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JANUARY - 1945

History of Headquarters, 409th Bombardment Group L), for the month of January 1945.

1. Strength of the Unit as of 31 January 1945.

Officers: 38 Enlisted Men: 74

NARRATIVE

The premier month of the new year 1945 with its snow and bitter cold found the 409th Group with holiday plans and activity off-base canceled. The entire theater was placed on close restriction, at the outbreak of the German Ardennes, offensive. Liberty-runs to Paris were discontinued and the social life during off-hours with many French friends was curtailed. The restriction was lifted Jan. 15th and the entire base returned to the normal trend.

January, seemed unsuitable flying weather with ice and snow hampering takeoffs and landings and semi-blocking areas, but 14 missions out of 33 briefed assignments were airborne and completed per schedule. Experiences and exciting events were recorded on the strafing and low-level operations in the versatile A-26, on German convoys in retreat out of the Ardennes.

Captain Thomas H. Glenn (Inf) joined our group acting as General Liaison Officer. The Officer and his assigned enlisted assistant will be a part of our close-working team, bringing information from the Infantry standpoint to eyes and the ears of the Invader crews, who coordinate flying operations with the 'doughfoot'.

The striking arm of the A-26 Invaders dropped New Years Bomb Greetings, plastering buildings in the city of Saint Vith which was serving as a center of communications in direct support of the 12th Army Group in its Eiffle area. The 154th target was marked by melting snow.

Bombing from an altitude of 13,000 feet on their own sight through 7 to 9/10 cloud cover, the 37 aircraft dropped 95, 1000 pound GP bombs and 12-500 pound bombs. The visual bombing was accomplished after PPF failure. The briefed aiming point was not visible however the lead bombardier/navigator selected a visual building after making three passes. Buildings and roadways at the western edge of the town were smashed. Damage assessment was rather difficult because of cloud cover but lead bombardier 1st Lieutenant Michael A. McEvilly reported "The only remaining buildings stood out like a sore thumb".

Attacking the railroad bridge at Simmern, Germany, approximately 25 miles south of Koblenz, Invader crews reported enemy smoke screen prevented visual observation of attack results. The bombing was done in flights from 9000 to 10,000 feet. Weak inaccurate heavy flak greeted the formation on run in to target. No losses or casualties. This attack was made on 2nd of Jan. 1945.

Weather prevented daily operations, the next mission activity being on 5th of Jan. a return trip to strike at the Rail-bridge at Simmern. Flying a round trip of 748 miles the A-26 Invaders coordinated plans with the U S First Army, continuing the supply line assault at the rail objective. The target was about two miles south-west of the city of Simmern, Germany. No enemy encounters nor casualties were reported though weak inaccurate heavy flak was hurled at the Group.

Shuttling again to the Simmern Rail-bridge on the 11th of January, the target was again bombed by use of Pathfinder technique. The third strike at the single track bridge. Important? Yes, as it was being used in transportation of enemy reinforcements, however results of the attack were labeled unsatisfactory. All bombs fell in dispersed pattern west of the town of Kirn, 13.5 miles SSW

of D.M.P.I. Majority of bombs fell in timber lands and fields, some 41 miles due east of the bomb-line, scoring direct hits to secondary roadways, W and SW of Kirn. All aircraft returned safely through sub-zero temperature. This was recorded as the 157 Missions.

Fighting snow covered runways on take off and landings, our Invaders hit the Bitburg Communication Center just 17 miles north of Trier. The formation struck blows at important choke points of the German salient. Weak and accurate heavy flak was experienced in the target area. One A-26, D6M crash landed at A-69 after heavy flak claimed one engine. The gunner was slightly injured in the process of landing. Weather forced the entire formation to land at A/F A-68, returning to the Home Base at a later hour when the weather lifted.

Clear weather prevailed the 16th of January on the Western Front, allowing the briefed PPF formation to bomb visually after equipment failure of the Pathfinder. Though this bridge had received damage it was again in use and serving the enemy well in the shuttle process of their supplies and other reinforcements to Nazi front lines. The bridge spans the Ahr river which is a tributary of the Rhine approximately 14 miles SE of Bonn. It was declared to be one of the best operational days for several months. Weather was CAVU. As PPF equipment failed, Box 1 left it when course was not maintained, bombing a visual I. P.. Box II continued on as briefed to target. Weak inaccurate flak was experienced after leaving Luxembourg. All aircraft returned with no personal casualties. The target was shared with the 416th Bomb Group. Over 130 tons of bombs were cautiously planted on the double-deck span and declarations of bomb-bursts cutting the rails were made a matter of record.

