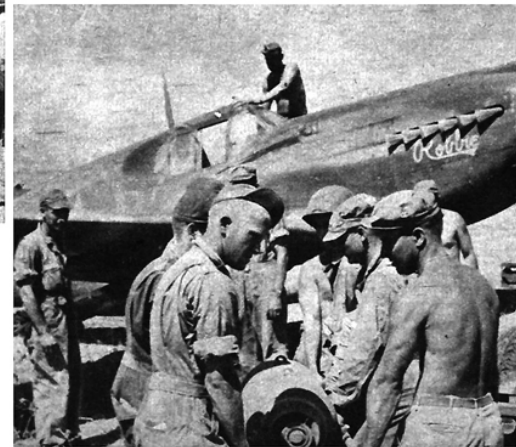
given by some of the pilots. The first is the story of Capt. Roger Miller of Salem, Oreg.:

"We ran into several columns of troop trucks, carrying 20 or 25 men apiece. They were probably German and put up a lot of flak, which was very accurate. I didn't think we'd get through, but we did. After that, we saw a train carrying tanks on flat cars. It was in a railroad gorge near Aeia. We made three passes to get in to strafe them, then had a hell of a time getting out. It was one long pull and no picnic. Then we came back to strafe a column of trucks.

"A little farther up we ran into another locomotive pulling flat cars loaded with tanks. We shot up the tanks and blew up the locomotive. It was really a sight to see. The locomotive just went up in steam. About two miles farther we found another locomotive with six tanks and guns all around it. I saw the engineer get out in a hurry. We got that one, too."

Lt. J. B. Walton Jr. of Shreveport, La., followed Capt. Miller into action. "We started after a convoy of 50 or 75 trucks," Walton said. "The captain went after the trucks ahead and I took those on the right. One truck started to turn back off the road and got caught in a gully, and I got him just as he toppled over.

"Then I swung over to the side of the mountain we were passing. There were two trucks carrying about 30 men each. The men started running, and I got both trucks. Then I went over a hill and got three more—all big trucks hauling men. Got them clean; I could see my tracers kicking up the dust around them. Then our flight ran into a locomotive, and I saw it go up in steam. There was some ack-ack around this and I could see men standing around a gun. I was over to the right, and they didn't see me. I shot all the men on the gun and damaged the gun."



A ground crew loads 500-pound bomb on an A-36.

Flight Officer R. T. Carter of Birmingham, Ala., gave this report:

"I saw several convoys of trucks split up and park in the shade of trees. I went over them three times and strafed. They had heavy ammo, maybe 88-mm stuff, which began to pop all over, but I got at least 10 trucks and damaged at least 10 more. Toward Prizzi I saw a Macchi jump our flight leader, who shot him down.

"But something must have hit his own plane because he bailed out right after the Macchi crashed. His parachute split when it opened and we all thought he was gone for sure. He came down between a building and a church, and we lost sight of him and figured he was gone. Then all of a sudden we saw him come running out from behind the building.

"He was running toward an Italian truck that was standing there. Some Italians started after him, but we came down and gave them a few bursts. We couldn't see whether he got away or not, but he probably did. This isn't the first time he's done something like this. He'll probably come walking into the mess in a couple of days."