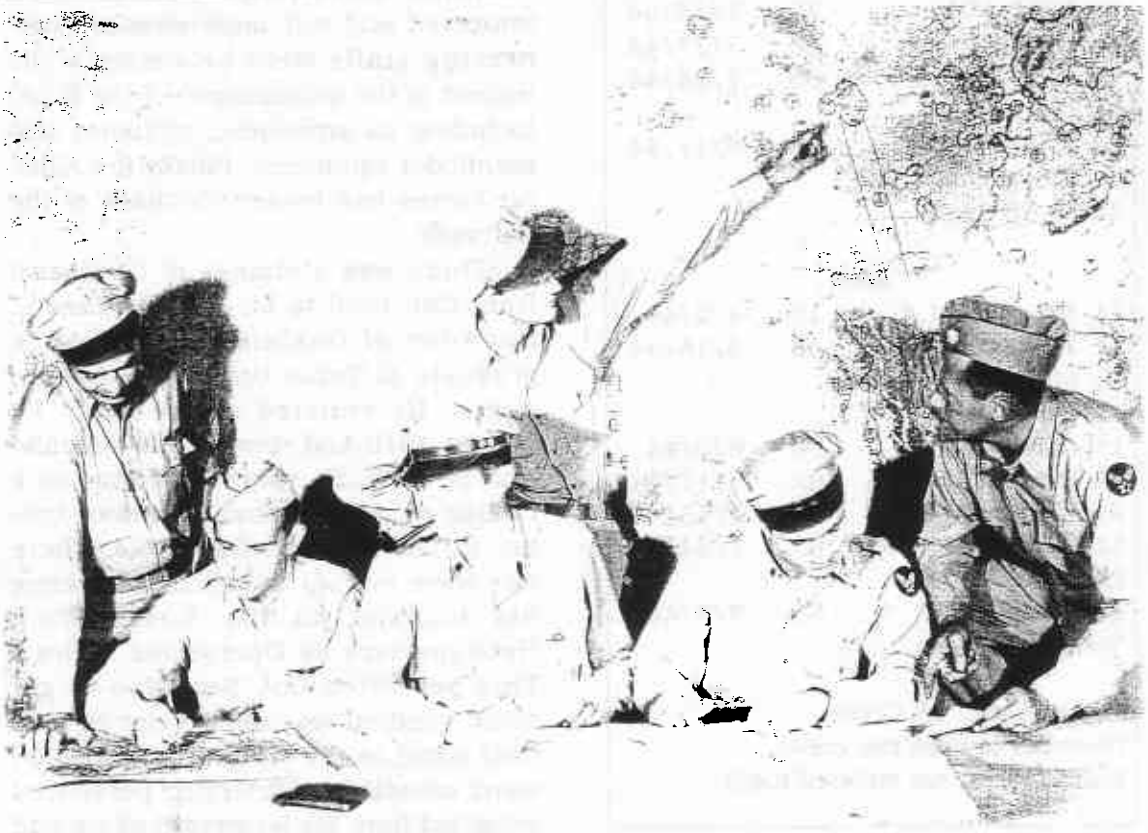
Flight of the Vulgar Vultures

1943-1945

The Second 100 Missions



Plotting enemy anti-aircraft installations for route planning the combat missions to avoid the flak areas. Standing L to R: Jack Horner and Larry Wilson. Seated L to R: Jim Moeller, Kenneth Cool, Hugh Graff and Al Coons.

SEPTEMBER 1944

With winter coming, there were changes made in mission planning to avoid reduced activity because of bad weather. The formations of our B-24's would become smaller and thus more manageable in marginal weather. Some bombing strikes were single airplanes flying in bad weather and bombing by pathfinder. Pathfinder methods were used to a good advantage during bad weather months, continually disrupting the enemy's capability to wage war.

In September, the German Air Force fighters disappeared from the sky as far as the 455th was concerned. If they were there, we did not see them. We continued with our attacks on the enemy's oil production and their aircraft industry. The war against oil was not over yet, as this month would prove, although one big target was eliminated from our list, Ploesti. Our targets would be the enemy's communication lines as well as his factories. We hit the marshalling yards and ports, along with the oil refineries.

Mission 107, September 1 We sent 30 B-24's to bomb the marshalling yards at Novi Sad. They bombed the

target with good results. Flak at the target was light and accurate but we had no losses. All aircraft returned to base safely.

Mission 108, September 2 Thirty B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Nis, Yugoslavia. No aircraft returned early so that all planes dropped a total of 75 tons of 500# GP bombs on the target. Flak was light and not very accurate. All aircraft returned to base without incident.

Mission 109, September 3 The Group was sent to bomb a railroad bridge at Szeged, Yugoslavia. Twenty-eight B-24's carrying 1,000# RDX bombs had a very good bomb run on the target with excellent results. Over 45% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the target. Flak was encountered at the target but all returned safely.

Mission 110, September 4 Thirty-one B-24's loaded with 1,000# GP bombs were after bridges again. This time it was the railroad bridge at Tagliamento, Italy. The results were even better this time, with almost 60% falling into the 1,000 feet circular range. There was no flak at the target and all aircraft returned safely.

Mission 111, September 5 We were having such success in the bridge demolition missions that we were at another one. This time a bridge at Szolnok. Again we loaded 30 B-24's with 1,000# RDX bombs. The results improved again as we dropped over 68% within 1,000 feet of the target. With light flak and no fighters, all planes returned to base safely.

Mission 112, September 6 We had excellent weather and had flown six missions in as many days. The marshalling yards at Novi Sad, Yugoslavia were the target for the second time this week. Thirty B-24's loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs hit the target with over 75% of the bombs falling within 1,000 feet of the aiming point, which was remarkable bombing. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate but we came home with no casualties.

Mission 113, September 8 After a day of rest, we sent 30 B-24's loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs to the bridges and marshalling yards at Brod, Yugoslavia. Flak at the target was heavy and intense, and we lost one of our planes to the flak batteries. Nine men were reported missing in action. The results were only fair with three of our planes receiving severe flak damage and three slight damage.

Mission 114, September 10 The weather deserted us as we sent 30 B-24's loaded with fragmentation bombs to the airdrome at Horschine, Austria. Weather turned the Group back over Austria and it returned to base. Half the airplanes jettisoned their bombs over the Adriatic while the rest returned theirs to the base. It was a judgment call either way as they were very "touchy" bombs.

Mission 115, September 12 This time, 27 B-24's were loaded with 500# RDX bombs to bomb the airdrome at Lechfield, Austria. Flak at the target was very heavy and intense. We lost four of our airplanes to flak with 41 crewmen missing in action. The bombing results were not that good for those losses. Two of our planes suffered severe damage as well.

Mission 116, September 13 We loaded 30 B-24's with 500# RDX bombs to bomb the oil refinery at Odertal, Germany. This was another long mission. We bombed the target by pathfinder and dropped 68 tons of bombs. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and very accurate. We lost three ships over the target. One pilot brought his plane back to Allied territory and the

crew bailed out successfully. Nineteen crewmen were missing in action.

Mission 117, September 15 We had a day of rest, then 29 B-24's dropped 69 tons of fragmentation bombs on Tatoi airdrome in Athens, Greece. Flak en route was light and inaccurate. At the target it got a little rougher and the flak was moderate to intense. One airplane received heavy damage from flak but we suffered no casualties and all planes returned to base.

Mission 118, September 17 We sent 27 B-24's loaded with 1,000# GP bombs to the marshalling yards at Rakos, Hungary. The results were not satisfactory as we had no bombs within the 1,000 foot range. Flak was moderate at the target but we had no losses.

Mission 119, September 18 We loaded 29 B-24's with 500# RDX bombs to bomb the marshalling yards at Czegled, Czechoslovakia. We encountered no flak en route nor at the target area but we still did not do a good bombing job as only 26% fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. All planes returned to base without casualties.

Mission 120, September 20 Twenty-nine B-24's loaded with fragmentation bombs attacked the airdrome at Malacky, Hungary. Sixty-five tons of bombs were dropped on the target with good results as 18 enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground. Flak was moderate and heavy but not accurate. All our planes returned safely.

Mission 121, September 21 We were again loaded with fragmentation bombs, which meant another airdrome. This time it was the Riem Main airdrome at Munich, Germany. Thirty B-24's dropped 62 tons of bombs on the target area with good results. Flak was heavy and intense at the target but we came through with no losses.

Mission 122, September 23 We were back to attacking railroad bridges. This time 31 B-24's carrying 1,000# RDX bombs attacked the railroad bridge at Dona Di Piavi, Italy. We encountered no flak at this target and we got excellent results. Over 67% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. All planes returned safely.

Mission 123, September 24 We were back to the Tatoi airdrome at Athens, Greece. This time 32 B-24's were loaded with 100# GP bombs. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and heavy, and we were fortunate to suffer no losses. We did destroy four enemy planes on the ground. All planes returned to base safely.

