

S E C R E T

UNIT HISTORY

55TH BOMBARDMENT WING (H)

March, 1945, Installment

1. The 55th Bombardment Wing (H) is assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force. Its headquarters is at SPINAZZOLA, Italy. During the period covered by this Installment of its History, the Wing was engaged in the ITALY campaign, MEDITERRANEAN Theater of Operations, United States Army.

2. On 31 March 1945 there were 46 Officers assigned (a decrease of 2 from 28 February 1945), 2 Warrant Officers assigned (no change), and 11 Officers attached (an increase of 4). There were 128 Enlisted Men assigned (an increase of 6) and 49 Enlisted Men attached (an increase of 23) on 31 March 1945. The increases, particularly in the category of Enlisted Men, were chiefly occasioned by the putting into effect of the new set-up of the Service Groups; the radical reduction in Service Group in personnel of the Service Group in conjunction with Wing Headquarters required the retention of Enlisted Men of certain categories, and this was done by carrying them as attached.

3. Operations during the month of March 1945, were highly effective, in total effectiveness surpassing any previous month, including the previous high point of August 1944. Only in part was this effectiveness due to improved weather, for although weather improved after the middle of the month, it was by no means favorable at the month's beginning. The new high point was attained by the determination to drop, at this phase of the war's development, the greatest possible tonnage of bombs on enemy targets, and the implementing of that purpose by extraordinary effort in maintenance. As a result, 20 missions were flown, and all of them were effective. All Bombardment Groups of the Wing participated in all of the 20 missions and on each mission bombs were dropped on some designated target.

Fifteen missions were flown against targets in AUSTRIA and GERMANY, two against targets in CZECHOSLOVAKIA, two against targets in HUNGARY, and one against a target in ITALY. A tabular view of the 55th Bombardment Wing missions flown during March, 1945, follows:

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

Mission No.	Date	Target	Units Participating	Air-craft	Tonnage Dropped
179	1 Mar	MOOSBIERBAM, AUS. (O/R)	460, 465,	24	46.95
		ST. POLTEN, AUS. (M/Y) *	460, 464, 485	41	82.00
		AMSTETTEN, AUS. (M/Y) *	464, 485	36	72.00
		FELDBACH, AUS. (M/Y) **	465,	5	10.00
		MARIBOR, YUGO. (M/Y) *	460, 465,	27	52.50
180	2 Mar	LINZ, AUS. (N/S Main M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	76	151.75
		AMSTETTEN, AUS. (M/Y) *	465,	12	24.00
181	4 Mar	SZOMBATHELY, HUN. (M/Y /South)	460, 464, 465, 485	117	229.75
182	8 Mar	VERONA, ITALY			
		(Porto Nuove M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	76	148.00
183	9 Mar	GRAZ, AUS. (M/Y) *	460, 464, 465, 485	62	124.00
		LJUBLJANA, YUGO. (M/Y) *	460	19	36.75
184	12 Mar	VIENNA, AUS.			
		(Florisdorf)	460, 464, 465, 485	143	285.00
185	13 Mar	REGENSBURG, GER. (M/Y /South)	460, 464, 465, 485	117	233.00
186	14 Mar	NOVE ZAMKY, HUN. (M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	115	283.50
187	15 Mar	MOOSBIERBAUM, AUS. ***	460	17	41.75
		WIENER NEUSTADT, AUS. (M/Y) *	460	14	34.00
		GRAZ, AUS. (N/S) (M/Y) *	464, 465	51	124.00
		ST. POLTEN, AUS. (M/Y) *	485	18	43.00
188	16 Mar	VIENNA, AUS. (KORNEUBURY O/R)	464	19	38.00
		AMSTETTEN, AUS.	460 464 465 485	81	151.50
		GRAZ, AUS. (M/Y) *	465	9	18.00
		PRAGERSKO, YUGO. (M/Y) *	465	9	18.00
189	19 Mar	MUHL DORF, AUS. (M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	156	383.00
190	20 Mar	AMSTETTEN, AUS. (M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	141	347.00
191	21 Mar	NEUBURG, GER. (A/D)	460, 464, 465, 485	90	191.70
192	22 Mar	VIENNA, AUS. Heiligenstadt (M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	145	274.50
193	23 Mar	GMUND, AUS. (M/Y)	460, 464, 465, 485	146	276.90
194	24 Mar	NEUBURG, GER. (A/D)	460, 464, 465, 485	142	304.66
195	25 Mar	PRAGUE, CZECH, Letnany (A/D)	464, 465, 485	97	207.56
		WELS, AUS. (A/D) *	460	36	77.60
196	26 Mar	BRATISLAVA, CZECH Rangier (M/Y)	464 485	60	133.75
		WIENER NEUSTADT, AUS. (M/Y) *	460 465	21	46.50
		BADEN, AUS. (M/Y) T/O	460	7	15.75
197	30 Mar	VIENNA, AUS			
		(N Station & Goods Depot) (PFF)		485	1* 2.00
		GRAZ, AUS. (M/Y) *	460, 464, 465	4*	8.00
		KAPFENBURG, AUS. (T/F) * (PFF)	460, 465	3*	6.00
198	31 Mar	VILLACH, AUS. (M/Y) *	460, 464, 465, 485	<u>112</u>	<u>247.13</u>
<u>TOTALS FOR MONTH</u>				2,249	4,772

