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HEADQUARTERS
416TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (L)
Office of the Commanding Officer

Exh #1-Oct 1944

APO 140, U.S. Army
2 November 1944

SUBJECT: Conversion of 416th Bombardment Group (L) From A-20 Type Aircraft to A-26 Type Aircraft.

TO : Commanding General, 97th Combat Bombardment Wing (L),
APO 140, U. S. Army.

1. At approximately noon, 30 September 1944, this Group was notified that it was to be converted to an A-26 Group in the near future. That evening, at approximately 1800, sixteen A-26 airplanes, plus crews, arrived at Station A-55. During the next few days five more aircraft were destined to arrive. Although the newly arrived crews were not certain of their mission or status, plans were immediately laid for rapid conversion of the Group.

2. Because the Group was to remain fully operational, it was decided to divide the training load equally among the four Squadrons. One six-crew flight from each Squadron was taken off operations, and these flights were assigned to the A-26 Training Unit for conversion. In addition to the combat crews thus assigned, one-fourth of the engineering personnel from each Squadron were assigned to the A-26's for training. This meant the Group was to conduct a full time combat operations course while at three-fourths strength, conduct an A-20 indoctrination course for newly arrived replacement crews, and, in addition, conduct an operational training unit for rapid training of an A-26 Combat Group.

3. On 1 October 1944 a minimum standard of training was set up as follows:

- a. 4 hours cockpit familiarization.
- b. Complete Questionnaire.
- c. 5 hours transition, including a one-hour orientation ride.
- d. 5 hours of 3-plane formation.
- e. 2½ hours of 6-plane formation, including join-up and landing procedures.
- f. 2½ hours of 18-plane formation, to include evasive action, turns, and cross-overs.

4. In reference to (b) above, a Questionnaire was drawn up which included starting and operation of engines, airplane operation, propellers, superchargers, fuel systems, engine oil and dilution systems, and the air-speed system. All pilots were required to complete this Questionnaire, plus a blindfold cockpit check before they were allowed to solo the aircraft.

5. Expected A-26 Mobile Training Units had not yet arrived. Consequently, improvised lectures by A-26 personnel were given concerning the fuel system, flight characteristics, and emergency procedures.

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6. Thus, during the first day, in which training crews received familiarization lectures and cockpit time, the training program was organized. The next day, 2 October 1944, actual flight training was inaugurated with preliminary orientation rides. Good weather favored flying, and all pilots were ready to begin the next day with solo and transition flying. However, the dawn of the next day revealed a nemesis which was destined to plague us during the entire period of conversion--bad weather. Consequently, a total of only eight hours of flying time was logged. The next day, 4 October 1944, all of the transition pilots soloed in spite of poor weather conditions.

7. During all flying training, the extremely poor condition of the field and taxi strips was a constant handicap. The weather conditions were forcing us behind our training schedule. The location of the A-26 aircraft, which were dispersed on the grass at the south end of the field because no hardstands were available, magnified the difficulties in crew availability. The shortage of transportation made it extremely difficult to assemble the various ground crews, air crews, and equipment at the proper times. Consequently, it was decided that, when the first cadre of trainees had completed training, one entire Squadron would be taken off operations. This would necessarily increase the operational load on the other three squadrons, but would place all personnel and equipment of that squadron available for concentrated A-26 training.

8. During several days when the weather prohibited flying, Squadron C personnel were given familiarization lectures, questionnaires, and cockpit time. Therefore, when a short spell of favorable weather allowed the completion of training for the first cadre, Squadron C was ready to start flying training immediately. Things went smoothly until 15 October 1944. At first light on this day our eager crews had all available aircraft airbornes. Misleading weather information had assured us of favorable conditions. However, our old nemesis, weather, soon closed in so quickly that only one aircraft was able to get back into the field. Two days elapsed before our aircraft were able to return. One had crashed and one had crash-landed because of weather.