No missions were flown in the last week of September and the Group got a well deserved rest. During the month we flew 17 missions with 502 planes over the target, dropping 1,173 tons of bombs. We lost eight aircraft with 69 crewmen missing in action. Twenty additional aircraft were damaged by flak. We destroyed 32 enemy aircraft on the ground, so it wasn't a bad month for the Group. The war continued as we move into October.

OCTOBER 1944

October brought bad weather for the first three days. Although missions were scheduled, none were flown until the 4th of the month. While we still were hitting oil refineries, we also concentrated on the marshalling yards that transported the oil. Oil refineries would only be 23% of our missions this month while over 60% would be against marshalling yards. Missions from here on would be effected by weather as much as anything else.

Mission 124, October 4 Twenty-six B-24's dropped 500# RDX bombs on the marshalling yards at Munich,

Germany. Flak at the target was intense, accurate and heavy. The barrage lasted over four minutes, which made it seem like hours. Two of our aircraft received flak damage, but all returned safely.

Mission 125, October 4 While one portion of the Group was bombing Munich, the Group also sent 17 B-24's to bomb the viaduct at Avisio, Italy. These planes were loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs. No results were observed due to cloud-cover. Flak at the target was moderately accurate and heavy. Six aircraft received damage from the flak but all returned safely.

Mission 126, October 7 We were assigned another split mission. Our first contingent was loaded with 500# RDX bombs to hit the Vienna Winterhafen oil storage facilities. Bombing was rather good considering the amount of flak thrown at the Group, which was intense, accurate and heavy. We lost one airplane to flak with ten crewmen missing in action. Six aircraft received slight damage from flak.

Mission 127, October 7 Our second mission this day was an attack on the airdrome at Gyor, Hungary. We loaded 18 B-24's with 500# RDX bombs. Bombing accuracy was not very good as we failed to hit the target. Flak was light, inaccurate but of the heavy variety. We all came home safely.

Mission 128, October 10 Twenty-nine B-24's were loaded with 500# RDX bombs to attack the railroad bridge at Latisana. The mission was aborted due to bad weather at the target. All planes returned to base.

Mission 129, October 11 We again loaded up with 500# RDX bombs to bomb the harbor at Trieste, Italy. Our bombing was much better this day, as we got over 64% of the bombs within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak at the target was light and inaccurate. All planes returned safely.

Mission 130, October 12 Thirty-nine B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs struck the marshalling yards at Bologna, Italy. Flak at the target was light and inaccurate but still of the heavy variety. Bombing was only fair as we got less than 30% within 1,000 feet of the target. All planes returned to base.

Mission 131, October 13 This was another day for double missions. We loaded the first mission with 500# RDX bombs to bomb the oil refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. Flak at this target was always intense and accurate, and this day was no exception. We lost two aircraft to flak. One plane managed to make it back to allied territory and the crew was recovered. We reported 11 crewmen missing and one killed in action. It was a rough mission as six airplanes received heavy damage and four with slight damage. The flak at Blechhammer was indeed accurate.

Mission 132, October 13 The second mission for this day was to the marshalling yards at Szekesfehervar, Germany. Twenty B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs dropped 45% of their bombs on the target with no flak, fighters or casualties. All planes returned without incident.

Mission 133, October 14 The Group was scheduled to bomb the oil refinery at Odertal, Germany. Thirty-five B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs dropped 78 tons on the refinery by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was intense, accurate and heavy. We lost one aircraft over the target and two more resulting from flak. Thirty-one crewmen were missing in action and eight planes received damage; another long, rough mission.

Mission 134, October 16 We

bombed the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria, with 39 B-24's carrying 1,000# RDX bombs. Although the flak at the target was intense and accurate, we managed to get through the mission without any losses.

Mission 135, October 17 We sent 27 B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs to bomb the marshalling yards and factories at Miribor, Hungary. Flak at the target was moderate, accurate and heavy but we managed to come through it without a loss.

Mission 136, October 20 We sent 33 B-24's carrying fragmentation bombs to the marshalling yards at Innsbruck, Austria. Flak at this target was moderate and inaccurate, and we escaped without any damage. All planes returned to base.

Mission 137, October 21 We sent 25 B-24's to bomb the marshalling yards at Szombathely, Hungary. We dropped 62 tons of 500# GP bombs on the target with over 57% falling within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. A few days after this mission we received a communication from the C.O. of the 304th Wing. It informed the Group that General Twining was very pleased with the results of the bombing effort by the Group, as the attack on these marshalling yards did a great deal of damage. It was a great feat of bombing by the lead bombardier and the Group as a whole. There was no flak at the target and all planes returned safely.

Mission 138, October 23 We were back in the oil business. We loaded 24 B-24's with 500# GP bombs and struck the oil storage facilities at Regensberg Winterhafen. We bombed by pathfinder method, so there was no way to tell if we did a good job except from the fires we started. Flak at the target was moderate, accurate and heavy. We brought all planes home safely.

Mission 139, October 23 We loaded 16 more B-24's with 100# GP bombs for the second mission of the day. They were scheduled to bomb the Motor Transport Park at Ossopo. Weather again made the target unreachable and all planes brought their bombs back to base.

October was a month that saw bad weather effect our efforts. We flew 16 missions in only 13 days of flyable weather. The coming months look the same as far as weather is concerned. We managed to put 425 aircraft over the targets. We dropped over 793 tons of bombs on the enemy. We lost five aircraft from enemy action with 52 crewmen missing in action. We had one man killed in action and one man wounded.

NOVEMBER 1944

Winter time brought on weather problems that not only hindered bombing efforts, but also maintenance and other ground support functions. This month would be a harbinger of what to expect in the next four or five months: bad weather, bad weather and more bad weather. But the Group would nevertheless fly almost 20 missions. Four of these would be aborted and nine would bomb by pathfinder method. Still it was remarkable for the Group to take off on that many missions; a real credit to the support personnel and crews.

Mission 140, November 1 Twenty-eight B-24's took off loaded with 100# incendiary bombs. Twenty-one aircraft bombed Cakovek marshalling yards as a target of opportunity. One aircraft returned when it lost the formation in a cloud bank. Six aircraft returned to base without dropping their bombs as they could not line up on the target. There were no fighters or flak in the area and all planes returned safely.

Mission 141, November 3 Three B-

24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off to bomb the aircraft factory at Klagenfort, Germany. One aircraft returned early because of ice on the wings. Two aircraft dropped their bombs by pathfinder method. Results were unobserved because of clouds. The two B-24's returned undamaged and there were no casualties.

Mission 142, November 4 Forty-one B-24's took off to bomb the Linz, Austria main marshalling yards. Each airplane was loaded with 500# RDX bombs. Thirty-seven of these aircraft dropped their bombs on the target. Two of the aircraft did not bomb because of malfunction of the pathfinder equipment and two aircraft returned early because of crew sickness. Since bombing was done by pathfinder method, no results were observed. All planes returned to base without casualties.

Mission 143, November 5 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna, Austria. Half of the B-24's carried 500# RDX bombs while the other half carried 500# incendiary bomb clusters. Bombing was done by pathfinder method so no results were observed. Flak at the target was intense, inaccurate and heavy. Flak en route was moderate and fairly accurate at Bratislavia. All aircraft returned to base safely.

Mission 144, November 5 Shortly after the 28 B-24's took off to bomb the oil refinery at Vienna, eight B-24's were sent to bomb the Mitro Vica, Italy troop concentrations. These aircraft were forced back by bad weather and did not drop their bombs. All aircraft returned safely.

Mission 145, November 6 Forty B-24's took off to bomb the South Ordinance Depot at Vienna, Austria. They were escorted by P-51's. One B-24 returned early because of a gas leak, so 39 aircraft dropped 93.5 tons of a mixture of RDX bombs and incendiaries on the target. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. Eight enemy aircraft were seen in the Lake Balaton area but did not attack. All aircraft returned to base safely.

Mission 146, November 7 Twenty-eight B-24's attacked troop concentrations at Sjenica, Yugoslavia. They dropped 66.5 tons of RDX bombs on the target. Flak at the target was non-existent. Bombing was done visually with fair to poor results. All aircraft returned to base.

Mission 147, November 11 The Group was scheduled to bomb the marshalling yards at Linz, Austria. All 28 B-24's returned to base without dropping their bombs due to bad weather.

Mission 148, November 15 Five B-24's took off to bomb the Linz Benzol Refinery. All five aircraft bombed the target by pathfinder method and returned safely despite the intense flak at the target. None of the aircraft received any damage.

Mission 149, November 16 Two missions were scheduled against two different targets. On the first target, 28 B-24's took off to bomb the Munich West marshalling yards. Flak in the target area was intense and accurate. Bombs were dropped by pathfinder method so the results were unobserved. All planes returned to base with no casualties.