The isolation of western battle area supplies was accomplished when 41 aircraft, thirty-two of which were the new A-26 Invaders coordinated attack at Euskerchen Railroad bridge on the 160th mission on January 21st. Pathfinder leader was the lead-ship in each box, however, the 1st box bombed visually and scored an excellent, making the attack and scoring by individual flights. The second box ran into 10/10 cloud cover at the target area and followed Pathfinder dropping bombs. S/Sgt. Robert T. Harris was wounded when flak struck his forehead. He was gunner in lead ship. No other personnel were injured.

Enemies use of the secondary railroad bridge southwest of Simmern was attacked by the 409th Bomb. Group. On two previous occasions the 2nd and 11th of Jan., our target with Pathfinder leader was this same rail-structure. While the bridge carries only a single track its importance is due to potential usage by the Germans in supplying their forward lines. Most mainline service has been seriously impaired. All bombed according to briefed plans, dropping destructive weights of both 1000 and 500 pounds GP on the target. Results were unobserved due to the 7/10 cloud cover. No encounters nor personal casualties. This mission covered 615 air miles.

Another mission for the day was brewing as interrogation was in progress for the Simmern Railroad attack. The word "special" struck those at pre-briefing with interest...and many tried to be called for this new plan. Quickly those scheduled to fly were briefed for the strafing attack. It was a low-level operations against German Motor vehicles milling in a general retreat near the city of Vianden, Germany. Locations were not known for this premier down-to-deck level assignment before take off. Rendezvous with P-51's near Luxembourg at 8000 feet and then it was to be "follow the leader". Diving on the target, the first element followed the escort down to 2000 feet reaching a speed in the descent of 385 MPH. Clouds closed in on the fighter and it was lost from the formation. The P-51 was not able to locate the target. Bad weather prevailed. No attack was made but it gave the light-bomber pilot and crew a keen lesson in tactics and observation for a job soon to be accomplished. Moderate flak was reported.

Mission #163, for the 23rd of January called for an enemy motor convoy to be destroyed. Versatile A-26 Invaders on short notice struck blows at tree-top level in a strafing attack on the transports mobilized on an east-west roadway between Dasburg and Arzfeld. This area is just inside the Nazi border, just east of Clevauz, Belgium. Six A-26's were dispatched on the bombing and low-level strafing sweep carrying M-81 fragmentation bombs and loaded with maximum load of ammunition. The rendezvous as in the yesterdays mission was at Luxembourg with P51's charting the way. Limited to medium altitude thus far in the ETO, the A-26's swooped to

the deck level plan in joint operation with the fighters on long lines of Nazi vehicles east of the Ardennes salient. The fighter-leader followed a planned course west to east at 6000 feet, parallel to road, making a 180 degree right turn leading back from east to west at 5000 feet on a course that was parallel to and north of the target road. Taking up attack formation of three elements of two aircraft, diving turns to the left were made to attack the target. Firing on vehicles, choking the highway in the vicinity of Arzfeld the pilots poured streams of 50 caliber slugs from the powerful spray of the A-26 nose guns. Bombing first with fragmentation M-81's, the formation returned to harass in the strafing attack. As the crews zeroed in on their targets they were met with intensive heavy ground fire causing the loss of planes flown by Capt. Dick Bills, Capt. Mark Robb, Lt. Ken Woods and Lt. Henry M. Simons. With Capt. Bills was Lt. McEvilly and Sgt. Jones. With Lt. Woods was Cpl. Kenneth R. Seay and Cpl. James J. Stygles. With Lt. Simons was S/Sgt. Henry L. Westbrook and Cpl. James Barrett. Plane flown by Lt. William H. Rochell took terrific punishment, lost one engine and had no elevator or aileron controls except the use of the trim tabs. He managed to keep airborne long enough to reach a 9th TAC fighter strip in Luxembourg for an emergency landing. Lt. Arden Connick with gunners Sgt. Marshall Steele, Jr. and Sgt. James "Tex" Clark, making their first pass at the line of vehicles had one engine knocked out but returned for a second pass on one engine before attempting to leave target area. Lt. Connick's good engine failed and was forced to rapidly crash land in a small clearing just inside the Allied lines Lt. Connick was injured in the landing but pulled from the burning plane by Sgt. Clark. Sgt. Steele was trapped in the turret by twisted metal. The tail of the plane broke off just behind the turret. Sgt. Clark retrieved a fire ax from the plane and was able to free Sgt. Steele. They were located by U S infantrymen and taken for first aid.