9. Squadron C completed training on 18 October 1944. Squadron D, having previously completed preliminary lectures, questionnaires, and cockpit study, commenced training on this date. Bad weather limited flying for the period 20-25 October 1944 and totaled 22 hours; it was not until 29 October 1944 that D Squadron was able to complete its training.

10. Squadron B started training on 30 October 1944, and, at the time of this writing, is in the process of conversion.

11. Next let us consider the ground phase of the training program. During the entire period of conversion, ground crew personnel of the units undergoing training were assigned to A-26 aircraft for practical training and actual maintenance.

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12. The first A-26 Mobile Training Unit arrived on this base the night of 5 October 1944, and commenced functioning as a training unit the morning of 7 October 1944. Two Squadrons were assigned to this unit for training. The next two M. T. U's to arrive were each assigned to a Squadron, and the fourth Unit was assigned to the Service team. Thus, although only one Squadron at a time was conducting flying training, all personnel concerned with the conversion were undergoing ground training. This ground training, of course, was necessarily coordinated with air training and operational missions.

13. The following schedule was set up as a minimum required amount of instruction for various personnel by the Mobile Training Unit:

	Pilots	B/N	Gunners	Mech.	Arm.	Inst.	Elec.	Turret Specialists
Bombing and Armament	1	3	1	1	3			
Turret GSFC	2	1	3	1			4	12
Electrical	2	1	1	3				
Fuel System	1	1	2	2				
Instruments	1	1	1	1		3		
Flights and Flaps	1	1	1	1				
Hydraulics	2	1	1	4				
Power Plant	1	1	2					
TOTALS	11	10	10	15	3	3	4	12

At the completion of this training, specialist, repair, and trouble shooting courses were held at an A-26 airplane with groups from the various sections and an instructor from the M.T.U.

14. In addition to their course with the M.T.U., the gunners received practical turret training in the aircraft, and were required to fire one hundred rounds of ammunition in the turret trainer. For purposes of a turret trainer, one A-26 airplane, which was out for maintenance, with auxiliary power, was used as a trainer. Near-to-ground or air-to-air gunnery facilities were available.

15. Because the radio equipment in the same as that in A-20 aircraft, Communications personnel spent time in study of the wiring system of the A-26.

16. All Armament personnel were given a minimum of six hours practical work in loading different types of bombs in the A-26.

17. The following table indicates the average time which may be expected to be consumed in loading various types of bombs in a single aircraft. This time does not include fusing time.

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TYPE BOMB	NUMBER OF BOMBS	NO. OF PERSONNEL IN LOADING CREW	TIME
100#	22 (Bomb bay tank installed)	4	48 minutes
250#	12 (Tank installed)	5	40 minutes
250#	14 (Tank not installed)	5	45 minutes
260#	12 (single cluster)	5	30 minutes
M-81 Trng Bomb	18 (double cluster)	5	30 minutes
	16 (single cluster tank not installed)	5	40 minutes
500#	6	4	35 minutes
1000#	4	4	30 minutes

18. Training and conversion will continue along these lines until the entire Group is converted; it will then be necessary to carry on sustained training in all available aircraft. This sustained training will emphasize 18-plane formation, practice bombings, and night indoctrination.

19. During the entire period of conversion, several difficulties are outstanding. The poor condition of the airfield and taxi strips slowed down training and damaged equipment. The heavy flying schedule in favorable weather, plus the fact that ground crews were not entirely familiar with the equipment, was detrimental to proper maintenance. The urgency of the situation prevented the usual thorough acceptance inspections. Spare parts were scarce; consequently, mechanical difficulties were common.

20. However, the outstanding difficulty has proved to be the weather hazard. The constant threat of bad weather works havoc with our flying schedules. The total available flying time during the period 1-30 October 1944 was 140 hours. During this period, 972 training hours were logged with an average of ten available aircraft.

21. Nevertheless, the Group is now well on its way to being converted, and should be carrying on its usual outstanding operational efficiency with the new aircraft in the near future.

THEODORE R. AXLESWORTH,
Colonel, Air Corps,
Commanding.

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