Mission 150, November 16 The second mission was an eight aircraft raid on troop concentrations at Visgrad, Yugoslavia. Seven B-24's dropped 13.5 tons of bombs in the target area where slight and inaccurate flak was experienced. All aircraft returned to base.

Mission 151, November 17 Eighteen B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Mirabor, Hungary.

Flak at the target was very intense and accurate, and one aircraft was shot down by flak. One crew member was killed by flak and three others received serious injuries. Bombing results were good with over 40% of the bombs falling within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Twelve men were missing in action.

Mission 152, November 17 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the Gyor, Hungary marshalling yards. These aircraft were loaded with 500# RDX bombs. Flak at the target was heavy and accurate. One aircraft was seen with one engine feathered and did not return. Ten men were reported missing in action. Bombing was done by pathfinder method so no observation of results could be made. The rest of the aircraft all returned to base.

Mission 153, November 18 Forty B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs were briefed to bomb the Airdrome at Vicenza, Italy. The mission was flown without escort and bombing was done visually with excellent results. Over 50% of the bombs fell in the target area causing extensive damage to the installation. Flak at the target was light and generally inaccurate. All planes returned to base without casualties.

Mission 154, November 19 The Group was again scheduled for two targets. The first was the Locomotive Repair Depot at Verona, Italy. The target was completely covered by clouds and the weather was very bad so the mission was aborted. All planes returned to base.

Mission 155, November 19 The second target for that day was the Lobau Oil Blending Plant at Vienna, Austria. Twenty-seven B-24's carrying 100# GP bombs bombed the target by pathfinder method. Intense but inaccurate flak was experienced at the target area and no planes received damage; all returned to base safely.

Mission 156, November 20 Twenty-eight B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off to bomb targets in Czechoslovakia, but due to weather obscuring the primary target, the group bombed the factories at Zlin, Czechoslovakia. Sixty-three and a half tons of bombs fell on this target with good results. No flak was experienced in the target area and all planes returned to base safely.

Mission 157, November 22 Thirty-six B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Villach, Austria. No flak was observed in the target area and no bombs were dropped because of bad weather but we still lost one aircraft, with 11 men missing in action. The B-24 was last seen losing altitude and appeared to be on fire. No chutes were observed. The rest of the planes returned safely.

Mission 158, November 25 This was the Group's last mission in November. This was also our first mission flying three pathfinder aircraft at night. The target was the marshalling yards at Munich West. The three B-24's took off at 0045 hours and were over the target at 0409. One B-24 dropped its bombs on the primary. The other two dropped their bombs on the Innsbruck main marshalling yard because the primary target had weather clearing and the planes would not have the protection of the bad weather from fighter attacks. No flak or enemy aircraft were seen on the mission. All three planes returned to base safely at 0630 hours.

November bombing was over. Although our efforts were heroic, the results left a lot to be desired. We managed to get a total of 429 aircraft over the targets and dropped a total of 707.1 tons of bombs. The Group flew 19 missions while losing three aircraft. We

reported 41 crewmen missing in action; we had one man killed in action; we also had three severely wounded. The 19 missions were flown in only 15 days. The doubling up helped our totals for the month and showed how efficient our ground support had become. Tougher flying weather was coming, so we were getting prepared.

DECEMBER 1944

As was anticipated, December brought bad weather, but it also brought a new concept in strategic bombing. Bombers would make single and three ship formation attacks on targets in bad weather. These attacks would be accomplished by pathfinder method and it showed how much the 15th Air Force had progressed in the art of bombing through an overcast. Twelve of the 15 missions would be done by radar and only four by visual methods, with one mission aborted. This gives one some idea of the bad weather conditions in which the Group had to fly.

Mission 159, December 3 Three B-24's took off to bomb a primary target but were unable to bomb due to clearing weather at the target. One aircraft bombed the alternate target, the marshalling yards at Villach, Austria by pathfinder method. Two aircraft jettisoned their bombs in the Adriatic and all planes returned to base safely.

Mission 160, December 6 Thirty-seven B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria. All planes returned to base when weather prevented them from reaching the target. Some of the planes jettisoned their delayed fuse bombs in the Adriatic while the remainder brought their bombs back to base.

Mission 161, December 7 On the third anniversary of Pearl Harbor, two B-24's took off at 0223 hours to bomb their primary target at the head of the Adriatic. One aircraft abandoned the mission because the weather appeared to be clearing and offered no cover from enemy fighters. The other aircraft bombed the alternate target, the marshalling yards at Klagenfort, Germany. This aircraft dropped 1.5 tons of 100# RDX bombs by pathfinder method and returned to base at 0730 hours.

Mission 162, December 8 Two B-24's took off to bomb targets in the Vienna area. One aircraft returned early because of a malfunction of the pathfinder equipment. He jettisoned his bombs in the Adriatic. The primary target was clear and the other aircraft bombed the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria by pathfinder method with good results, as fires were seen in the target area. Flak at the target was moderate, inaccurate and heavy. Both planes returned to base safely.

Mission 163, December 9 Fifteen B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs struck the industrial area of Linz, Austria by pathfinder method. They reported that they had a good run on the target. Flak at the target was moderate and inaccurate. No observations were made due to the cloud-cover. All planes returned to base.

Mission 164, December 12 Four B-24's equipped with pathfinder equipment took off to bomb the oil refinery at Blechhammer, Germany without escort. Two of the aircraft bombed the primary target as briefed. The other two bombed a target of opportunity at Neisse, Germany by pathfinder methods. One of the bombs dropped at the primary target was a leaflet bomb and in falling, it shattered the ball housing the pathfinder equipment. Three aircraft returned to base and one made a forced landing at the island of Vis.

Mission 165, December 15

Twenty-five B-24's dropped 50.5 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the freight yards at Linz, Austria. Bombing was accomplished by pathfinder method, so no results were seen. Flak at the target was moderate, inaccurate and heavy. No planes were damaged and all returned to base.

Mission 166, December 16 Thirty-nine B-24's took off to bomb the Synthetic Oil Plant at Brux, Germany. One aircraft broke its landing gear on take off and was forced to jettison its bombs in the Adriatic. It then crash-landed at the Gioia, Italy airdrome. One other aircraft returned early due to engine trouble. Twenty-eight B-24's dropped 60 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the primary target by pathfinder method. One flight leader could not open his bomb bay doors so the whole flight missed the bomb run. These aircraft dropped their bombs on any target of opportunity that they could find. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate so only one plane received slight flak damage. All planes returned to base without incident.

Mission 167, December 17 Thirty-six B-24's took off to bomb the oil refinery at Odertal, Germany. Two airplanes returned early due to gas leaks while 31 dropped their bombs by pathfinder method. Sixty-six tons of 500# RDX bombs were dropped on the primary target. Three aircraft dropped their bombs on other targets since the flight leader was out of position on the bomb run. Flak at the target was moderate and generally inaccurate. One of our aircraft was lost and was last seen about 5,000 feet below the formation with an engine on fire. No chutes were observed and ten crewmen were missing in action. All other planes returned safely.

Mission 168, December 18 Thirty-seven B-24's took off to bomb targets in Germany. Three aircraft returned early and 31 dropped 74.5 tons of 500# RDX bombs on a target of opportunity, the marshalling yards at Sopron. The bombing was accomplished by pathfinder method. No flak was experienced in the target area or en route to the target. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 169, December 20 Of the 37 B-24's that took off to bomb the Skoda Works at Pilsen, Germany only 27 were able to drop their bombs on the target. The others, because of various troubles, were not able to drop their bombs. The Group dropped 66.5 tons on the target by pathfinder method. The bomb load for that day was 500# RDX bombs. Flak at the target was slight and inaccurate. Despite this, we lost six aircraft, five of them to unexplained causes while one aircraft was seen to crash into a mountain. Sixty-two crewmen were missing in action. All other aircraft returned to base.

Mission 170, December 25 It was Christmas Day and 28 B-24's took off to bomb targets in Austria. Weather conditions forced 12 aircraft to return early and only 15 aircraft bombed the third alternate, Wels, Austria marshalling yards. The bombing was done by visual methods with just fair results. One aircraft was missing and was not seen after takeoff. Five aircraft returned to other bases. Ten crewmen were reported missing in action.

Mission 171, December 26 Twenty-six B-24's dropped 50 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the oil refinery at Oswiescim, Germany. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Three aircraft were missing. One was seen with a feathered engine and heading toward Russia, another was seen jettisoning equipment and it too was heading east

from the target area. The other aircraft was reported to have landed at the island of Vis. Thirty-three crewmen were reported missing in action. All other crews returned to base.

