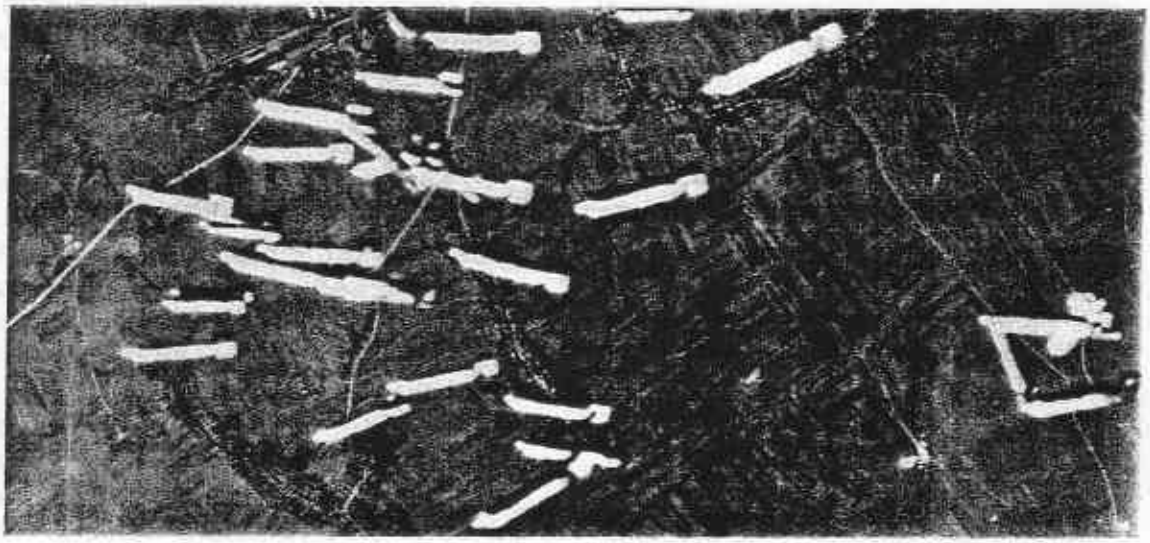
Flight of the Vulgar Vultures

1943-1945



Our Final Missions



MARCH 1945

March arrived with some good flying weather, at least for the first three or four days, and the 15th Air Force took advantage of it. Our final missions supported the "mopping up" activities of the Allies in the defeat of the Nazis. The German defense in northern Italy still held along the Gothic Line and the battle on the eastern front was in full swing as we went back to our attacks on the communication systems of the enemy.

Mission 207, March 1 At 0900 hours, 18 B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Maribor, Yugoslavia. Eleven aircraft dropped their bombs on the secondary target, the marshalling yards at Jesenice, as the primary could not be reached due to weather conditions. Seven aircraft did not bomb. All aircraft returned to base.

Mission 208, March 1 At 0930 hours, 16 B-24's took off to bomb the same Maribor marshalling yards. Scant but fairly accurate flak was encountered at the target. The weather had improved and a good concentration of bombs were observed in the target area. All planes returned safely.

Mission 209, March 2 Twenty-eight B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Linz, Austria. Nineteen planes dropped their bombs on the primary target by pathfinder. Five aircraft dropped their bombs on the Knittlefeld marshalling yards as they could not line up on the primary. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 210, March 4 Seventeen B-24's took off to bomb the station yard at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. All 17 aircraft dropped their bombs by pathfinder method and returned to base. No flak or fighters were encountered.

Mission 211, March 4 Twenty-one B-24's took off to bomb the primary target at Brod, Yugoslavia, but all returned without dropping their bombs due to bad weather conditions.

Mission 212, March 8 The Group was scheduled to bomb the railway cars

at Novezamke marshalling yards. Twenty-one B-24's took off at 0738 hours loaded with 500# RDX bombs. The weather prevented them from bombing any target as the Group tried to find targets of opportunity but none were found. Three aircraft were missing due to shortage of fuel. Two were heading to Zara, Yugoslavia for refueling and one plane was reported missing. There was no flak nor fighters but bad weather was our foe for the day.

Mission 213, March 8 The second section, or blue force, took off at 0810 hours with 21 B-24's loaded the same as red force to bomb the same target. They had the same results, as they were unable to spot even a target of opportunity. All planes of the blue force returned to base safely.

Mission 214, March 9 The red force of 19 B-24's took off to bomb the Pragersho marshalling yards. They were loaded with 500# GP bombs. One aircraft returned early because of an oil leak and 18 aircraft bombed the secondary target, the marshalling yard at Graz, Austria. They dropped 42 tons of bombs by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was slight and inaccurate. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 215, March 9 The blue force took off with the same bomb load. Their target was the same but they were unable to bomb because of weather conditions. All planes returned to base with their bombs.

Mission 216, March 10 Twenty-one B-24's took off to bomb the railroad bridge at Verona Parona, Italy. They were loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs. Two aircraft returned early due to mechanical trouble. Nineteen aircraft dropped their bombs with outstanding results. Over 75% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak at the target was moderate and very accurate. One aircraft received heavy flak damage and three were slightly damaged. All planes returned safely.

Mission 217, March 12 We are back in the oil business. We put up a maximum effort of 42 B-24's to bomb the Florisdorf, Vienna oil refinery. The load was 500# RDX bombs. Only 38 aircraft dropped their bombs by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. No results were observed because of clouds. One aircraft was missing. It was seen leaving formation with the pilot saying he could not feather his number four engine. Twelve crewmen were reported missing in action.

Mission 218, March 13 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Regensburg, Germany. Three aircraft returned before bombing but 25 dropped over 52 tons of 500# GP bombs by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was slight and inaccurate. All planes returned to base without incident.

Mission 219, March 14 Twenty-one B-24's of the red force and another 21 of the blue force consolidated their efforts and took off between 0805 and 0840 hours to bomb the primary target. They settled on the alternate target of the marshalling yards at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. They dropped 93 tons of bombs on the target by pathfinder method. Flak was not experienced at the target or en route. All planes returned to base.

Mission 220, March 15 The red force of 20 B-24's took off to bomb their primary target but had to settle for their fourth alternate, the marshalling yards at Bruck-Leitha, Austria. Thirteen aircraft dropped their bombs on the primary target. Seven others dropped theirs on the Wiener Neustadt marshalling yards, a target of opportunity.

No flak nor fighters were encountered. All planes returned to base.

Mission 221, March 15 The blue force was unable to bomb its primary target so 13 of their aircraft bombed a target of opportunity, the marshalling yards at Murzzuschlag. Seven aircraft of "C" box bombed various targets of opportunity. All planes returned to base.

Mission 222, March 16 Red and blue forces combined and took off between 0800 and 0830 hours. Weather prevented the Group from getting to their primary target so they bombed the marshalling yards at Amsteten, Austria. Thirty-seven B-24's dropped over 87 tons of 500# GP bombs on the target with fair results. No enemy resistance was met and all planes returned safely.

Mission 223, March 19 Forty-two B-24's took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Muhldorf, Germany. One aircraft returned early and 41 aircraft dropped over 116 tons of 1,000# GP bombs with good results. Over 55% fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. No enemy resistance was met and all planes returned safely.

Mission 224, March 20 Forty-two B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Wels, Austria. All 42 B-24's dropped their bombs with outstanding results. Over 80% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Again, there was no enemy resistance. All planes returned safely.

Mission 225, March 21 Mission was the Airdrome at Neuburg, Germany. The group was able to get 42 aircraft into the air for the third day in a row, an outstanding effort by the ground crews. One aircraft returned early and 41 dropped over 94 tons of 500# RDX bombs with outstanding accuracy. Over 87% fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak at the target area was non-existent but some flak along the route inflicted slight damage to one plane. All planes returned safely.

Mission 226, March 22 This was the fourth day of good weather and the red and blue forces again combined to fly a mission. Forty-two B-24's took off to bomb the oil refinery at Kralupy, Czechoslovakia. This time we were escorted by P-51's and P-38's. The bomb load was 500# RDX bombs. Two aircraft returned before bombing and 40 B-24's dropped 93 tons of bombs. No enemy resistance was met and all planes returned to base.

Mission 227, March 23 Good flying weather. Forty-two B-24's took off loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs to bomb the St. Valentine Tank Works. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. One aircraft was badly damaged and crash-landed at a nearby field with three crewmen seriously injured and six injured slightly. Another aircraft landed at Zaro, Yugoslavia with engines damaged from flak and the crew was returned to Bari, Italy by C-47. All other aircraft returned to base.

Mission 228, March 24 This was the sixth day of flyable weather. The group sent both red and blue forces on a combined mission. Forty-two B-24's were scheduled but only 38 took off. One aircraft returned early and 37 dropped their bombs on the primary target, which was the Riem Airdrome at Munich, Germany. Over 85 tons of 500# RDX bombs were dropped with fair results. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Four aircraft received heavy damage and four slight. All planes returned to base.

