

## SEPTEMBER - 1944

History of Headquarters, 409th Bombardment Group (L) for the month of September.

### 1. Change in organization:

Three officers were added to the unit.

Captain John H. Mulliner, appointed Ass't Statistical Officer

1st Lt. David H. Russell, appointed Ass't Group Intelligence Officer

Captain Lloyd A. Williamson, appointed Public Relations Officer

Of the twelve missions completed in the month, eight of them were flown from the English base, the last mission from AAF Station 165 being number 123.

On September the third, the 409th joined other American bombers at enemy strong-points in the city of Brest. This morning mission answered Gen. Omar Bradley's eleventh hour request for serial aid in the freeing of this Atlantic harbor for use by Allied forces...the prize of the hour. No flak reported, nor was the German fighter-arm active during this operation. Smoke and clouds prevented accurate interpretation of results. We battered port defenses though weather prevented some of our group from bombing. This continued the thrust following Gen. Eisenhower's orders to keep bombing Brest until it was crushed or surrendered.

Striking another telling blow on the 118th mission of the Group, where strong-points in Brest were pounded, the siege for the important harbor city was in the fifth week of terror. The damage wrought was recorded as excellent to good, falling on enemy gun positions, concrete underground shelters and dumps. Thirty-six of the thirty-eight aircraft dispatched bombed the primary. The besieged German garrison at Brest...it is reported is acting under a direct order by Hitler to hold the prize Atlantic port for another four months...and it really took punishment from our Havocs.

On September 12th, our target was the gun emplacements at Klange, and though the leader aborted due to flak, the balance of the aircraft unleashed its full weight against the concrete enemy fortifications. The guns and fortifications was holding up the advance of our Third army in the sector and removing them would lessen the chance of a remnant of the German 19th Army from moving up from the Southwest to reinforce these positions.

The German defenses bore the brunt of another day of successful assault. The focal points of the attack of the 409th included a 'star-shaped old French fort at Metz, which was heavily fortified, along with strong-points at Landremont. Our bomb-bursts started just inside one of the star points in the fort, extending through the middle and across to the other side. The star-shaped fortification was left burning and not twinkling. Good results were also recorded in the attack at Landremont. It was served by a fine first class highway. Boxed like a parallelogram, juttied with strong fortifications it presented a terrific obstacle to the ground forces but it's vulnerability was exposed from the air as bombs burst inside the wall and smoke could be seen boiling up from the entire area.

It was officially disclosed that the Ninth Bomber Command, and the fighting Havoc-groups were now based in France and the bombers were hitting the 'teeth' of the Siegfried Line with precision bombing. On the September 12th mission was the first time Havocs had crossed the aerial frontier and dropped clusters of bombs on the soil of Germany. Our six-months ambition was achieved.

It was on the 19th of September that our bombers, flying at an altitude of some 10,000 feet bombed rail-yards

inside Germany. Following the request of the ground forces, who described the facilities in the marshaling yards as 'very active and important to the enemy', the mission cut any attempt to draw on these supplies and reinforcements. Excellent results were recorded, as explosions were seen as result of hits in the yards.

We rounded out the month with a perfect attack on the marshaling yards and warehouses at Bitburg. Reserves of the German troops and vital communication veins, from the heart of the enemy's r\existence in the Trier sector were battered heavily by our Havocs. Cutting in behind the enemy lines, to drop tons of bombs on rail yards, to break the stalemate in the bitterly congested fight, our bombs struck supporting Gen. Hodges First Army.

The rail-yard and warehouse that was our target at Bitburg just southwest of the town was left ablaze as freight cars of five trains fell in the smoldering wreckage. Describing the attack, 2nd Lt. James F. Goodman, related, 'Our bombs hit right on the tracks and in a fraction of a second I saw a train blow up'.

This first penetration into the Reich from our French air base strewn with wreckage of the recent departed Luftwaffe, was without opposition from enemy aircraft. Flak was moderate to intense, no casualties but twenty aircraft received battle damage.

Flying the second mission of the day from France, our group supported the allied ground forces, leaving fires raging in the target area. Our Havocs, pounded supply and rail-yard at Bingen, after flying the deepest penetration of Ninth Air Force A-20's; 60 miles inside German-Luxembourg border.

Object of this mission was to destroy troops and supplies being shipped through the Bingen supply point which was reinforcing the Nazi Siegfried Line. This marshaling yard, situated on left bank of the Rhine was an important junction of rail lines leading to important strong-points at Metz, which was holding out against our assault.

One aircraft, 51J with 2nd. Lt. Marion E. Hightower, pilot and S/Sgt Earl O. Salmon and Sgt. James M. Tuchel, gunners was hit in target area by HFF and is missing; it was reported by several crewmen to have crashed and exploded at 1708, at approximately L800470, about 3 miles SE of Kirchberg; no chutes were seen to open. Another aircraft, piloted by Lt. Holmes was so damaged by HFF that it crash-landed at base and was destroyed, crew however was uninjured. Two injures were recorded to Gunners S/Sgt. Robert I. Wilson, in 5 IN and S/Sgt Ray Melton, in D6H due to HFF.