Mission 172, December 27 The weather was giving us a break and we were able to get three days in a row with favorable flying weather. We had 31 B-24's take off and bomb the main marshalling yards at Graz, Austria. The Group dropped 62.5 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the target with fair results as 35% of them fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Slight to moderate flak was experienced at the target. All aircraft returned to base with no casualties.

Mission 173, December 28 This was the fourth day in a row with good flying weather and we sent 28 B-24's to bomb the primary target, the oil refinery at Kolin, Czechoslovakia. There was no flak at the target and none en route. All planes returned to base safely, a milk run for a change.

Mission 174, December 29 Twenty-six B-24's took off to bomb industrial targets in Austria. An 80-mile an hour head wind over the Alps caused the group to abandon the primary target and they bombed the third alternate target. Fourteen B-24's dropped 30.75 tons on Rosenhiem marshalling yards. The other 12 aircraft bombed the locomotive repair shops at Udine. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate, which accounted for one aircraft being lost. Another aircraft crash-landed at Pianola, Italy as it ran out of fuel. These crewmen escaped serious injury. Nine crewmen were reported missing in action.

The month of December was over as far as missions were concerned. It was a month that saw the Group fly several different kinds of missions with two and three single planes as well as many pathfinder missions. The Group flew a total of 16 missions with 359 aircraft over the targets. These aircraft dropped a total of 649.5 tons of bombs. We lost 15 aircraft with only four due to flak and the other 11 due to other causes. There were 111 crewmen reported missing in action and 32 reported killed in action. December was not a good month in that regard. We were looking forward to the new year as one that would end the conflict.

JANUARY 1945

January started off just like one would expect in this climate: cold, snow and rain. The outlook for continued operations was not good. The Group had to see what developed from day to day. Most of the targets were communications targets as these were closer and gave us a chance to hit them before the weather changed. Briefings would continue in the off chance that the weather would break and the Group could fly. This was the month when the Wing and Group started designating dual missions and Blue and Red Forces.

Mission 175, January 4 The Group got its first mission of the new year. Twenty-seven B-24's dropped 62.75 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the primary and secondary targets. The primary target was the marshalling yards at Verona Porto Nuava, Italy. The secondary was the marshalling yards at Vicenza, Italy. Flak at the targets was moderate and accurate. One aircraft crash-landed at Gioia when its landing gear would not lock in the down position. The crew was not injured. One top turret gunner engineer was slightly wounded in the leg from flak. All other aircraft returned to base.

Mission 176, January 8 Twenty-six B-24's took off to bomb a goods depot in Linz, Austria. After flying for almost

eight hours, all planes returned safely to base without dropping their bombs due to poor weather conditions at the target.

Mission 177, January 15 Twenty-nine B-24's took off to bomb the Florisdorf marshalling yards at Vienna, Austria. Nine aircraft returned early and only 19 aircraft dropped their bombs on the target. One plane had its bombs fail to release. A total of 35.5 tons of 500# RDX bombs were dropped by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. One crewman was severely injured and one received a slight flak injury. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 178, January 19 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the railroad bridge at Brod, Austria. Only 20 aircraft bombed the target with unobserved results. One flight of five did not drop its bombs because their flight leader's bomb bay doors would not open. Two aircraft returned early. One aircraft had engine failure, could not make the field and crashed two miles short of the runway. Four crewmen were injured, one seriously. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. Six crewmen suffered flak wounds, one serious. Only 24 aircraft returned to base.

Mission 179, January 20 The crews were briefed to bomb the main marshalling yards at Linz, Austria. Twenty-six B-24's tried unsuccessfully to get to the target. They ran into cloud-cover from 3/10th to 9/10th cover and impenetrable cloud banks at the head of the Adriatic. All planes returned to base without dropping their bombs.

Mission 180, January 31 On the last day of the month, both red and blue forces were briefed to bomb the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria. The blue force had 19 B-24's that were carrying 500# GP bombs. They bombed the target and returned to base at 1640 hours. Flak at target was moderate and accurate. Bombing was done by pathfinder method. Results were not observed. All planes returned safely.

Mission 181, January 31 The red force consisted of 18 B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs. They too encountered moderate and accurate flak at the target area. They dropped a total of 29 tons on the target by pathfinder method. All aircraft returned to base without casualties.

January was our least productive month to date. All we could hope for was an improvement in the weather. The Group flew a total of seven missions, putting 168 aircraft over the targets. We dropped a total of 200.25 tons of bombs. That was our lowest total since beginning operations in February 1944. We lost two aircraft, but only one was to enemy action. The group had ten crewmen injured; five of those were serious. January was not one of our better months.

FEBRUARY 1945

February started off with marginal weather, then it got worse. The first mission had to be aborted due to bad weather. The concentration on targets this month was still oil, along with our attacks on the enemy's communications, otherwise known as marshalling yards. So far the 15th Air Force had done a tremendous job of disrupting the enemy's railroad system, denying them vital supplies for their war effort. The 455th had a big hand in this operation for which they were justly proud.

Mission 182, February 1 Thirty-eight B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs took off to bomb the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria. Weather was so bad en route and at the target that the group leader decided not to bomb

as PFF was not prescribed for this mission. No enemy resistance was encountered and all planes returned to base.

Mission 183, February 5 The Group sent 42 B-24's loaded with 250# GP bombs to the oil storage facilities at Regensburg. These facilities were known as Rhenani Danubia Oil Storage. Flak at the target was moderate and inaccurate. Thirty-eight of the aircraft bombed the primary target by pathfinder method and one plane dropped its bomb load on a railroad siding at Mettighafen, Austria. The primary target results were unobserved as the target was cloud-covered. Three aircraft returned early and the rest returned to base without any casualties.

Mission 184, February 7 Both red and blue forces were scheduled and briefed to bomb the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria. The red force took off at 0815 hours with 20 B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs. One aircraft returned early with engine trouble and 19 aircraft bombed the primary target by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. No planes received damage and all returned to base safely.

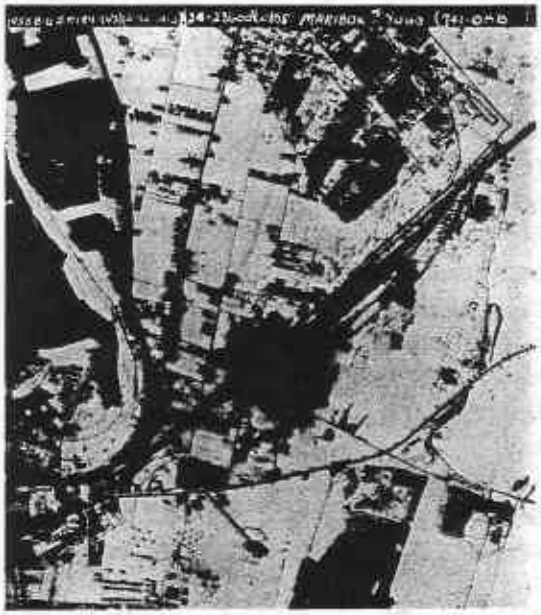
Mission 185, February 7 The blue force with 20 B-24's loaded with the same bomb load took off at 1012 hours. One aircraft returned early because of engine failure. Fourteen aircraft bombed Moosbierbaum by visual methods with fair success. Five aircraft returned their bombs to base as the flight leader's bombsight was inoperative and the rest of the flight did not bomb. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. One crewman was killed in action. Nineteen aircraft returned to base safely.

Mission 186, February 8 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the Matzleindorf marshalling yards at Vienna, Austria. They dropped 54 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the target by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. All aircraft returned to base safely. No enemy fighters were seen. However, one B-24 with markings similar to the Group markings took a position off the number two man in Baker Box. Radio contact could not be made and all guns trained on him. When the Group reached Lake Balaton, the aircraft made a "180" and left.

Mission 187, February 9 On the 9th of February, three B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off to bomb the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria. The bombing was through 10/10th cloud-cover. The pathfinder return was very good. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. All three planes returned to base after flying for almost six hours. No fighters were seen.

Mission 188, February 13 Today, red and blue forces would bomb different targets. Red force would bomb the Matzleindorf marshalling yards. Twenty-one B-24's carrying 500# RDX bombs dropped their bombs, sighting visually. Forty-one percent of the 36.5 tons fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point, a very successful bombing mission. Flak at the target was intense and accurate, and two aircraft received extensive damage. All aircraft returned to base.

Mission 189, February 13 The blue force was briefed to bomb the marshalling yards at Maribor, Yugoslavia. Twenty B-24's carrying the same load as the red force bombed the primary target by visual methods. Over 40% of their bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate. Four aircraft received slight damage but all returned to base without incident.



Mission 190, February 14 The red force was briefed to bomb the marshalling yards at Florisdorf, Vienna, Austria. However, 21 B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs went to the alternate target, the marshalling yards at Klagenfort, Austria because of bad weather. There was no flak at the target and all planes returned to base.