Mission 229, March 25 This was the seventh straight day of flyable

weather and again the Group scheduled 42 B-24's. Thirty-eight got off the ground to attack the C.K.D. Liben Tank Works in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Two aircraft returned prior to bombing. Thirty-six aircraft dropped 96 tons of 1,000# GP bombs with good results. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate. Three aircraft received slight damage from flak. No enemy fighters were seen. All planes returned to base.

Mission 230, March 26 The Group sent 28 B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs to the marshalling yards at Szombathely, Hungary. Only six aircraft dropped their bombs on the primary target as the weather moved in. Thirteen aircraft returned their bombs to base, while seven jettisoned their bombs in the Adriatic. Those that dropped their bombs on the primary did a good job because over 75% fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. Flak was moderate and accurate; one aircraft received heavy damage and ten had slight damage. All planes returned safely.

Mission 231, March 30 Four B-24's took off to bomb the North Station and Good Depot at Vienna, Austria under the cover of weather to avoid fighters. Two aircraft dropped their bombs on the primary and one dropped its bombs on an alternate target, the Kapfenberg Tank Works. One aircraft did not bomb because the primary target was clear. Results were good as bomb strikes were seen in the target area. Flak at target was intense and accurate. All planes returned safely.

Mission 232, March 31 The last day of the month and the group sent 28 B-24's to bomb the freight and locomotive depot at Linz, Austria. The group was escorted by P-38's to the target. Three aircraft returned without bombing. Eighteen aircraft dropped 33.5 tons of 100# GP bombs on the primary target. Four aircraft returned their bombs to base and three aircraft jettisoned their bombs in the Adriatic. Results were not observed. Flak at the target area was intense and accurate. All planes returned to base.

March was over and the Group had flown 26 missions, putting 719 aircraft over the target areas. The Group dropped 1,376.15 tons of bombs during the month. While no enemy fighters were shot down during March, it was because we were not attacked by them. We lost three aircraft to flak but only two of those resulted in a loss of 12 crewmen as the third aircraft crash-landed and most of the crew escaped with minor injuries. We had six men severely wounded and three received minor wounds. The concentration of flak around the major targets seemed to be increasing as the Germans appeared to be "circling their wagons" for the final attack.

APRIL 1945

April started off with a continuation of March's good weather. Our targets this month would be troop concentrations and communications. By communications we were including marshalling yards, railroad bridges and depots. We would hit one oil depot as our last effort against oil resources. The war was fast coming to an end and we hastened it a little with our effort.

Mission 233, April 1 The Group sent 28 B-24's loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs to bomb the railroad bridge at Kreglach. One aircraft returned prior to bombing with engine trouble. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 78 tons of bombs on the target. Results were not observed because of smoke in the target area. No flak was experienced and no enemy fighters were seen. All planes returned to base.

Mission 234, April 2 The Group sent 28 B-24's to bomb the marshalling yards at Krems, Austria. One aircraft returned prior to bombing because of low engine oil pressure. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped over 65 tons of 500# RDX bombs in the target area with outstanding results as 87% of the bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. There was no flak at the target and none en route. All planes returned safely.

Mission 235, April 5 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the railroad bridge at Verona, Italy. Weather prevented them from reaching the target so all planes returned to base, aborting the mission.

Mission 236, April 6 Six B-24's loaded with fragmentation bombs attacked the flak emplacements at Verona, Italy. They dropped 14 tons of bombs with poor results. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate. All planes returned safely without casualties.

Mission 237, April 7 Six B-24's of the red force took off to bomb the flak emplacements at Bressanone, Italy. Weather prevented them from bombing the target, so the mission was aborted. All planes returned to base.

Mission 238, April 7 The blue force consisting of 28 B-24's loaded with three 2,000# RDX bombs took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Innsbruck, Austria. Twenty-six aircraft dropped 81 tons of bombs on the primary target by pathfinder method. Flak at the target was moderate and inaccurate. No enemy fighters were seen. All planes returned to base.

Mission 239, April 8 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the railroad bridge at Campo Di Trens, Italy. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate. Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 81 tons of 2,000# RDX bombs with fair results. One crewman was wounded and two aircraft were damaged severely. All planes returned.

Mission 240, April 9 Forty-two B-24's took off to bomb troop concentrations in northern Italy. Two aircraft returned prior to bombing. The planes were loaded with 8,272 fragmentation bombs. Bombing was done visually and good results were obtained. Flak was moderate to slight at the target and all planes returned safely.

Mission 241, April 10 The Group again went to northern Italy to bomb troop concentrations. The bomb load was the same, fragmentation bombs. This time they dropped 9,084 of them with good results. Moderate and accurate flak was encountered at the target. No fighters were seen and all planes returned to base.

Mission 242, April 11 The Group was briefed to bomb the railroad bridge at Ponte Gardena, Italy. Twenty-eight B-24's loaded with 1,000# RDX bombs took off at 0800 hours. Two aircraft returned prior to bombing and only seven aircraft could bomb the primary target. The rest of the aircraft selected an alternate target, the fuel depot at Goito, Italy. Moderate flak was encountered at the primary and one aircraft was seen leaving the formation, radioing that his controls were shot away and he would try to make it to Switzerland. Eleven crewmen were listed as missing in action. The rest of the planes returned to base safely.

Mission 243, April 12 The Group was briefed for another railroad bridge. This time it was at Nervessa, Italy. Twenty-eight B-24's loaded with 500# RDX bombs took off at 1000 hours. Six aircraft returned early, two because of engine trouble and four because of weather. The remaining aircraft dropped 210 bombs with very good results. From observations, the bridge

appeared to be knocked out. Moderate and accurate flak was encountered at the target. One aircraft was lost when its nose wheel collapsed on takeoff; six crewmen were killed. One crewman was severely injured by flak and three slightly injured.

Mission 244, April 15 Seven B-24's took off to bomb the Ghedi, Italy ammunition depot and 42 B-24's took off to bomb troop concentrations in northern Italy. Six aircraft of the blue force bombed the ammunition depot with 500# RDX bombs and 39 aircraft of the red force bombed the troop concentrations. No flak was encountered at Ghedi and only moderate flak at the other target. All planes returned to base.

Mission 245, April 16 The Group was briefed to strike at troop concentrations in northern Italy. Forty-three B-24's took off at 0900 hours loaded with 250# GP bombs but were unable to bomb because of weather conditions. All planes returned to base.

Mission 246, April 17 Forty-one B-24's took off to bomb troop concentrations in northern Italy. Again they were loaded with 250# GP bombs. The Group bombed visually and dropped over 85 tons of bombs on the primary target with very good results. Flak was slight and inaccurate at the target. All planes returned safely.

Mission 247, April 18 The Group went back to the same area to bomb troop and equipment concentrations. This time 41 B-24's dropped 96 tons of 500# RDX bombs with good results. All planes returned to base.

Mission 248, April 19 The Group attacked an alternate target with mixed results as only 30 aircraft dropped their bombs on the Bischofshofen, Austria marshalling yards. Weather prevented the remainder from dropping their bombs. Three Me-109's were observed but they did not attack and were driven off by P-51's. All planes returned to base.

Mission 249, April 20 Forty-three



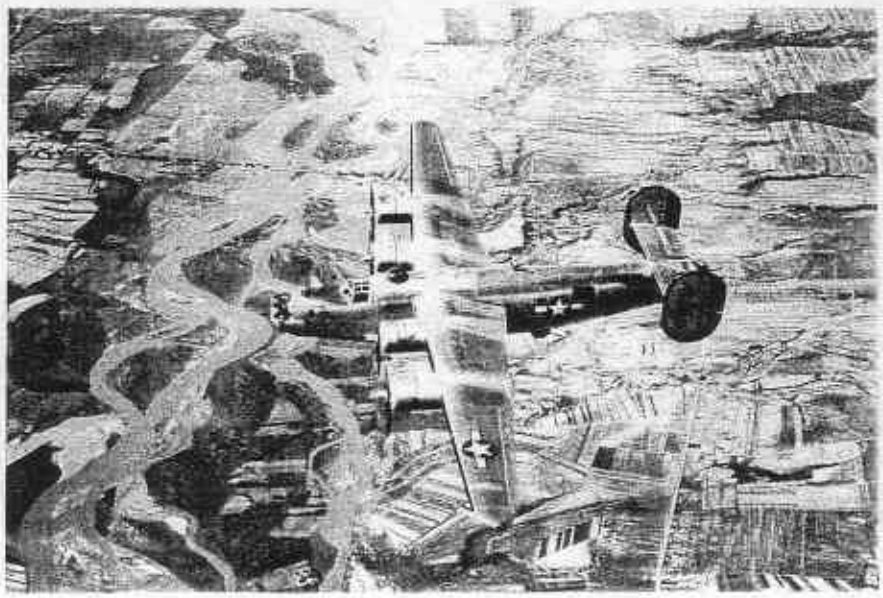
B-24's took off to bomb the Campodazzo, Italy railroad bridge. Five aircraft returned prior to bombing for various reasons. Thirty-three aircraft bombed the primary target with excellent results, dropping 1,000# RDX bombs on the target. Five aircraft dropped their bombs on the Campo Di Trans railroad bridge, an alternate, because the primary was obscured by smoke. Flak at the target was slight and inaccurate. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 250, April 23 Forty-two B-24's took off to bomb the road bridges at Padua, Italy. They dropped 93 tons of 500# RDX bombs with good results. No flak or enemy fighters were encountered in the area or en route. All planes returned to base.