Grim, yes...adept men with skill..their lives...not just these recorded here have gone in the testing and tactical operations proving the Invader. They will not be forgotten.

Flying back at the medium-level our combination of A-26 Invaders and A-20 Havocs had Pronsfeld, Germany (road junction) for their target, however it was not attacked. Lead bombardier was wounded by flak on the second pass. With his eyes filled with blood, sighting was impossible. Bombardier of 2nd Box could not identify definitely target. One A-26 flying in 4th position was lost as a result of flak west of Dahlen. One chute was observed.

On a road blocking tour, the 409th flying Invader-Havoc formation created a bottleneck of motor transports on a constant retreat from the Von Rundstadt's salient. This attack was made on Hillesheim Road Junction on 25 January 1945. Much damage resulted to the three road junctions located in the city just 17 miles east of the bomb-line. One A-26 received a direct hit by flak in the bomb bay causing aircraft to explode and crash. One chute was seen floating earthward at about 2000 feet. The Luftwaffe fighters were unseen, however batteries with intense flak power was very alert in enemy area. Since most of the enemy armor is located south in the Eiffel Sector and enemy divisions thinly spaced without armored support are being hard pressed to the North in the Cologne area. This road communication center is of great importance by way of supplying and reinforcing in both directions. Excellent results were recorded. 500 GP bombs were dropped.

Cutting rail lines to maintain interdiction on those leading west from the Rhine river, our target for the 28th of Jan. was the six track bridge span SW edge of Kaiserlautern, Germany, 50 miles east of the current bomb-line. A rail link to Cologne, Frankfurt area, the rail bridge served the German supply chain which was striking at our 7th Army in the Alsace Sector. Only one box went to the target as the second element was scrubbed as the 1st box became airborne. One A/C crash landed with category "B" damage, no injuries. Results unobserved due to weather conditions.

Bombing by boxes on the 29th of Jan. to close the months flying operations, the 409th target was the Communication Center located at Ahrweiler, Germany. Pathfinder technique was used as 10/10 thin alto stratus conditions existed. This supply center lies 14 miles to the south of Bonn, Germany. No fighter attacks were made on our formation. Results went unobserved.

January comes to an end with the German 'bulge' gradually shrinking. The greater part of the missions of the month directly supported and was well coordinated with the foot-soldiers plans to prevent the effective withdrawal of the enemy.

Plans were being outlined for the movement of our group..but that will be a part of February history as January is no more.

FEBRUARY - 1945

The Official Operations Records of Headquarters for month of February are not available due to the deteriorating condition of Micro film that was used to store the records of the 409th Bombardment Group by the Historical Division of the Air Force.

An explanation of what the "deteriorating condition of Micro film" means is the Micro film over the years has faded to the point that much of the content is not legible.

The following information was extracted from the Micro film:

1. Changes in organization:

Captain John H. Strand appointed Group Training Officer

Major Thomas E. Powell relieved from temporary duty as Training Officer and assigned 643rd Bombardment Squadron as Commanding Officer.

Captain Gerald A. Autin assigned and joined from 642nd Bombardment Squadron and appointed Group Bombing and Gunnery Officer.

Captain William J. Daner appointed Group Training Officer vice Captain Strand.

Captain Tobin H. Underwood, Jr., rejoined Group after thirty day leave in Zone of Interior.

Captain Thomas E. Glenn, Inf., departed TD with 29th TAC for approximately ten days.

2. Strength of organization as of 28 February 1945:

39 Officers and 69 Enlisted Men.

3. Change of Station:

15 February 1945

From: AAF Station A-48, Bretigny, Seine-et-Oise, France.

To: AAF Station A-70, Leon/Couvron, Aisne, France

MARCH - 1945

1. Changes in organization:

Captain Gilbert L. Farr, appointed Group Training Officer, replacing

Captain William J. Daner.

!St. Lt. James C. Irwin, appointed Group Gunnery Officer, replacing

1st Lt. Milton J. Rosenfield, transferred.