Mission 191, February 14 The blue force attacked the marshalling yards at Maribor, Yugoslavia, which was the second alternate. They too carried 500# RDX bombs and dropped them in a good pattern on the target. Over 80% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak at the target was moderate and inaccurate, and one aircraft received slight damage. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 192, February 15 The red force of the Group was briefed to bomb the Korneuburg oil refinery in Vienna, Austria. Escorted by P-38's, 19 B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off at 0830 hours and bombed the refinery by pathfinder. The results were not observed because of complete cloud-cover at the target. The lead pathfinder operator said that he had a good picture and the run on the target was very good. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. No enemy fighters were encountered nor seen. All aircraft returned to base without casualties.

Mission 193, February 15 The blue force that day also had 19 B-24's loaded the same and were to bomb the same refinery. This force took off one hour later than red force, at 0930 hours. They bombed the primary target by pathfinder method with the results unobserved. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. No aircraft were damaged and all planes returned to base.

Mission 194, February 16 Thirty-nine B-24's took off to bomb the Oberstraubling Airdrome at Regensburg, Austria. Three aircraft returned early so that 36 aircraft dropped over 83 tons of fragmentation bombs on the target by visual bombing. Results were good as frags were seen covering the assigned target area. Flak in the target area was moderate and inaccurate. All aircraft returned to base without casualties.

Mission 195, February 17 Forty-two B-24's took off to bomb the primary target, but weather intervened and the Group had to bomb an alternate target, the shipyards at Fiume, Italy. Three aircraft returned early, two because of engine trouble and one because they lost the formation in the clouds. Thirty-eight of the aircraft dropped 63.5 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the shipyards with only fair results. Flak at the target area was slight and inaccurate and all planes returned to base safely.

Mission 196, February 18 The Group was briefed to bomb the main marshalling yards at Amstaten, Germany. Weather along the route was so bad that the Group aborted the mission without dropping any bombs. All

28 B-24's returned safely.

Mission 197, February 19 The Group was given a choice of bombing several different targets because of weather. Twenty-eight B-24's took off but the weather was so bad that only seven aircraft bombed the sixth alternate target which was the harbor at Fiume, Italy. Five others bombed the harbor at Pola, Italy with poor results. The rest of the planes brought their bombs back to base. Flak at the targets was slight and inaccurate. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 198, February 20 Weather again dictated the target, as the Group had to bomb the sixth alternate: Trieste shipyards. Twenty-eight B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs dropped 55 tons on the target. The results were much better as almost 80% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak at the target was slight to moderate and inaccurate. No enemy fighters were seen and all planes returned to base without incident.

Mission 199, February 21 The Group sent 27 B-24's to bomb the central marshalling yards at Vienna, Austria. Six aircraft returned early due to various malfunctions. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 39 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the target by pathfinder method. Flak in the target area was intense and accurate. Two aircraft received extensive damage and 12 aircraft received light damage. Two crew members received slight wounds by flak. No enemy fighters were seen and all but one aircraft returned to base. This aircraft landed at Zarà, Yugoslavia and the crew was returned to base later.

Mission 200, February 22 The Group again had a double mission. Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the Straubing, Germany marshalling yards. However, the weather did not accommodate these planes and they had to settle for an alternate target at Bischofhofen. No flak was encountered at the target and few bombs were dropped. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 201, February 22 The target was the same for 15 B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs. They too encountered bad weather but were able to drop 28.5 tons of bombs on the marshalling yards at Bischofhofen, Austria with good results. There was no flak at the target or en route. All planes returned to base without incident.

Mission 202, February 23 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Gmund, Germany. Weather conditions prevented any sightings of the target and all planes returned to base with their bombs.

Mission 203, February 25 The Group was briefed to bomb the main north marshalling yards at Linz, Austria. Twenty-eight B-24's loaded with a mixed load of RDX and GP 500# bombs successfully bombed the primary target. They were escorted by P-38's. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. One aircraft received heavy damage and four aircraft were slightly damaged, but all aircraft returned to base safely.

Mission 204, February 27 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Augsburg, Germany. Twenty-one of the aircraft bombed the primary target despite pathfinder trouble on the lead ship. Three aircraft bombed the Innsbruck marshalling yards. One aircraft bombed buildings at Wessobrunn, one dropped its bombs on Swartz and another dropped its bombs on the Villach, Austria marshalling yard. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. One aircraft was hit just before the target and dropped its bombs early. It was last seen heading for

Switzerland. Two other aircraft were missing as well. One aircraft had a forced landing at Falconara, Italy where two of its crew were injured on landing. There were 33 crewmen missing in action and three crewmen were severely injured by flak. Four aircraft had severe damage and 15 received slight damage. One radio man reported that one of the aircraft reported reaching Switzerland. Only 24 planes returned to base and 19 of these were battle damaged.

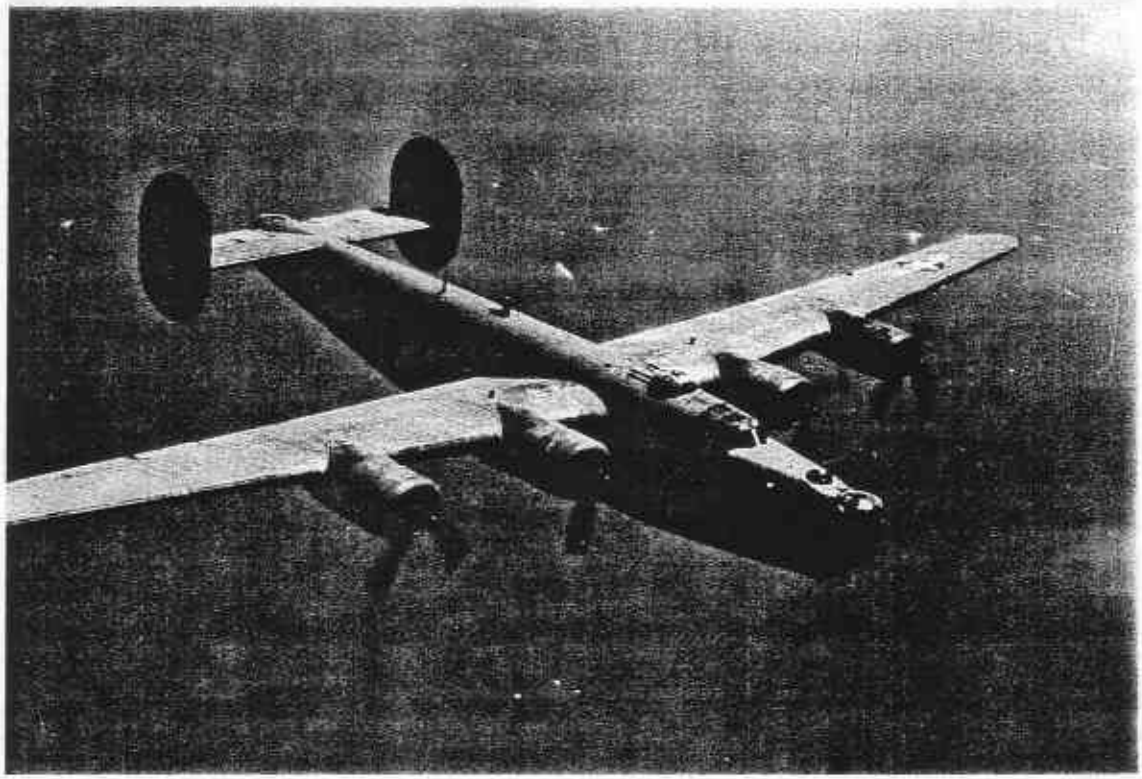
Mission 205, February 28 Eighteen B-24's, the red force, took off at 0705 hours to bomb the railroad bridge at Isarco/Albes, Italy, escorted by P-51's. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. One aircraft was hit over the target and was last seen with two engines smoking and losing altitude. A total of 51 tons of 1,000# RDX bombs were dropped near the target area with results that were not very satisfactory. Eight crewmen were reported missing in action and 17 aircraft returned to base.

Mission 206, February 28 The blue force, consisting of 17 B-24's, carrying 1,000# RDX bombs took off at 0755 hours to bomb the same target, the railroad bridge at Isarco/Albes. One aircraft returned early because of engine trouble and 16 aircraft dropped 46 tons of bombs on the target area with better results, 60% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak again was moderate and accurate. Eleven aircraft received slight flak damage and 16 aircraft returned to base at 1340 hours.

February was over and we had flown 26 missions. Seven of these were aborted. We had effectively put 505 aircraft over the targets and dropped 840 tons of bombs. We lost five aircraft and had 41 crewmen missing in action. One man was killed in action and 16 severely wounded. With weather conditions as they were, it speaks highly of the support given by the ground echelon as well as the effort put forth by the crews. With better weather on the horizon, things would only get better.