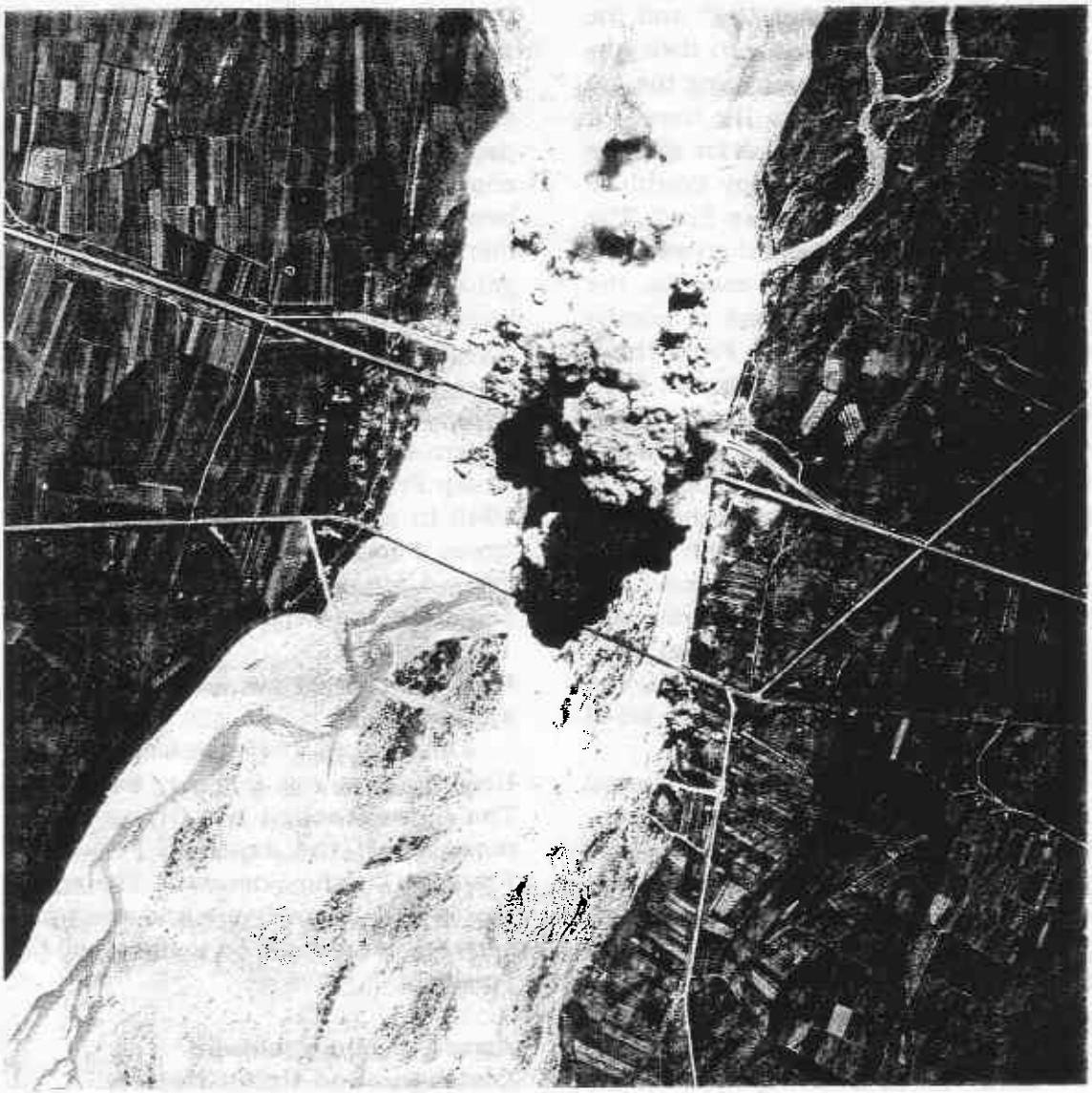
Mission 251, April 24 Forty-two B-24's took off to bomb the road bridges at Friola, Italy. Twenty-eight of the aircraft dropped 1,000# RDX bombs on the primary target with good results. Fourteen aircraft dropped their bombs on the alternate, Oseppe marshalling yards and ammunition dump, with good results. Flak at the target was slight and inaccurate. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 252, April 25 Twenty-eight B-24's took off to bomb the main station and marshalling yards at Linz, Austria. The group was escorted by P-51's. Two aircraft returned prior to bombing because of engine trouble and 26 aircraft dropped 62 tons of 500# RDX bombs on the primary target. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. It seemed that the enemy was bringing all their flak guns back to protect their priority targets as the flak was extremely intense over this area. One aircraft was hit in the bomb bay and ten crewmen were missing in action. Three other crewmen received flak wounds, one serious and two slight. Twenty-five planes returned to base at 1440 hours.

Mission 253, April 26 Although a mission was scheduled for this day, it never got off the ground as the air war was over while the Group waited for takeoff. April was over and so was the war in Europe. The results for April were 20 missions flown with a total of 653 aircraft over the target and 1,305 tons of bombs dropped. The group lost three aircraft, two to enemy action and one accident. The loss in personnel was six killed, 21 missing and eight wounded in action.



The War Has Ended



April 25th marked the last day the 15th Air Force flew high over enemy territory and the last day the bombs fell in full force. Everyone knew the war would soon be over and the air crews started "sweating out" the last few missions as they had made it this far and some suspicions and anxiety prevailed about getting shot down at this stage of combat. The remaining strategic targets were heavily defended with flak with Linz, our last target, being no exception. We lost one airplane and crew from flak on that mission and two men were severely wounded and one received slight wounds. Seven of our B-24's received severe flak damage and 11 were slightly damaged. The Group had flown 13 missions with no enemy opposition from flak or fighters before striking Linz.

These missions were flown in support of the ground forces in the Po Valley, Italy. Another mission again was scheduled against Linz for 26 April 1945 and the crews were already waiting in their aircraft with great concern, hoping the red flare would be fired from the tower for its cancellation. It was time for starting engines and shouts of joy could be heard as the red flare was fired. The war was over for the combat crews!

During these last few months, the Group dropped 2,851 tons of bombs from flying 1,434 sorties. From these operations, we lost eight aircraft from flak and 134 received flak damage. There were 74 crewmen missing in action, 20 wounded and 16 killed. In addition, we lost three B-24's to causes other than combat. The Group started with 60 aircraft at the beginning of this period and with the loss of 11 planes, the rate was 18%. Losses to causes other than combat plagued the Group throughout the war. Many of the crews listed as killed were from these accidents.

Much of the Group's efforts during April was giving direct and indirect support to our ground troops trying to push the Germans out of Italy, or to capture them. In doing this, we bombed just ahead of our troop lines and hit bridges and marshalling yards to stop all ground transportation. Air transport was no longer a factor.

Crude but effective ways were developed to mark the areas along the front lines for the bombers to hit the dug in enemy troops and make certain that we would not accidentally hit our own. This was accomplished by the use of low frequency radio beacons and white markers well placed along the lines. The bombing altitude was generally 15,000 feet. The radio beacon was placed at one end of our dug in troops. Supplementing this, the Army placed a series of white letters "T" 100 yards in length and 1,000 yards apart to mark where our troops were located. The bomber stream flew perpendicular to the line of troops from an IP and would not drop their bombs until the pilot got an indication on his cockpit radio compass that he had passed the radio beacon, i.e., his compass bearing to the beacon was 90° or more. The white markers were for the benefit of the navigators and bombardiers to insure the bombers were beyond them before dropping the bombs. Also, this was of great assistance in locating the dug in troops of the enemy for bombing. This system worked extremely well with the Group flying several missions in March 1945 in direct support of the ground forces. Shortly after this campaign, our ground forces were able to move out and defeat the Germans.

We Lost Our Commander and Chief

On 13 April 1945 the flag at Group Headquarters was flown at half mast. The news reached the Group in the morning of the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. There was sorrow felt by everyone and memorial services were held in memory of the President.

