

EXH #17-Dec. '44

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9th Air Force No. P-340
9 January 1945.NINTH FLIES 328,105 SORTIES D ROPS
217,000 TONS BOMBS DURING 1944.

NINTH AIR FORCE HEADQUARTERS, JAN. 9.-In its first full year of operations as a tactical weapon, the U.S. Ninth Air Force in 1944 cooperated with Allied ground troops by dropping more than 217,028 tons of bombs in 328,105 sorties flown against the enemy.

In combat from England to Normandy to the German border, Ninth fighter-bombers loosed 126,618 tons of bombs, while medium and light bombers dropped 90,410 tons of explosives on enemy targets of almost every description.

Flying from England with a limited number of B-26 Marauders and P-51 Mustangs in the first months of 1944, the Ninth by mid-year was a fully developed exponent of tactical airpower. It caught its "second wind" on the wing, adding strength and experience to the resources it tapped in the great tactical air assaults which helped clear the path for invasion and the Allied sweep through France.

The Ninth's initial year on the Western Front ended approximately when its planes and pilots perforated the Belgium bulge with all-out assaults which came with clearing skies during the Christmas season.

During the year, Ninth Air Force pilots destroyed 1,752 enemy aircraft in the air, probably destroyed 257 and damaged 817. On the ground, 470 German planes were destroyed, 67 probably destroyed and 236 damaged.

A total of 1,455 Ninth Air Force fighter-bombers and 288 light and medium bombers were lost during the year—1,743 aircraft of all types.

Carrying out another of tactical airpower's "priority" objectives, the Ninth struck enemy communications and supply lines in its program to isolate Europe's battlefields from the source of German reserves. Fighter-bombers knocked out 2,397 locomotives and destroyed 10,906 railroad cars in post D-Day assaults. P-47 Thunderbolts, P-51 Mustangs and P-58 Lightnings also disabled or damaged 840 bridges to add to the total knocked out prior to June 6.

The fighter-bomber toll included 1,481 rail-cuts from D-day through December 31; 175 ammunition and fuel dumps destroyed, 99 damaged and 45 probably destroyed during the year. Since October 16, 1944, 13,246 tons of bombs were dropped on enemy rail yards.

Linked with the Ninth's continuous assaults on German behind-the-lines facilities were those aimed at the enemy's motor transport equipment. During the year, the Ninth's fighter-bombers destroyed more than 21,000 vehicles of all types, including tanks and track-propelled armor. Many thousands of similar vehicles were probably destroyed or damaged. An additional 2,872 horse-drawn vehicles were des-

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destroyed, 90 probably destroyed and 226 damaged by fighter or-bombers.

In other missions flown hand-in-glove with ground troops of three American armies, fighter-bombers silenced 1,625 gun positions, probably silenced 240 and damaged 555. A total of 1,997 enemy held buildings were destroyed, 169 probably destroyed and 781 damaged.

The Ninth moved to England from the Middle East late in 1943, but its presence there was not announced by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower until February 17 of 1944. Within the next 100 days, size of the Ninth's operational elements was increased 1,000 per cent to make it the world's largest tactical air force.

Maj. Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, the Ninth's present commanding general, assumed command in August of 1944, succeeding Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton who now commands the First Allied Airborne Army.

During April and May, the Ninth Air Force took on its first "big" job in the ETO, joining with the Eighth Air Force to soften up the continent for invasion. Railroads in France, the Lowlands and Germany were pounded. In the two weeks ending D-Day, 176 locomotives were knocked out and 16 enemy rail yards heavily attacked. From May 1 to D-Day, the Ninth's fighter-bombers and bombers flew 35,000 sorties—more than 1,000 per day—and in the five weeks before June 6, 35 separate assaults were made on Luftwaffe airfields.

Where there had been 13 important highway and nine railroad bridges crossing the Seine from Paris to the sea, there were none that could be used by the enemy by June 6. In addition, the Ninth hit pilotless launching platforms and coastal guns on the Channel coast.

The Ninth Air Force operated on a 24-hour schedule on D-Day, sending its men-filled and equipment-laden C-47's in a 200 mile skytrain from England to Normandy (Troop Carrier Command no longer is under the Ninth). Bombers took final cracks at coastal guns and at other ground installations, while fighter-bombers patrolled the area to guard against interference by the Luftwaffe.

Another 1944 high-point for the Ninth was the part it played with the Eighth Air Force when, on July 25, 3,700 tons of bombs were dropped in an area 4 miles by 1 1/2 miles about St. Lo. The First Army moved eight miles in the next 12 hours in the historic "St. Lo break-through" which saw Paris liberated one month later. Taking advantage of every break in the weather, the Ninth gave the Germans no rest. On August 17, Thunderbolts, Lightnings, and Marauders left more than 1,000 enemy vehicles knocked out.

With the enemy entrenched along the Siegfried Line, the Ninth for the rest of the year cooperated with ground troops in destroying targets up and down the front.

For seven days after Von Rundstedt launched his counter-offensive on December 16, airmen of the Ninth waited impatiently for the break in the weather which finally came on December 23. During the 12 favorable flying days since that time, the Ninth Air Force has launched more than 15,000 sorties, shooting down almost 500 enemy planes and disabling more than 1,000 tanks and armored vehicles and nearly 5,000 freight cars. In addition, German communications and supply lines have been smoldered by heavy assaults from the air.

To accomplish its mission in 1944, the Ninth Air Force added two newcomers to its mechanical veterans—the B-26 Marauder, A-20 Havoc, P-47 Thunderbolt, P-51 Mustang, and P-38 Lightning. The P-51 Black Widow night fighter began prowling the darkness, and the A-26 Invader made its first appearance with the Ninth Bombardment Division. This fast, heavily-armed medium bomber is pointed to the new year as one of the deadliest of the AAF's combat airplanes.