Our First Year of Combat Operations



February 12, 1945 marked our first year of operations and on 22 February 1945 our 200th mission was flown, which was against the Linz marshalling yards. This was quite an event in many respects. It climaxed 13 consecutive days of combat flying during which we put up 17 separate formations called "Forces," lost no planes, had no turn-backs on seven forces and only one early return on seven others; a noteworthy tribute to the line crews. Col. Snowden led the entire Wing on this mission and the Linz marshalling yards were not the same for a long time. The B-24 named "Ole Tepee Time Gal" flew her 100th mission that day and as far as was known, the only original B-24's left were "Glamour Gal" and "Bestwedo" which was at the 459th for Col. Cool's use. It was good to have the old boss, Col. Cool, back the day the Group hit the Vienna central yards on the 199th mission 21 February 1945.

The Group continued its relentless pounding of the German targets and with the advances of the Allied forces, the Russians in the east and the American and British in the south and west, the area for bombardment was shrinking. The strategic targets remaining were generally in Hungary, Austria, Germany and the western part of Czechoslovakia. Close ground support

was periodically provided to our ground forces as needed to help break stalemates. Both vehicle and railroad bridges were attacked in northern Italy to disrupt resupply of the German ground forces and to deny them of escape routes.

The mission attack structure changed, depending on the location of the targets. Although the standard 36-ship formation with two sections continued to be basic, six planes abreast with two boxes were sent to some targets where enemy fighters were not expected. On a few occasions, single ships were sent to some targets at night, using pathfinder methods for locating and bombing the target. On a few occasions, single ships were sent to bomb using pathfinder when weather was expected so that the B-24 could hide in a cloud bank from enemy fighters. It was difficult to evaluate results from these types of operations but it certainly had its nuisance value against the enemy. On some missions, the Group was split into two attack forces, A and B. These forces would attack different targets on the same day. On many targets, bombing was done by individual boxes, going over the target in train. Although the enemy fighters were becoming less of a problem, there continued to be fighter escort to some targets where known opposition existed. But the flak became heavier over most targets as the Germans moved their gun batteries from the Balkins and eastern Europe to the west as they were losing territory to the Russian Army. Some gun batteries were also moved from the west as the American and British forces were liberating France, Belgium and Holland.

The tonnage of bombs was impressive for the second 100 missions, a total of 4,412 tons from flying 2,521 sorties. The bombing accuracy improved substantially during the period, especially from December through February where the Group greatly exceeded the average performance of the 15th Air Force as a whole. These accomplishments were not without losses. We lost one B-24 to fighters and 24 from flak. An additional 22 B-24's were lost for other reasons, or a total of 47 from all causes. When one considers that we had 60 B-24's assigned for our 101st mission, our losses were 77% from that base. From these losses, we suffered 95 killed, 25 wounded and 169 missing in action. The maintenance personnel were kept busy as we had 130 of our B-24's damaged from flak which required repairs. The loss of our airplanes for other reasons continued to plague the Group as they were almost as high as losses from combat and many were killed from these losses.

The German Jet Aircraft

The combat crews started sighting German jet aircraft that greatly outperformed our friendly fighters. The Allies became concerned about this so they attempted a knockout blow against the increasing number of German jet aircraft in southeastern Germany. It was known that at least two types of twin jet engine aircraft and one or more types of single engine jets were planned for production on a substantial scale in 1945. Attacks against targets of this nature had to be timely and accomplished under visual conditions. These conditions became apparent on 16 February 1945.

For the 304th Wing, the Regensburg/Obertraubling airdrome was assigned as a target. (Our Group was selected to participate.) This airdrome was still known as a former large scale producer of Me-109's and had been almost totally destroyed in the success-

ful attacks of 22 and 25 February 1944 and was now attempting a comeback in the jet field, as a final assembly point for the jet Me-262. Photo cover of 8 February 1945 showed 48 Me-262's, the largest number of jets yet seen on any one airdrome.

The objective of the attack was to destroy the remaining installations along with their contents of jig tools, partially completed aircraft and as many completed aircraft as possible before they could be used for operational and training purposes.

Potential enemy resistance amounted to 15 to 20 single engine fighters from the Munich area and the known flak defenses at the target, which were heavy and accurate. The mission was most successful with our Group getting credit for destroying 12 and damaging four of the jets. The total Wing effort rendered a knockout blow against jet aircraft from which the Nazis never recovered.

Some estimates ran as high as 1,400 for the number of jet aircraft built by the Germans. Had Hitler listened to his Luftwaffe pilots and used the planes for fighters instead of bombers, it may have had a major impact on the air war. The Me-262 was three times faster than the B-17's and B-24's and there would have been little defense against them. But by the time Luftwaffe pilots finally mutinied, ignoring Hitler's orders and flying the jets as fighters, it was too late. The Allied ground troops had taken over much of Germany and the jets had few protected airports from which to fly.

A Stranger in Our Formation

The Germans made flyable many of the Allied aircraft that crash-landed in their territory. There wasn't much they could do with these airplanes as they



would be shot down by their own gunners if flown near them. However, there is at least one account where the Germans flew a restored B-24 and joined our formation while we were on a mission. Erling Kindem of the 742nd Squadron had this account in his war diary: "We were briefed to hit the oil refinery at Vienna. Because of cloud-cover, we hit the alternate instead which was the Maribor marshalling yards in Yugoslavia. Before reaching the target, a 'phantom' B-24 joined our formation. We had fighter escort from the fine squadron of black pilots. This was reported to them and one responded: 'I'll go scare him out but you tell your boys not to point their guns at me.' He came in and the phantom said he was from the 55th Wing and got lost. There was no such thing as a 55th Wing from Italy with heavy bombers. We did not want him in our formation as we didn't know his intentions. It would have been an easy matter for him to turn those 50 caliber guns of the B-24 on us and cause considerable damage. The fighter pilot gave him some bursts from his guns and warned the phantom to turn back and he will be escorted. The response was that he could make it alone. The black pilot said: 'You are going to be escorted whether you want it or not. You're going to have two men on your tail all the way back and don't try to land in Yugoslavia.' The phantom protested and said he wanted to drop his bombs. The response from the fighter pilot was: 'You ain't gonna drop no

bombs.' The phantom left with his escort and we heard nothing further from the event." Actually there was a 55th Bomb Wing in the 15th Airforce. However, aircraft were not normally assigned to a Wing Headquarters and the B-24 had no markings.

The Problems of Frostbite

God bless our gunners! They withstood temperatures of -30°C and sometimes down to -55°C. In one instance, a temperature of -62°C was reported. It was difficult for the gunners in the rear of the B-24 to operate efficiently and frostbite was a serious problem. There were cases of "blast" frostbite of the face and hands which was avoided by installing closed waist windows. Wind screen devices also prevented a few more.

The doctors tried several methods for treatment of frostbite. One method was to encase the injured member in plaster of paris at once on the theory that the swelling did much of the damage. By avoiding extravasating of blood and tissue fluids through injured capillary walls perhaps more of the tissue could be saved than otherwise. This method was painful and results inconclusive. Dissolved plexiglass was also tried since it did not give off heat when drying as did the plaster. It is an old axiom that a frostbitten extremity should not be heated too fast. One thing stood out, it was impossible to determine the extent of the injury at the time the plane landed a few hours after the frostbite occurred. Some very innocent appearing toes became gangrenous. On the other hand, some third degree frostbitten toes and fingers healed without loss of tissue. The lesson learned was to treat all cases with respect, rest and elevation. No new treatments of frostbite resulted from war experience in the 15th Air Force. One's effort was best directed at prevention.

Anoxia Problems

While there were several cases of anoxia, only one death occurred. The lack of oxygen made a crew member inefficient and many times another crewman had to take care of the person suffering from anoxia to save his life. This problem was reviewed by both the medical and flight equipment personnel and standards and procedures were implemented to carefully inspect the oxygen system, including the crewman's mask, prior to flying at high altitude. A small committee was established to investigate each anoxia case, conduct training in the use of oxygen and insure proper distribution of flight clothing. Toward the end of the year, some of the missions flown exceeded 25,000 feet to get above the clouds to keep the formation together.

The Story of a Tail Gunner

Most of our gunners had volunteered for aerial gunner school while they were completing their basic Army training. Many attended the school at Fort Meyers, Florida where they learned the basics of the Browning M-2 .50 caliber machine gun inside-out and had practice firing the gun. The gun had about 150 working parts and the men were required to strip and reassemble it blindfolded wearing gloves. This was necessary if a gunner was to repair a malfunctioning gun at high altitude in sub-zero weather.

The basic gun weighed 64 pounds and fired 750 to 850 rounds of ammunition per minute (14 rounds per second) with a muzzle velocity of 2,900 feet per second. The most effective range was up to 600 yards. Anything beyond that might only scare off an attacking fighter or just

waste ammunition. When fired, there was considerable recoil, most of which was absorbed by the mounting adapter. So much for the Hollywood heroes shown holding a .50 caliber gun in their hands and shooting down Japanese fighters in some of the WW II films.