Award of the Second Distinguished Unit Citation

On 16 April 1945 the Group was awarded its second Distinguished Unit Citation for destroying the Moosbierbaum oil refineries at Vienna on 26 June 1944. The troops made a nice picture marching to the flight line and standing at attention in their Class A uniforms. General Twining failed to attend but sent a Brigadier General instead to make the official presentation. This, however, did not make the

award any less significant. It was indeed a happy and proud moment for everyone.

Our POW's Were Freed

Our POW's held by the Germans were freed! It was indeed a joyous occasion but many of them had been mistreated and all suffered from malnutrition. A good number had to remain in Allied hospitals to return to health before making the long trip back to the States and home. Many had to remain in veteran's hospitals for long periods of time after returning to the States.

Tom Ramey, himself a POW, gave this account: "We had 179 airman lost from burning planes, ditching in icy cold water, crash-landing on rugged mountain terrain, often times wounded, only to realize their fate on the ground – captured American prisoners of war. Each airman had a different story to tell but sooner or later it reverted to starvation diets, deprivation, abuse, humiliation, vermin-infested quarters, forced marches in sub-zero weather, considerable weight loss, inadequate or no medical attention, infamous German box car rides, and in many cases, torture.

"Prison camp life was one of cold drafty buildings, warning wires, guard towers, lengthy roll calls in bitter cold weather, search lights and guard dogs at night, boredom and loneliness. Escape was the binding thread that held out hope. Tunnels were dug, found by the Germans, filled in and then under the threat of death, new tunnels were dug again. From a handful of nothing but American ingenuity, POWs were able to fashion many articles to meet basic necessities of life. Humor was the thread that made life bearable and the waiting tolerable.

"The German prison camps were located throughout most of Germany, Poland and occupied Europe. Stalag indicated the enlisted POW camps: Stalag Luft, air force camps; and Oflag, officer camps. As the war drew to a close and the Russian and American troops pushed forward, camps were closed and prisoners were marched out and consolidated deeper into Germany.

"The sounds of war came closer and closer until one day when armored tank columns overran the camps and the American flag flew once again."

At the same time, our crews who were interned in Switzerland were turned over to our Embassy personnel who arranged for transportation for their return to the States.

There was little recognition given to our POWs for the acts of heroism and hardships endured. Stories later told about crew members risking their lives to save others during the heat of combat clearly indicate that awards should have been made following the end of the war. There were not only acts of heroism in the air but also acts of individuals making sacrifices so that others could evade capture. There were also acts during POW life by some that deserved recognition. Perhaps this in some small way will call attention to the forgotten crewmen who became POWs.

There Was Humor with Tragedy

There were several incidents which occurred that were tragic to those involved but to others and in retrospect, they were rather humorous. For example, we lost two waist gunners over the target when the bombardier said: "Let's get the hell out of here," as he released the bombs over a target with very heavy flak. The waist gunners hearing this over their airplane radio intercommunications mistook the comment as an order to bail out, so they did. The pilot and remainder of the crew returned to base safely. The

two gunners became POWs for the duration. Replacement gunners were given to the crew and they completed their tour.

Another incident occurred when the bombardier and navigator mistakenly bailed out over the target after bombs away. Their airplane received a hit in the nose section from flak, destroying the radio intercommunications. The navigator, being concerned as to the status of the B-24, looked back at the pilot from the navigator's plastic dome. The pilot gave him an OK sign by making a circle with his thumb and finger. The navigator saw only his thumb and thought the sign meant to bail out, so he and the bombardier did. The rest of the crew returned to Italy, badly shot up and bailed out over friendly territory. The navigator and bombardier became POWs.

Many will always remember about one of the pilots who suffered from the "GI's" and never made it back to the base before using up the space inside his electrically heated blue flying suit as a substitute for the latrine. Many saw him on a very cold day in March standing ankle deep in a water puddle next to his hard stand trying to clean himself and his flying suit. He completed the combat mission but was in dire straits the whole time. Many thought he should have been given some kind of medal or award but no one could think of an appropriate one for him.

VE-Day

The official announcement of the end of the war in Europe on 8 May 1945 did not cause much surprise in the Group since it had been expected for days. Also, it was an anti-climax to another war still going on, that against the Japanese in the Far East. It was a hot, sunny day and the men were routed out of their "sacks" in the morning and marched down to the parade ground near the runway for a thankful prayer by the chaplain. The Group C.O., Col. Snowden, gave everybody the day off to celebrate except the guards. Very little celebrating was done. Most of the men just took it easy, getting a suntan and listening to their radios with all the notables from President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill down to the commanding officers of all the bomb wings and service groups in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations giving glowing accounts of what the men over in Italy had accomplished toward achieving victory! Somehow, the accolades sounded hollow, like praise often does. It was a poor replacement for the thoughts of those who had made the supreme sacrifice with their lives.

Packing and Going Home

Rumors were rampant. Some implied that the Group would be sent to the Far East to help defeat the Japanese. This would have been a major undertaking to move ground equipment, personnel and airplanes. Other rumors were that just individuals would go to fill the critical needs of our forces in the Far East. None of this happened.

The Group was assigned the task to fly a few support missions, carrying mostly foods to areas in dire need. For example, Erling Kindem of the 742nd Squadron entered in his war diary that his crew carried a cargo of wheat to Udine, Italy. Supplies and food products were also carried to Aviano and other places in Italy. The pilots and airplanes were also used to carry personnel to ports and airfields for processing and shipment home. Many of the airplanes were being made ready for the long flight back to the States. In the meantime, several of the crews went on sightseeing trips in their B-24's over many of the areas they had bombed. There were raves about the sights from the air, especially Rome, Pisa and the Alps. There were accounts of trips

lasting more than eight hours. The weather was good and they generally flew at 3,000 feet altitude to enjoy the sights over Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Germany and Italy.

Foremost in the minds of all the men was the prospect of going home. This hinged, of course, on the progress of the war with Japan. In June 1945, the war with them was progressing well. Daring naval and air raids upon the Japanese homeland were a display of Allied strength and Japanese weakness. Military leaders were pushing for the redeployment of troops from Europe in order to mass the needed strength for the invasion of the Japanese homeland. After all low point men (those with the fewest missions and smallest length of time overseas) left Italy for possible shipment to the Far East, the movement of the remaining Air Corps personnel would be accomplished.

During June 1945, the crews with their airplanes headed home. They generally flew the same routes as they did when flying to Italy. Some flew to South America, then to the States. Others traveled through the Azores Islands to Newfoundland and then to the States. There was no shortage of food and items to buy in the Azores. The men enjoyed the juke box music, malted milks, movies, well-stocked PX where they bought Swiss watches, cigarette lighters, Portuguese silk stockings and perfume. It is said the men did not sleep during their stop-over at the Azores.

During the latter part of June, the entire 740th Squadron was moved to the airfield at Bari, Italy, the location of the 15th Air Force Headquarters. There they assumed the duties of servicing the aircraft used by the headquarters. No details were made known about the length of service in that capacity.

So passed the month of June for the Group, it was a month of continual change with personnel from all branches of the Air Corps being shipped in and out. But out of the confusion, one thing was certain. The men were slowly being siphoned out of the Theatre of Operations and arrangements were being made for the movement of all but Occupational Forces to remain behind and start the rehabilitation of the countries which suffered the ravages of war.

Highlighting the month of July was the movement of many of the Group's ground personnel into other groups in the 304th Wing for shipment to the United States. Accompanying this movement, the task of readying the Group area for eventual return to the Italian owners had begun. This meant taking down all tents, stacking lumber, metal and equipment and turning it in to the higher echelons of supply. Groups from the Occupational Air Corps were "eyeing" the stockpiles of building material for their own use and arrangements were made to make this valuable lumber and tuffa blocks available to them.