Throughout the month we were unopposed by the Luftwaffe. Thus we flew 12 missions against the enemy.

## **OCTOBER - 1944**

History of Headquarters, 409th Bombardment Group (L), for the month of October.

### **1. Strength of the Unit as of 31 October 1944:**

Officers: 36 Enlisted Men: 74

### **2. Awards and Decorations:**

## **DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS**

1st. Lt. John T. Ertler

## **NARRATIVE**

Striking at the request of advancing American First Army, thirty-eight Havocs of the 409th were dispatched on

Oct. 2nd. Ubach was the target, however through misidentification the formation attacked incorrect points at approximately grid-coordinates K421657, and K431651.

Missions were scheduled on Duren, where enemy barracks were located but no attacks were accomplished on two missions, because of bad weather enroute and at the target.

Excellent and good results were verified on Oct. 6th, when Durne military installations and communication center in Germany were attacked and our A-20's carried out a real aerial offensive, participating in the largest single operation of Ninth Bombardment Division from continental Europe, to date. Reports that Duren was a main-point for Debarkation of enemy troops and supplies bolstering Aachen sector defenses, drew continuous attacks in advance of U. S. First Army. Supported by 9th Air Force Fighter Bombers the operation which drew heavy flak damage for eleven aircraft caused no losses or casualties.

The town of Julich caught our next attack, one that interrupted and seriously damaged rail junction and highways of importance northeast of Aachen. Striking at an opportune time when the enemy were rushing troops and supply reinforcements to a wide spread front in Germany and also Holland we made a determined effort to isolate Julich area, environ to the Western Front.

Describing Julich--a small railway and manufacturing town on a junction leading to Cologne, 1st Lieutenant Michael A. McEvilly, a Bombardier-Navigator, reported "Fires ringed the town and there was a heavy concentration of smoke from the center. I saw one large building collapse from a direct hit". The fire from Anti-aircraft defenses were very active. One aircraft crashed over friendly territory--all personnel safe.

On Oct. 12th, strikes covered-DMPI at Camp de Bitch, 50 miles east of Metz. Bombs fell among barracks housing German replacement troops in France destined for Metz battle areas. Photos showed good concentration blanketing buildings. One aircraft was lost due to flak, crashing near Nancy after limping back to friendly territory with both engines knocked out. The damaged aircraft jettisoned bombs just after turn off target. The pilot, Lt. Charles A. Hunton, Jr. jumped after assuring self his crew had bailed out. Leaving the aircraft at approximately 250 feet in the air the pilot landed uninjured in a tree with partially opened chute.

Poor visibility due to clouds affected bombing October 13th, at Venlo-R.R. Bridge in Holland. This priority attack a request of Allied ground forces drew a formation of 37 aircraft from the 409th. It was here that the Germans were attempting a drive in form of a wedge cutting three divisions of British Second Army salient to the north. Heavy clouds were encountered at the target, but many of our bombs cut the tracks on the approach to the bridge.

Dense clouds again prevented the group from completing our operations on the 14th, over Euskirchen R. R Bridge. On the 17th the Group preceded by Pathfinders penetrating heavy clouds, bombs were dropped on this bridge. It was a key link in a supply chain on Siegfried Line defenses. Clouds prevented visual observance of bomb results on this rail span across the Erft River just thirty miles south-east of Aachen.

The Huesden Road Bridge, an important crossing over the Maas River, served our enemy front line troops for both supply and escape.

Briefed for the tenth successive time in the last eleven days, the forty-one aircraft dispatched carrying 220-a500 GP bombs returned because of 10/10 cloud cover over target area. Operations were hampered during the entire month, only nine missions were flown.

## **NOVEMBER - 1944**

History of Headquarters, 409th Bombardment Group (L) for the month of November 1944.

1. Change in organization:

Captain Robert D. Gorden, Assigned and appointed Group Intelligence Officer, replacing Major Robert Goyne

2. Strength of the Unit as of 30 November 1944:

Officers: 37 Enlisted Men: 75

### NARRATIVE

Forces of our A-20 Havocs on Nov. 2nd struck at German transportation, at Trier/Pfafzel, by the aid of Pathfinder planes. The approach to the railroad bridge spanning the Moselle River, just 2 miles N.E. of Trier was destroyed. Visual reports tell of bombs smashing the approach to the east. As a result of moderate flak which caused some category A & B damage. One gunner, S/Sgt Floyd I. Ater, was wounded in the left leg.

Adverse weather conditions continued to blanket targets, but it did not stop our A-20's from releasing bombs on 4 Nov. at the Trier Ordnance depot. Attacking the targets and dealing blows to damage the supply centers feeding German Panzers, the group returned safely, results unobserved.

Targets for the 139 and 140 missions of the group called for runs on Hehlrath, gun positions in Germany and the ordnance depot at Homberg. The latter target was served by two rail lines some two miles west of the town and this was our assignment.