Training was also received in aircraft recognition, range estimation, sighting and position firing. The sighting and position firing were most important, learning the various modes of attack (head-on, fly-through and the pursuit curve) used by enemy fighters, the proper deflection for each point of attack and when the gunner could most effectively start shooting. There was ground training firing at moving targets and guns were mounted on jeeps for firing as well. Following this, there was limited air-to-air firing with a .50 mounted for firing from the rear seat of an AT-6 training aircraft.

Often times, a crew in combat was required to fly a mission in an airplane other than their own. Their airplane could be out of commission that day or it could be a crew without their own plane. Louie Hansen, tail gunner in the 743rd Squadron, gave this story. "We are 'bringing up the rear' on our way to bomb a fighter base at Newburg, Germany. Being somewhat new at this game, my view of bombing an enemy fighter base seems akin to attacking a hornet's nest. A relatively new replacement crew, we were assigned on the less desirable slots in the formation, sometimes referred to as the 'purple heart slot.' I wouldn't say that I felt lonesome, but from my vantage point, someone else would have to confirm that we were not on a one-ship mission. A nagging thought came to mind: 'He who last attacks the hornet's nest gathers the most hornets.' Yes, I felt a bit nervous!

"Everything was going well into the mission, no one had used the relief tube from the forward part of the airplane. Whoever decided that the relief tube should discharge under the tail turret either disliked tail gunners or did not understand the aerodynamics associated with the rear window of a station wagon. Any tail gunner will vouch that just a few freeze-dried specks of urine on his newly polished turret glass could, with no reference point for depth perception, become a whole squadron of enemy fighters in the distance. (This was sometimes a problem for the ball turret gunners.)

"Following an oxygen check, we were told that the formation had spread out and it was safe to test fire the guns. From where I sat, I could have fired my twin 50's for the last hour with nothing in the way. I set the guns at six o'clock level and pressed the trigger button for a short burst. The burst was exceedingly short, one bullet from each gun. I reached and tugged at the cable that recharged the right gun. The gun was jammed! So was the left one! Now, I began to sweat!

"The diagnosis is elementary, the S.O.B. who cleaned the guns after the last mission put the cocking levers in backwards! The only way the guns would fire was to dismantle them, push the cocking levers forward and reassemble them from the inside of the turret, if that was possible. I had never tried it. Thoughts ran through my mind whether there would be enough time before they were needed to fend off enemy fighters. There was only space in the turret to get one hand through to a gun. I would have to do one with my right hand the other with my left. Sweat started to trickle down my back, my goggles steamed over which made no difference as there was no way to see what I was

doing. At 50° or so degrees below zero, I dared not remove my gloves. I was thankful that, in gunnery school, they made us dismantle the .50 caliber machine guns, find broken parts and reassemble them while sitting in absolute darkness and wearing heavy gloves.

"Yes, I got the job done and, as most combat crew members know, one can sweat at 50° below!"

Living Conditions and Entertainment

Living conditions continued to improve as the squadrons built new buildings for office space and recreation. By this time, there was some type of floor in each bivouac tent, either wooden or concrete, to keep the water from flowing through them during heavy rains and flooding conditions. The food improved as well. Steak, fresh chicken, eggs and ice cream were served more often, especially on special occasions.

Schools were started by squadron officers to give classes in algebra, business administration, aircraft maintenance, Italian language and other courses. The instructors were primarily from our own personnel. These classes were well attended, especially the language classes by the ground echelon. They came to the conclusion that since there was no hope in going home before war's end, they might as well understand what the natives were talking about. Flight, bombing and gunnery training continued for the flight crews.

There was more entertainment for the officers and men. During October, a USO show was at the group theater and there was a large turnout. The men enjoyed it a great deal. Who said vaudeville was dead? Jokes like "Why does the chicken cross the road?" were amusing. As usual, the faithful Red Cross was on the job. Four very attractive and charming young ladies served hot coffee and doughnuts. Of course, everyone had to bring their own cups. Learning this, the men ran back to their tents and grabbed their little tin cups that they had stolen from the Red Cross the week before. The latest movies were also shown with one of the favorites being Ester Williams starring with Red Skelton in "Bathing Beauties."

The officers and men were encouraged to buy war bonds, give blood and donate funds to the AAF Aid Society. An arrangement was made so that everyone could buy Christmas gifts through the PX and have them delivered to someone in the United States.

Improvements were made in every area except the weather. The author of the well-known book, *The Rains Came*, must not have spent time in "sunny Italy." At times, the squadron camps became a sea of mud, especially around the new mess hall where there was a lot of traffic. Two G.I.s were heard discussing the mud and one stated he stumbled and fell into the mud and sunk in ankle deep! The other G.I. then said that he had met the same fate but he went in the mud up to his knees! The first G.I. turned and snorted, "Yeah, but I went in head first." Yes, the mud was quite a problem.

The Award of the Presidential Citation

November 3, 1944 was a very busy day getting ready for award ceremonies for the Unit Citation the group had earned on the Steyr mission flown on 2 April 1944. At 1230 hours, the men from the squadrons marched to the flight line in their Class A uniforms. The officers beamed a little because the men really looked like soldiers. They marched in good formation and each

and every one of them was proud of the fact that they were a member of the Group. At 1350, a silver colored C-47 circled the field and came in for a beautiful landing. It taxied to the flight line and General Twining stepped from the plane and the presentation ceremonies were soon underway. The men stood at attention with our B-24's in the background while the presentation was made. It was indeed a memorable day.

Christmas and New Year's

On Christmas Eve there were many parties in the clubs and some hosted gatherings in their tents. A good time was had by all but there were some casualties. There were accounts where one officer fell in a fox hole and injured his legs, and some men were confined to the guardhouse for having too much fun. There was an accidental shooting in which one man suffered from powder burns. All in all, it was a great celebration.

On the 25th, Christmas Day, there was no let up from our bombing attacks against the enemy. The group took off to bomb Wels main marshalling yards in spite of the weather being very bad at our home field. One of our airplanes went into the clouds soon after takeoff and was not heard from until much later when it was learned it crashed and all were killed. The target was hit, but on the return the ceiling was so low that it gave the appearance the formation was buzzing the field and skimming the building tops. We were lucky that all returning aircraft were able to land safely.

On New Year's Eve, it was a moment in time that many will always remember. It was a year ago that the ground echelon set sail for Italy. Most of the original flight crews had finished their tours and returned to the States. It was a double celebration, the celebration of the New Year and the anniversary of our first year. The men started celebrating early and continued to do so into the night. The weather was bad the next day so there was no mission to fly. Snow started falling about noon time on New Year's Day and the officers and men stopped by the orderly rooms, S-2 and operations offices to pay their respects and visit. Parties started up again, mostly in the officer's and enlisted men's clubs. The clubs set sales records over the New Year celebrations. The dispensaries had the fewest number of men on sick call for more than three months. At about 0100 hours, voices could be heard with the men's sloshing of their feet through the mud to turn in and be ready to face the New Year with confidence that can only be acquired by living under a banner of a nation whose creed is: "All men are created equal!"

Group and Squadron Newspapers

The initiation of Group and Squadron newspapers was indeed a morale booster. Many persons of the Group contributed by writing articles. It was surprising at the wit and humor that flowed, a real indication that we truly had a cross section of talent from the melting pot, America. The papers were typed and run off on the hand-cranked mimeograph machines, a modern advancement in office copying in those days. The group paper was called the "Journal," the 740th the "Il Castoro Ardente" meaning "Eager Beaver" and the 741st, "Stagrag." Records could not be found about papers for the 742nd and 743rd Squadrons. However, personnel of those squadrons made contributions to the Group paper.

The first issue of the Group Journal was published in November 1944 with

Sgt. Winfield S. Clayton the editor. The first edition was dedicated to the Steyr-Daimler raid. Col. Cool, who led this raid, wrote the following for the paper:

"The Steyr-Walzlagerwerke raid was of great importance because a vital enemy industrial plant was destroyed and also because we gave the Luftwaffe a severe beating that day. It was a fine job done by the 455th Bomb Group and I am very proud to have been one of you.

"It seems fitting that the 455th has dedicated the first issue of 'The 455th Journal' to the Steyr-Walzlagerwerke mission and I hope that all of you, every officer and enlisted man, will give the publication your enthusiastic cooperation and support it in making it successful and permanent." Col. Cool was the 304th Wing Operations Officer at the time.