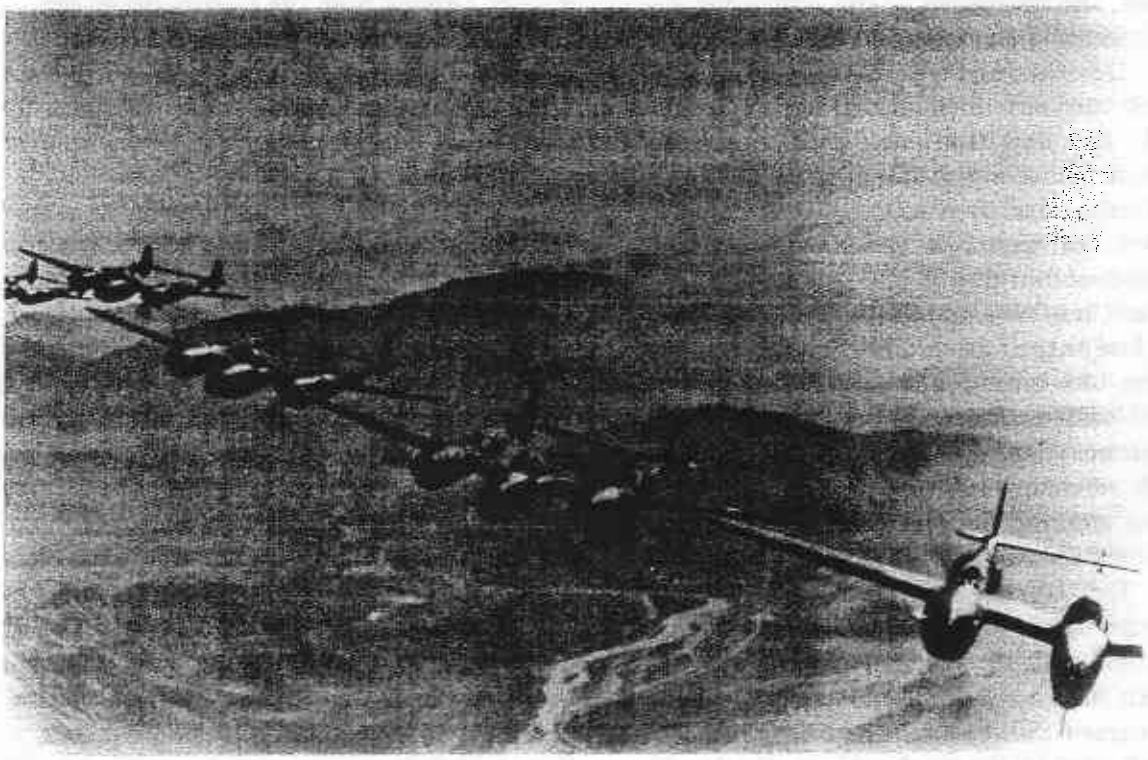
The Group started serving as a small replacement depot for extra crews from other groups, and the 742nd Squadron had more than 1,500 of assorted crew members who were "sweating out" orders to go home. With a skeleton staff of ground officers, an attempt was made to straighten out service records and prepare these men for processing.

Many rumors floated about, but no definite word was given by higher headquarters about the final disposition of the flight personnel. By the last week of July, notice was received to have the entire body of the crewmen ready for shipment by truck to Naples. During a hectic 24-hour period, the processing was completed and at 0400 in the morning, the truck convoy left San Giovanni airfield with the last of the air echelon that remained in the Group.

Priority telegrams had recalled most of the men who were scattered about Europe at the various rest camps. Those who drifted back late were given a hurried processing and flown to Naples to join the main body for shipment to the United States.

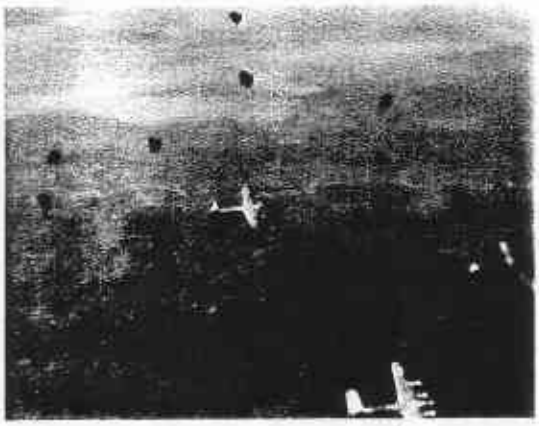
Left in the Group were less than 300 officers and enlisted men, excluding those in the 740th Squadron at Bari. The clean-up was continuing with gangs of Italian laborers working in the areas tearing down tents and bundling them for shipment to Bari – sorting lumber and metal into stockpiles, and building shipping boxes for the equipment that remained. The necessity of guarding the areas from the Italians who were growing more bold in their thievery was proven when more than 15 of them were chased from the 742nd Detachment area in one night.

Preparing the area for return to the Italian owners and the processing and shipment of personnel continued through the month of August and on 9 September 1945, the 455th Bombardment Group (H) was deactivated!



Little friends! P-38 fighters in flight.

Summary of Operations



From the activation date of 1 June 1943 to 26 September 1944 the Commanding Officer of the group was Colonel Kenneth A. Cool. He was replaced in September by Colonel William L. Snowden who served in that position until May 1945 when he was assigned as 304th Wing Commander. Lieutenant Colonel William R. Boutz then became the Commanding Officer of the 455th Bomb Group.

The Group flew its last mission on 25 April 1945. During the 15 months of combat operations, the group had flown enough miles on combat missions to circle the earth over ten times with a 30 ship formation. During that time, the group flew 252 combat missions and dropped over 13,000 tons of bombs on enemy targets while logging 7,400 sorties. In all this activity, the Group lost 118 aircraft from stiff enemy opposition. Of this number, 31 were lost to enemy fighters in the first seven months of operations when the enemy fighters were out in force. Thirty-six of our bombers were lost to flak during the 15 months and 51 were lost from other causes. Our personnel combat losses were 147 killed in action, 268 missing, 179 taken prisoners and 169 wounded from enemy action. The overall casualty rate was 22.6% broken down as follows: 12.3% MIA/KIA, 5.3% POW and 5.0% wounded in action. A total of 1,200 crewmen completed their tours and returned home. During its existence, the group had over 4,000 assigned personnel. This was an enviable record for 15 months of combat operations.

The types of targets that the group attacked was determined by the day-to-day requirements of the overall conduct of the war. The first combat experience was gained through three support missions of the armies fighting their way up the Italian mainland. After that, the group began as a full scale operational unit. Strategic bombing of the aircraft factories, the ball bearing plants, harbors and oil refineries was the all-out effort. The following shows the tonnage dropped on the types of targets:

Tonnage by Type of Target

Communications	6,239.22
Oil refineries and storage	2,704.22
Air fields	2,092.89
Troop concentrations	974.19
Harbors and shipping	1,034.50
Gun positions	203.54
Total	13,248.56

These targets were located in many different parts of Europe within range of our bombers as shown on the accompanying map. Communications included marshalling yards, bridges, rolling stock and like targets.

Victories Over Enemy Aircraft

During the period February 1944 through July 1944, when the group met practically all of the enemy fighter opposition, our formations destroyed 119 enemy planes in the air, or an average of 20 per month. During this same period, our formations were attacked by over 780 enemy fighters. Thirty-one of our planes were shot down or damaged beyond repair as a result of fighter attacks. This means that we destroyed 3.84 fighters for every bomber we lost. In addition, the group got credit for 78 enemy planes probably destroyed. Victories by gun position chart below.

Gains and Losses of Crew Personnel

The Group arrived in Italy with a total of 699 officers and enlisted men comprising 70 combat crews. An additional 26 rated staff officers were assigned later to the group. This did not include replacement crews which joined the group later.

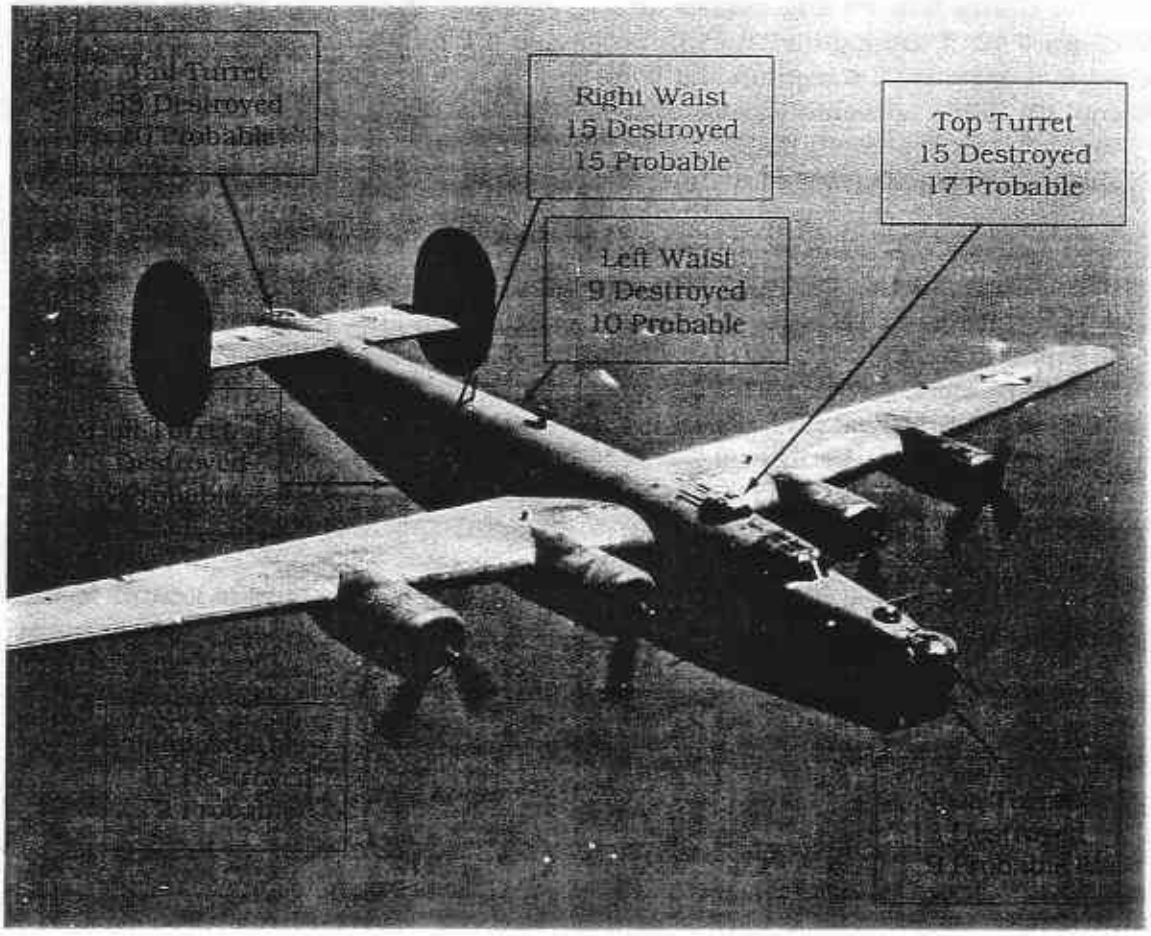
During 15 months of operations, from February 1944 through April 1945, approximately 74,540 personnel sorties were flown with a rate of 5.5 men per 1,000 personnel sorties killed in action or still missing in action shortly after war's end.