Captain George M. Blakely, Jr., assigned and joined from 643rd Bomb. Squadron and appointed Group Military Government Officer and Assistant Group S-2 (Pathfinder S-2 Section).

Captain Emanuel P. Peters, appointed Group Camouflage Officer.

1st Lt. William L. Guajardo appointed Assistant Group Camouflage Officer.

1st Lt. Galen V. Miller, assigned Public Relations Officer, replacing Captain Lloyd A. Williamson, transferred.

1st Lt. Carl F. Gerhardt assigned and appointed Group Medical Administrative Officer, replacing Captain John C. Shumate, transferred.

2. Strength of organization as of 31 March 1945:

Officers 41 Enlisted Men 77

3. Awards and decorations:

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

Colonel Thomas R. Ford

Starting with Mission No. 190, the 409th Bombardment Group (L) hit it's peak in the European Theater of Operations during the month of March, and ran up the impressive total of forty one (41) operational forays against the enemy.

Before time ran out, in continuation of the offensive East of the Rhine, the group had reached its 230th mission since arrival in this theater in February 1944.

The month brought not only big news in operations, but saw an improvement in bombing efforts, the group climbing to fifth place in the 9th Bombardment Division (M). Figures compiled by Group S-2, revealed that of eighty eight (88) precision aimings, fifty four (54) were in the circular error computation, with twenty four undetermined, for 61% within 520 feet.

Colonel Thomas R. Ford, the group commander, led the 200th mission of the group on 9 March 1945, the first of two missions that day. The assault was against the Dotzheim (Weisbaden) ordnance depot, consisting of more than forty six (46) buildings, and stacks of stores. Two hundred six 500 lb. M-17 incendiary clusters were dropped on the primary target on this occasion. Results were undetermined due to 10/10 clouds. Five airplanes received category "A" and "B" damage from weak heavy flak fire near Giessen.

Due to the great number of missions flown during the month, there was a constant turnover of personnel in the squadrons, many of the "old timers" of the group, heading for the Zone of Interior, their tour of duty in this theater completed after participating in sixty five (65) battle missions against the Hun.

On only five of the thirty one days of the month did the group fail to complete a mission.

The intensity of the group's effort in supporting the great Allied offensive from the West is reflected in the forty one missions, two of which were in two sections. The total tonnage for March was 2,135 as compared to 1,045 for February, when twenty two missions were completed.

Additional interest in bombing technique was added for the group when the 643rd Squadron was taken off visual operations on Saturday, 17 March 1945, and redesignated for SHORAN Operations.

The changeover for PFF operations, led to a "reshuffling" of personnel within the group, and many pilots and bombardiers from the remaining three squadrons were sifted into the new type of operations.

Other activities included a Technical Inspection by the 9th Bombardment Division (M), and the opening of new clubs for both Officers and Enlisted men.

The enlisted men's club is located in a two story dwelling on the main road from group headquarters to the field. Complete furnishings, including a bar setup for serving beer, and a radio were procured for the entertainment of the men.

A dance, with feminine companions provided from the ranks of nurses from nearby hospitals, and French girls recruited through the French Welcoming Committee in Laon and San Quentin, marked the opening of the Officer's Club on 18 March 1945.

A great deal of effort went towards the preparation of the Officer's Club, located in a former warehouse in nearby Drepy-En-Laonnois, approximately four miles from headquarters.

A bar and bandstand were built inside, and concrete laid to provide a dance floor. Arrangements include a service bar and snack bar, with the loft of the warehouse converted in a game room, including ping pong tables and card tables. A radio adds the "home" touch. Facilities for handling cleaning and pressing of uniforms also has been added.

General all around "polishing up" has marked the second month of occupation of A-70, and the group once more is settling down, even if for a short stay.

Showers and shaving facilities were added to the headquarters setup, the baths being set up in an old German type barracks behind the mess hall.

Also added for a morale lifter, is the Red Cross Aero Club, with game rooms, a library, school room, and the ever present doughnut haven. The Aero Club continues to rate as one of the most popular spots on the field.

One of the highlights of the month came Monday, 26 March 1945, when Major General Samuel E. Anderson, commanding general of the 9th Bombardment Division, visited the group for an awards review.

General Anderson pinned Distinguished Flying Crosses and Soldiers' Medals on individuals from throughout the division during the ceremonies.