Weather made PFF essential and bombing results were undetermined. The section caught the weight of our bombs and damage was done to the lines feeding supplies to the Luxembourg front.

On Armistice Day the Havocs flew to Sinzig, pounding the railroad bridge over the Ahr River, 30 miles from Cologne. This 141st mission decreased the enemy mobility. No casualties or battle damage was recorded and results were unobserved.

Attacking warehouses just one-half mile north-east of Zavera on the 19th, fifty-five A'20's bombed by flights of six...flying the route formation of three boxes of 18. Scoring direct hits and excellent photographic coverage, the attack against the supplies of the enemy was devastating.

Supporting the U.S. Armies driving toward the river Rhine, on the second mission of the day, attention was directed at Baal, Germany. Our target was the road and rail junction lying just 19 miles north-east of Aachen. Weather threatened all day and closed in early . Many aircraft had difficulty in returning

Equipped for bombing on Pathfinder, our A-20 formation bombed visually on the next mission with excellent results. Efforts and bombs were concentrated at Landau Ordnance arsenal this 25th day of November. 1st Lt. Michael A. McEvilly, a lead bombardier-navigator described the attack, "the ammunition stores were located in a form of 'V' railroad tracks just at the edge of town. As we turned from the target I saw smoke rise from what looked like a direct hit. Then bright flashes appeared as ammunition exploded". At this front, artillery action was close and real war was going on below.

Attacking the fortified village of Duren on the 28th of Nov. a part of the Siegfried Line defenses, our orders read to destroy the town. A fine woven carpet of bombs were laid on this German village as ordered and when our work was completed, the town was as rutted as Aachen.

Thirty-one assignments were given to the group for combat missions, but only twelve completed missions are recorded. Weather called for the scrubbing of 19. One crew was lost on the Landau, Germany, mission of the 25th of Nov. Plane crashed at Moissy, France..no chutes observed. Crew lost as a result of bad weather. 1st Lt. William V. Benton, Cpl Marvin D. Riggs, Cpl. P. A. Iannasso made up this crew.

Conversion from A-20 type A/C to the A-26 was the continuing highlight of events for the month. As it replaces the A-20, the group will continue to push the enemy closer to the heart of Berlin.

### DECEMBER, 1944

History of Headquarters, 409th Bombardment Group (L), for the month of December 1944.

#### 1. Strength of the Unit as of 31 December 1944

Officers: 37 Enlisted Men: 74

### NARRATIVE

Operating the A-26 Invader, America's speediest and most versatile attack bomber, the group continued with high standards set by the A-20 Havoc. Weather closed in, restricting the 409th from aiding the foot-sloggers. Crews were anxious to give support from the air, just as they aided at St. Lo, and at the loop at Rouen. Only five missions were flown for the month of December though briefings numbered twenty-two. Rain, fog and heavy haze layers stopped maximum concentration in the isolation plans of the enemy counter-offensive in the Ardennes Forest section.

On the fifteenth of December the first mission was airborne and supported the drive of the 1st Army near the Rhoer River. The target, Dreiborn, a German defended village. PPF did not bomb on the planned and briefed target but turned off and bombed on their alternate which was not known to the Group. The target bombed was approximately 17 miles SE of the briefed primary. No claims nor encounters. All returned safely, after a round trip of some 540 miles.

The second target for the month was Harperscheid, Germany, another defended village. The aerial attack was made with the aid of PPF. Blasting at this town with the heavy bomb load of the A-26, the U S 1st Army inched forward in the face of strong opposition. Pouring bomb load after bomb-load by the aid of Pathfinder, the German infantry divisions were stopped in the attempt to destroy dams and flood the valley. No enemy fighters were encountered. This attack was made on 18th December, 1944.

In the biggest aerial battle of the 9th Bomber Divisions Bombers, the 409th on 23 Dec. attacked Saarburg Rail-bridge. The A-26 formation demolished this highway and rail bridge which spanned the Saar River just 10 miles south of Trier. This bridge, it is known to have fallen into the river.

Effort of the group was concentrated on targets during December that fell in two distinct categories; R.R. bridges on the perimeter of the break through area and traffic junctions within the area itself. This was a part of the interdiction program designed to cut rail centers and stop traffic and badly needed supplies and reinforcements for the Wehrmacht.

During holiday time and on 25 December, Christmas Day, saw our formations on their way to completing 152 missions that called for bombing on the Munstereifel, Germany, rail and communications 11 miles SE of Zulpich. Then on Dec. 27, 1944, the target, the Rail bridge at Eller, Germany was bombed from an altitude of 10,000 and 12,000 feet. The Invaders struck the important rail-head which was partially covered by patches of melting snow, continuing the big holiday time assault on enemy communications. Hitting in planned aerial offensive against the drive of Von Runstadt's across eastern Belgium, our efforts centered to delay troop movements and supplies. Excellents were scored this day on the bridge which spanned the Mosselle River at Eller.

The year 1944 slipped slowly and quietly into history. No readjustment seemed necessary--the year was gone. Our outlook was on the new year and we reach up and tear 31 December off the calendar..ready for 1945.