The gains and losses of personnel who were regular members of crews were as follows:

Gains

New assignments	2,478
Regained from injuries	112
Returned from MIA	85
Total gains	2,675
Plus original crews	699
Total	3,374

VICTORIES BY GUN POSITIONS



Losses

Killed in action	147
Missing in action	268
Prisoners of war	179
Injuries	169
Completed tour of duty	1,200
Other*	460
Total	2,423
Plus operational personnel on duty 1 May 1945	951
Total personnel	3,374

*Other includes personnel lost to reclassification, medical disposition board, flight evaluation board, transfers and personnel sent directly to the United States after returning from missing in action.

Gains and Losses of Aircraft

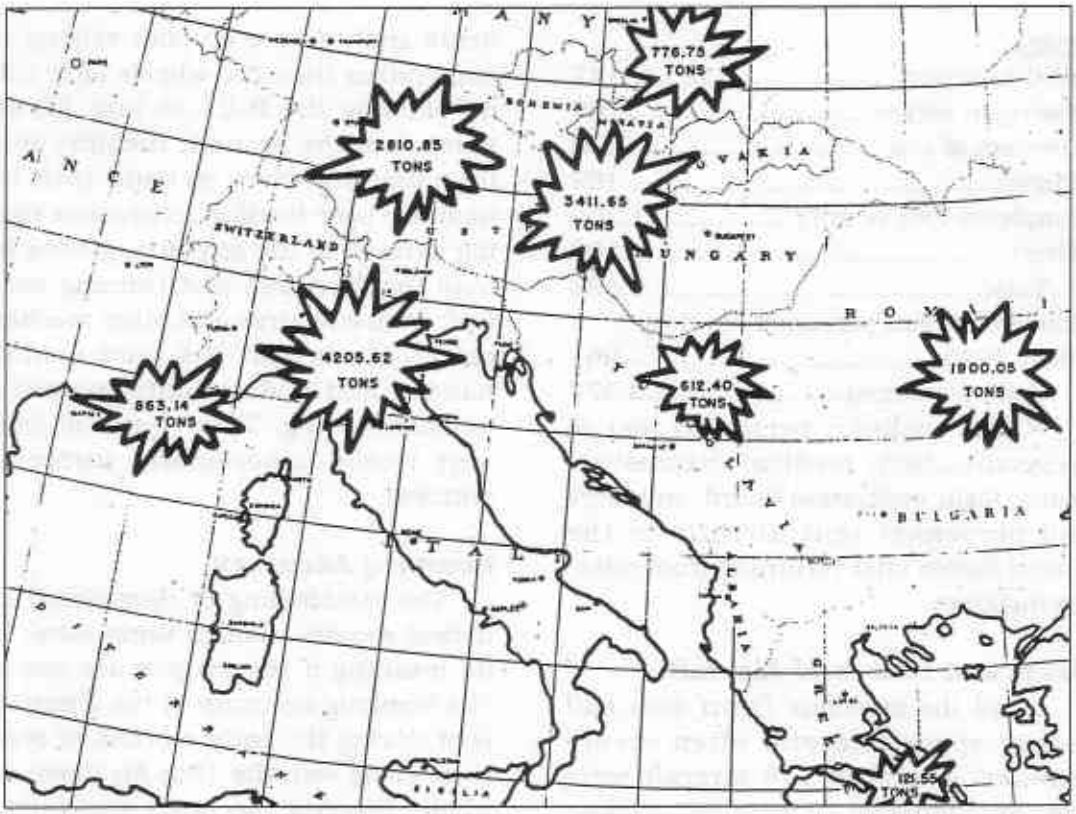
In all the missions flown with stiff enemy opposition and often severe weather, a total of 118 aircraft were lost. An additional 12 were lost to non-operational causes. The gains and losses of aircraft for 1944 and 1945 are listed below. The 51 shown under Combat, Other were losses during combat operations but not directly related to enemy actions. These included accidents such as the co-pilot raising the flaps rather than the wheels after take-off causing the B-24 to lose lift and mush into the ground; inability to fly instruments when getting into bad weather; poor landing techniques causing damage to the airplane; getting lost from the formation and running out of fuel; engine failures and other mechanical problems that the crew couldn't handle; and midair collisions during formation flying. These types of losses were totally unacceptable under any criterion.

Bombing Accuracy

The establishing of operational statistical records, though impressive, has no meaning if the targets are not hit. The bombing accuracy of the group was poor during the early months of operations along with the 15th Air Force as a whole. However, accuracy improved as the group gained experience and compared favorably with the average for the 15th Air Force as shown on the chart, Bombing Accuracy – Visual Attacks.

Aircraft

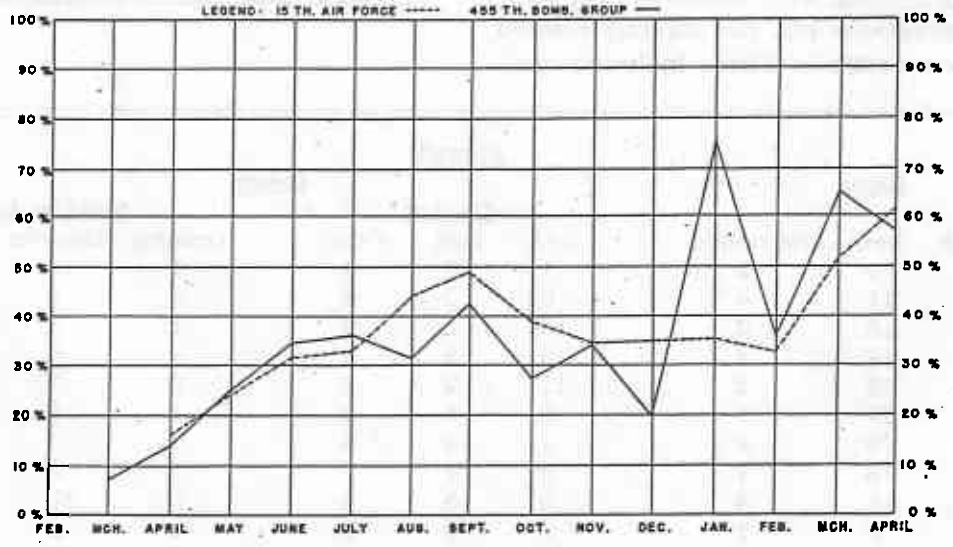
	Gains		Losses					
			Combat			Non-Combat		
Month	New	Recondt'd.	E/A	Flak	Other	Training	Transfer	Other
Feb	0	2	1	0	1	1	10	0
Mar	11	4	0	0	2	0	5	0
Apr	18	2	10	2	2	1	4	0
May	17	4	3	5	1	1	4	0
Jun	12	2	11	2	3	0	7	0
Jul	17	7	5	4	9	1	3	1
Aug	18	4	1	4	4	1	7	0
Sep	16	1	0	1	7	0	8	0
Oct	15	4	0	3	4	0	10	0
Nov	6	7	0	2	2	1	2	0
Dec	5	3	0	4	11	0	13	0
Jan	5	4	0	1	1	0	2	0
Feb	7	4	0	5	1	0	2	0
Mar	8	4	0	1	2	3	6	0
Apr	2	6	0	2	1	2	4	0
Total	157	58	31	36	51	11	87	1



BOMBING ACCURACY – VISUAL ATTACKS

PERCENT WITHIN 1000' OF BRIEFED M.P.I.