Sgt. Clayton always wrote a column called "Reflections" for the Journal. The following is a part of what he wrote for the first issue where he was reminiscing about the times in the early days when we first arrived in Italy:

"Remember our hunt for food those few days, and we had little equipment...now often we have chicken served by the mess sergeant ...yes, even chicken by an occasional officer or a ranking non-com now and then...remember, no mess halls, no kitchen, little equipment...sitting out in the weather on the cold ground eating your stew...that damn stew...garnished with hail stones...and your coffee, ugh...those bitter winds and rain in your face as you ate...now heated tents...mess halls decorated by Italian artists...hot and cold showers... movies...clubs...yes, our leadership has been good, hasn't it...new crews to replace the old ones...we grumbled they will never be like the old boys, our squadron is shot...then we discovered they were the same American boys...wanting to be accepted...willing to share...a natural hesitancy on the part of the old timer and the new arrival...now we find ourselves sweating out the return of our new friends in just the same manner that we did the guys who have gone.

"Yes, a year has brought many changes. The other day I sat meditating upon my favorite seat in probably the most highly patronized sanctum in the outfit, when a high ranking officer stuck his head in the door and advised me that a good soldier would keep the door closed...and I remembered a few short months ago when I had a favorite olive tree that I would hide behind and veer leeward or to portside to keep the hail stones from pounding against my sensitive spine...remember we had no buildings...certainly no covering could be spared for that sort of thing at first."

The January 1945 issue of the Journal, its third, marked the first anniversary of overseas duty by the Group. The following articles from the Journal clearly reveal the innermost feelings of the officers and enlisted men alike. The first is by Al Coons, our very fine Group S-2 officer, reflecting on our first year of combat as follows:

"One year of combat operation has now moved into the past – a year that will be variously characterized as experience, as a nightmare or even as memories, someday.

"It is a year that most of us would rather not have lived as we did, had the world we inherited been one in which free choices were possible. At the same time, it is a year most of us would not have spent otherwise, given the world as it was in February 1944.

"The lapse of time which separates then and now has brought changes of staggering proportions when viewed in

retrospect, and the territory wrested from the enemy day by day, mile by mile stretches at least across half a continent. The long road back from Stalingrad, which had only begun a year ago, today has crossed the German borders. France is nearly freed from the German invader. The German lines in Italy (a scant 100 miles away when we arrived) are now backed up almost to the Po Valley.

"Some small part of those changes are the result of the efforts we have put forth as a heavy bombardment group. Bombing which we did one year ago, if it succeeded in stopping the production of only five aeroplanes, paid off when those five planes failed to appear over the Normandy beachhead on invasion day. Grounded aeroplanes and parked motor transport are today a testament to what we have done at Ploesti, Brux, Blechaumer and Vienna. Desserling could use some of these trucks that ran no more after our 93% job on Chiavasso. And the credit for those accomplishments is shared by all who have done a job with the group – crew members who flew the missions, linemen who repaired and serviced the planes, clerks, cooks, communications personnel, and all the rest.

"With a year of experience behind us, and with the shape of defeat to come to the enemy already dimly outlined ahead, there is no reason why the second year's record should not be better than the one that is past. For, in gaining our year of experience, mistakes have been made – mistakes that should not be made again. Results have not always been as good as they should have been. The bombs jettisoned in the Adriatic, if well placed on the target, would have brought the war nearer to an end. Gasoline consumed by early returns would have supported additional effort against the enemy. Just as all of us contributed to the success of missions, so have all of us a responsibility for the failures – the briefings that were inadequate, the truck drivers who were late in getting the crews to their briefings, the crew members who stayed in the pad when they should have been familiarizing themselves with their planes or their guns or their targets, the cooks who didn't have breakfast on time for the men before takeoff and the lineman who failed to check the plane carefully. These failures have softened the blows against the enemy, they have cost the lives of Americans and our Allies.

"As the final showdown approaches, the pressure against the enemy must be maintained. Now as never before, the blows will tell. All that we have learned in one year of combat can be used to insure that the second year will be a short one."

Sgt. Clayton wrote his article "Memories of 1945" for the Journal as follows:

"January...just one year ago this month we arrived in this, a strange land...strange to us in custom...and strange to us in creed...a year packed with experiences...things I'll always remember...getting off the boat...the long train ride, then trucks to San Giovanni...the mad scramble to get our pup tents up before dark...our first meal in the old catacombed cellar which was being used as a mess hall by the 741st Squadron, now the war room for the 454th Bomb Group...it was dark when we arrived there...lit only by the smoking oil fires being used to heat the large pails of food, and several scattered small cans of oil with a piece of rag for a wick...smoky, dark, eerie ones...fancies easily drifted back many generations to days when other men at war were stalking through the arched cellars...or,

through the smoke-filled, dimly lit room, one could see the flowing robes of the ghosts of persecuted men of some religious order in hiding from their enemy...I remember my first bath in a month...the tub was old, dirty, the water cold...the bath was good...those first few days of inertia, bewilderment, and the gradual readjustment to a new life...the first mail from home after so many weeks, and the joy that came with it...men starting to better their living conditions...hoarding a nail, or a piece of string that in time they might have enough material to build some additional comfort to their new life...the arrival of the first combat men...renewed old acquaintances, swapping tales of experience...party that night...15 gallons of horrible, blood-curdling (but intoxicating) Italian vino...the thrill when the planes took off on their first mission, and how we all felt the first time one didn't return...Demo, the first mascot of the 742nd Squadron, flown from Africa when just a baby puppy...how he refused to leave the empty tent when his masters failed to return from their mission...lone sentry...faithful...broken-hearted waiting...Demo never went hungry...someone always remembered and carried food to the little soldier on guard, who still believed his would come back to him...I remember the first red alert that I experienced while in The Pit...a half minute to clear the place...men quickly disappeared into the darkness...you had the feeling you were alone in a stricken world...stifling stillness...dark, dark, all clear sound...laughter, chatter...like glow worms, dozens of cigarettes began flaring all about you. Yes, and I remember that sincere note in the voice of every man when they spoke of Col. Cool...and how the planes were ready to take off on an important mission when some discovered there were not enough flak suits for everyone in Col. Snowden's plane...with pride the men tell how Col. Snowden remarked: 'If there is a flak suit for every enlisted man, we will take off, but the men must be protected'...and the reaction to Col. Robnett's simple plea for a truck driver on Christmas Day to bring the tired, cold combat men from the line, and the very favorable reaction as expressed by the men at the EM clubs that night...yes, and after 19 months a corporal, my promotion. Every year has its highlights...1945 starts a new life for all of us, a new world...necessarily, new experiences...we are still at war...facing new experiences...creating new memories for the future...May they be good!"

The 200th Mission Party

On 4 March 1945, a cold day, frequently interrupted by intermittent snow flurries, a group of Italian laborers worked unremittingly erecting ornate carnival polls, tents and bandstands for a party which was scheduled, rain or shine, for the next day. By sundown the group headquarters building and area were in readiness for the party. This was just six short months since celebrating the Group's 100th mission. The next day was to be the 200th mission party.

The day was bright and the sky was clear but a strong, raw wind persistently blew. It was, nevertheless, a festive day considering the weather. There was beer and food for all. The day was designed to interrupt the routine of the officers and men, to give them a chance to relax and have fun with their friends. The 200th mission party was an absolute necessity.

From Bari, Foggia and other surrounding towns, entertainers were hired to perform. GI tents were erected about

the immediate area to house them. There were all types of shows, contortionists, muscle acts of strength, rifle ranges, ring games and caricature artists who drew likeness pictures of the men which most sent home. Variety shows in the mess hall and pit, the ancient subterranean wine cellar now used for the mission briefing room and motion picture theatre, were scheduled for four showings each during the afternoon and evening. The most talented entertainers were to perform in these two places. Some of their costumes were badly worn and even a bit tawdry. Several of the singers had good talent and their efforts, although inferior to American standards, were well received.

Our GI band formed by S/Sgt. Hodriquez played in front of the headquarters building. An Italian girl singer sang popular songs of the day and crowds of soldiers gathered around and applauded. After a time, the band moved inside as it became too cold to perform outside.

Beer was a major attraction and everyone had plenty. There were "Beer Points" scattered about the area. This term was derived from the British calling their gasoline stations "Petrol Points." As the afternoon wore on, the time came for the evening chow which was served in the enlisted men's club. Sandwiches, both cheese and roast beef, were served with gallons of hot coffee. The chow line was long but everyone who entered it was fed.

The party progressed into the evening; there were shows in the pit, tents, and in the mess hall. They were all packed and overflowing with eager men and officers pushing to view the figures behind the crude make-shift footlights. There was singing that reminded us of our loved ones and familiar tunes that carried our thoughts back home. Juggling and various other forms of entertainment amused the men and a good time was had by all.

By ten o'clock in the evening, the last show closed and everyone returned to their tent areas, more relaxed than before and ready for the next day's job, be it on the line, in the air or behind a desk. They had celebrated the 200th mission for this veteran Bomb Group!



The 200th Mission Party.