FEBRUARY 1944 THROUGH APRIL 1945



MONTH	FEB.	MCH.	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MCH.	APRIL
15th.A.F. AV	N.A.	N.A.	16.3 %	23.4 %	31.7 %	33.1 %	43.8 %	48.9 %	38.9 %	34.0%	34.2 %	35.1 %	33.4 %	51.6 %	61.4 %
455 B.G. AV	N.A.	* 6.9 %	14.4 %	24.2 %	34.1 %	36.5 %	31.4 %	42.9 %	27.4 %	33.9 %	19.9 %	78.3 %	35.5 %	64.5 %	56.8 %

* LESS THAN 5 MISSIONS

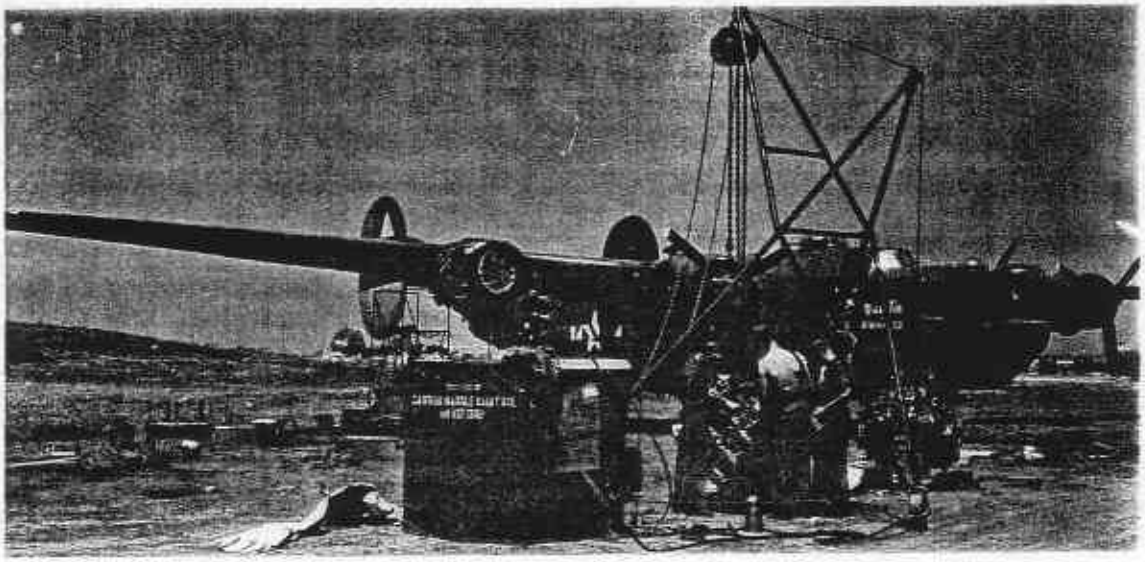
SOURCE: 1ST. OPNS. ANALYSIS SECTION, 15 TH. AIR FORCE

Home is With the Squadrons

The squadrons became close-knit organizations and there were many friends made by the officers and enlisted men. The squadron organizations accomplished the work to house and feed the people who flew and maintained the airplanes and were also a part of the squadrons. There was little person-to-person interface with Group Headquarters and other squadrons except at the command levels. The squadrons became self-sufficient and small villages of activity prevailed. They were located approximately a mile apart from each other and Group Headquarters when in Italy.

The character of the squadrons started developing at Langley AAB. By and large, all personnel were inducted into the AAC a few months prior to arriving at Langley. Most had some formalized training in their specialty but few had experience. Those with the most experience and service were placed in charge of activities and had the responsibility to train others. All pilots, navigators and bombardiers had completed flying schools but not much else. The pilots, however, had attended B-24 schools and could take off and land the airplane but were not well equipped to handle a flying emergency should one occur. However, with the long flight overseas and a little combat seasoning, we were able to handle many combat emergencies. Our aerial gunners were well trained in the operation of their guns and turrets but there was not time for much air-to-air gunnery before becoming a part of a combat crew. The airplane mechanics also had formalized training in aircraft maintenance but not specifically on the B-24. Some officers and enlisted men attended B-24 maintenance courses sponsored by the manufacturers. These men usually became our crewchiefs and trained others. Many of our fine officers and enlisted men had civilian experience which became most useful in the administration, supply and maintenance support of the flying activities. Our flight surgeons were most qualified as they were all trained and practicing physicians before joining our Group.

Many of the personnel were away from home for the first time and it was completely foreign to most to be living overseas and facing combat. Nevertheless, the squadron functions and personnel came together overseas and were soon flying combat missions as a group.



455th Group Headquarters



When the group was formed in Clovis, New Mexico in June 1943, the first personnel selected were to fill the positions in Group Headquarters. The first morning report carried 18 people: 10 officers and eight enlisted men. By the time the Group departed for Langley, this number had grown to 51. The final complement numbered about 80 throughout the remainder of the war.

Colonel Kenneth A. Cool was the first Group Commander and remained in that position until September 1944, when he was promoted to the 304th Wing and relinquished command to Colonel William Snowden. Many other changes occurred during the combat months. Some of these were made to strengthen the Group and Squadrons, but some were made to make up for combat losses. In July 1944, Colonel Graff was appointed Deputy Group Commander; Colonel Harp was transferred to the 740th as Squadron Commander, replacing Colonel Keefer who became Group Operations Officer. In August 1944, Colonel Graff was shot down and was replaced by Colonel Snowden. In September, when Colonel Snowden became Group Commander, Colonel Robnett became Deputy Group Commander. Also in September, Colonel Lanford, Commanding Officer of the 741st Squadron, completed his tour and was replaced by Major Reeder who was the assistant Group Operations Officer.

The Group had the S-1, S-2, S-3 and S-4 functions of administration, intelligence, operations and engineering. They provided guidance and coordination for the squadron activities in these functional areas.

Staff Assignments

Staff assignments were: Col. Philip John was the Group Executive Officer and in charge of all administrative activities of the Group, Major David Harp was the first Deputy Commander and second in command to Col. Cool, Major Alvin Coons was the Group Intelligence Officer, Major Hugh Graff was the Group Operations Officer and Major Philip Crowel was the Group Engineering Officer. In addition, Captain Jack Horner was the Group Bombardier and Captain James Moeller the Group Navigator. Major Frank V. Thompson was the Group Flight Surgeon and Captain Walter P. Frankel the Group Dentist. Captain Frankel had

the additional duty of being the dentist for the entire Group of over 2,300 men.

Major Carroll Olson was the Group Adjutant and responsible for all the paper work of the Group. The Headquarters had 27 officers and approximately 56 enlisted men. In addition to this, they had attached organizations such as the 558th Service Squadron to assist principally in aircraft maintenance.

Captain Pedro E. Guerrero was the Group Photo Officer, Captain Edwin Harris was an assistant to Major Coons in the S-2 section as was Captain Clarence Wilson. Captain David W. Wolf was the Group Meteorologist and appropriately was nicknamed "Stormy" by Col. Cool. Captain Francis T. Bradley was the Group Communications Officer and George Trbovich was the Group Armament Officer. Major Jack Reeder and Captain Howard Miller were assistant Group Operations Officers. Lieutenants Hatch and Farrier were the Group Statisticians. Most of the statistics compiled in this history resulted from their work while in Italy. Last but not least, Captain Mark A. Smith was our fine Group Chaplain.

The Group was well represented by many "old hands" in the non-commissioned officers field of four Master Sergeants: John J. Corrigan was Major Coons' right-hand man, Ralph E. Demick was Major Crowel's, Robert S. Linnell was the man who ran Operations and Arthur J. Smallwood was the Group First Sergeant. This was a fine array of talent that kept the Group running with the able assistance of Technical Sergeants Brigman, Buchanan, Janettas, Kelly, Muller, Neubarth and Smith. This with the complement of ten staff sergeants and 12 sergeants made up the core of the Group which made it tick.

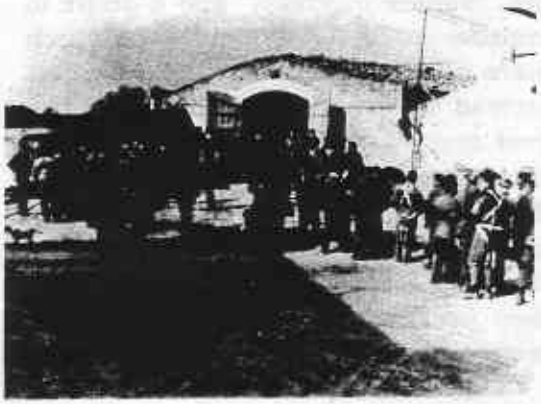
Going Overseas

In December 1943, most of the Group personnel departed for Italy by boat. A few that were on flying status and others that were essential to the smooth operation of the flight echelon, i.e., flight surgeons and maintenance crews, went with the flight crews. The training of the Headquarters Squadron was much the same as the other squadrons, however, most of the personnel were well trained in the positions they held before being assigned to the Group.

At San Giovanni, the Group set up offices in an old castle. Some of the Group officers had their living quarters there. The rest of the Group staff used the various out-buildings that surrounded the castle for living quarters. Captain Frankel set up his dental clinic



The Pit, where briefings were held.



Waiting their turn – after mission briefings.

in the castle and operated the drilling equipment by "foot power" until more modern equipment arrived. The group dental office was finally set up in the Group first aid station. It was completely furnished and had electricity to run the drilling equipment. A group of outbuildings around the castle were taken over by S-2, S-3 and S-4 for their offices. A large building adjacent to them was converted to a mess hall for the headquarters personnel. Rooms in the medieval castle were converted to offices. One large room was used as a war room. It had a map on the wall showing the areas that could be reached by the B-24's. In back of the castle was an old stable that had accumulated a huge amount of manure, perhaps over centuries. This was removed with great effort on the part of the enlisted men and some of the native help. The stable was converted into the Group briefing room and was affectionately known as "The Pit." When it first came into use, it was used for the local cinema for all Group and Squadron personnel to see the latest movies. It had left-over fleas from farm animals and finally had to be sprayed to keep them under control.

Living Overseas

During the stay in Italy, many changes took place in the Group facilities. "Yankee ingenuity" and a desire to improve made living conditions much more comfortable than when we first arrived in San Giovanni. During the first month, there was one fire after another from the home-made stoves as the men began to find the best heating arrangements. During that period of trial and error, many of the men lost their possessions when a new heating device was tried for the first time.

One of the good things associated with being a member of the headquarters staff was that one could visit all the squadrons for various reasons and sample the cooking. It added a little variety to the routine.

The headquarters served as a hub for most Group activities. The movies were held in the Pit and most traveling shows were also held there. As time went on, the facilities became more modernized with little resemblance to those we had when we first arrived in January 1944, with the most significant improvement in the mess hall.

Training Never Stopped

Major improvements were made with training aids. For example, a link trainer for practice instrument flying was added as well as gunnery turrets set up on the ground to train gunners. Radar shops and photo laboratories were added. A medical infirmary was built and equipped to provide better health care for those needing attention. The Group began to resemble a small town with about 2,500 inhabitants.

Radar Section

A fine radar section was attached to Group Headquarters for providing all the maintenance of the radar equipment installed in the "Pathfinder" aircraft. The section also provided the radar operators called "Mickey" who flew in the Pathfinder airplanes each time radar bombing was scheduled over targets covered by clouds and/or smoke. These Mickey operators flew with the pathfinder trained crews of the Squadron and Group Headquarters leading the mission that day. The radar section made a major contribution for the Group's success in bombing the smoke-covered oil refinery and storage targets at Ploesti and other major targets in Germany and Austria

when they were obscured by smoke and clouds.

Leisure Time Was Well Spent

Much of the time overseas was spent in either writing letters or reading the ones from home. One of the most thankless jobs that an officer had was performing as a censor for the letters sent home. It was the officer's duty to see that no classified information was sent home (not that anyone knew much in the way of classified information). This provided many comical moments for some of those reading the letters. It wasn't that the personnel lied about their experiences, but many had fantastic imaginations. One man did his own censoring by cutting out so-called censorable words, making it look as though he had been through some tough battles and all the while he was a clerk in an office, a very inventive one at that. One "Romeo" even ran off the same letter to four different girls. One thing it did do was keep him in reading material with the answers received.

The Group public relations department published an early paper called "Bombblast" edited by Hayden Carruth and Joseph Kirby. It, along with anything printed, was read for news items. Sgt. Godfrey won the contest for naming the paper and was awarded a quart of Kentucky bourbon whiskey which he no doubt shared with his friends! The paper was later named the "Journal."

The "Stars and Stripes" was the best source of news and it was read by almost every man in the group. Pin-ups were everywhere: pictures of Rita or Betty were taken from the Stars and Stripes, they were not limited to the noses of our airplanes. Pick-up baseball games were the rule as weather began to get better and that lasted until the snow flew. Movies were about the only evening entertainment. They changed about once or twice a week, and then they were played by some of the lesser stars. When Rome was recaptured in May 1944, it became the place to go. None were disappointed in a visit there. Later, as the war progressed, the hot spots were the Lido in Italy, the French Riviera, and Cairo in Egypt. The trip to Cairo required some approval from higher up but many of the personnel visited there anyway.

Christmas Away from Home

The first Christmas in Italy came about one year after the group departed the States. This was the second Christmas away from family and friends for most. In typical American fashion, they organized fantastic Christmas programs for Italian children near the base. It was one that they would not soon forget, nor would the men who organized them. With the coming of the New Year and the continuation of the war, the Group settled in for the long run. Though they felt the war would soon be over, the enemy flak batteries didn't seem to agree as the missions continued.

Flak Continued to Take Its Toll

One of the most dramatic stories of the group was related on 18 November 1944 by Lt. Wade's crew of the 741st Squadron upon their return from Recarati, Italy where their plane had been forced down the previous day from bombing the marshalling yards and factories at Maribor, Yugoslavia. Over the target Lt. Wade, pilot, was severely wounded in the chest. Lt. Dolinsky, co-pilot, had his left leg shattered by flak and Flight Officer Hicks was also wounded in the leg. Both pilots were incapacitated. The plane was badly damaged in the rudder and ailerons

and the control cables and hydraulic system were shot out. Without any previous flight experience, Flight Officer Hicks took over the controls, flying the ship on automatic pilot until the engineer, T/Sgt. Schneider, spliced the control cables so the plane could be operated manually. Flight Officer Hicks attempted to land the B-24 at Recarati, Italy after crossing the Adriatic Sea to Italy and only after some last minute help from the badly wounded pilot, Lt. Wade, were the men able to save the plane and crew to fly again.

Another experience was Lt. Col. E.V. Robnett, Deputy Group Commander, who had his second very narrow escape from death when his plane was severely damaged over Augsburg, Germany on 27 February 1945 by flak. The flak explosion severely wounded the pilot and temporarily stunned Colonel Robnett who was flying as Command Pilot. The Colonel succeeded in bringing the badly damaged plane back to Falconera, Italy where a crash-landing was made. The airplane was demolished but the crew escaped with no further injuries.

The War Was Ending

The group was well prepared for the first full winter and did not suffer the rigors of cold weather, snow and rain that the personnel endured in January and February 1944. It was becoming clear that the gains made against the enemy would bring the war to an early end. Plans were already under way to fit the Group into post-war duties.

When air combat ended in April 1945, the mission of the Group changed. Many of the Group planes were used to haul supplies to northern Italy. The Group began to make plans to evacuate the base. One squadron moved to Bari for aircraft maintenance and administrative support to the 15th Air Force in moving personnel out of the European Theater. The remaining squadrons helped transfer planes and men back to the States. The Group remained in Italy until 9 September 1945 when it was deactivated. The 455th would be reactivated in March 1947 as the 455th Bomb Group (Very Heavy) and it was deactivated again in June 1949. So ended the history of the 455th Group Headquarters.





Group intelligence section. Front row, l to r: Smith, Harris, Coons, Wilson, Corrigan; back row, l to r: Hutchinson, Thompson, Koechel, Oliker, Keen.



Group operations section. Front row, l to r: Linnell, Godfrey, Fapiano, Costa, Brigman; back row, l to r: Adcock, Granzoni, McKelvey, Keilor.



Group administration. Front row, l to r: Rock, Villamez, Rubin, Neubarth, Latham, Guerra, Sharpee; back row, l to r: Post, McKenzie, Connors, Snow, McKelvey, Curley, Rochow, Gyurics, Ziegler.



Maggie's Doughnut Shop – Red Cross after mission coffee and doughnuts.



455th radar personnel. Back row, l to r: Francis J. Zegel, Ernest Olsen, UK, Robert F. Vest, five UK, James M. Dortch, Henry W. Apple, Lt. Col. Jabe Baily; middle row, l to r: Lt. Alfred Moldevan, UK, John R. Mattson, three UK, Willie E. Berry, Maxwell D. Cramer, Meyers, Shea, Adren R. Irvin: front row, l to r: UK, Skelton, five UK, Robert L. Frizsell, Alden P. Stickney, Snider. Ferdinand Verselette and Edwin W. Staples were unable to be present for the picture.



L to r: Col. Graff, group operations officer; Lt. Col. Phil John, group executive officer.



Capt. Frankel, group dentist, grinds away.



David "Stormy" Wolf, group weather.



L to r: George Meadows, group public relations; Carroll Olson, group adjutant.



L to r: James Mueller, group navigator; Jack Horner, group bombardier.



Group headquarters. L to r: Jack Reeder, Phil Crowell, Jim Ferrieri.