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

* Alternate Target
** Target of Opportunity
*** Oil Reserve/Processing
A/D Airdrome
AT Alternate Target
M/Y Marshalling Yard
O/R Oil Refinery
PFF PFF (Pathfinder Mission, single a/c, bombing through clouds.)
T/F Tank Factory
T/O Target of Opportunity
N/S North/South
N/ North M/Y
/S South M/Y

Notes: Totals of Sorties and Tonnage apply only to cited targets, and except for Individual PFF Missions include only a/c totaling at least one box; other a/c which dropped in less than a box formation are not included. Thus the Wing had a grand total of 2,314 effective sorties and dropped a grand total of 4,909 tons of bombs when a/c not shown on the above table are included.

A number of points of interest in the operations for March, 1945, may be pointed out. The previous high point of the Wing's combat effectiveness had been reached in August, 1944, when 2,435 B-24 aircraft were dispatched, of which 2,109 aircraft bombed assigned Primary or Alternate Targets or Targets of Opportunity and dropped a total of 5,135 tons of bombs. These impressive totals were secured in 22 missions.

In March, 1945, during which period weather was much less favorable than in August 1944, on 20 missions, 2,767 aircraft were dispatched and of these 2,314 were effective sorties (of the 453 non-effective sorties, 219 were attributable to weather; excluding these the rate of early returns was 3.9%, the lowest figure in the combat experience of the Wing except 3.8% in February and as against 6% in August, 1944), and these 2,314 effective sorties dropped 4,909 tons of bombs. Note that 226 tons more bombs were dropped by 205 fewer aircraft in August, 1944, than were dropped in March 1945; the difference is readily

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

explicable when it is remembered that in August Yugoslavian and Italian targets were frequently assigned, enabling more missions with heavier bomb loads. It is obvious that had weather in March, 1945, been comparable with that in August 1944, and had it been possible to have flown an equal number of missions, the March, 1945, total of sorties and tonnage dropped would have exceeded the totals of August, 1944, by far.

As had been noted, March was a month in which weather conditions changed from unfavorable to favorable. All missions dispatched were effective; but on two of them the assigned Primary Target was not reached; these were the missions of 9 and 31 March. Inevitably it was necessary to navigate and bomb by Pathfinder during this period: missions on 1,2,9,12,13,30 and 31 March were accomplished by this means. The mission of 30 March was a "loan wolf" expedition of individual aircraft briefed to bomb only through cloud, since these individual aircraft were unescorted and had only their "Panther" equipment as defense against flak. It was obvious that the general tactical situation required the dropping of the maximum tonnage of bombs on priority targets, and every effort was made to do so. It was at this time that the German offensive against the Russians was at its maximum power (in the area Southwest of Budapest), and toward the end of the period it was apparent that the Russians were due soon to capture Vienna. As a matter of fact, the mission of 30 March was the last mission flown against Vienna.

Targets of the month of March clearly reflected the general war situation. Twenty-seven targets in Austria were attacked and hit, 3 in Germany, 3 in Yugoslavia, 2 in Czechoslovakia, 2 in Hungary and 1 in Italy. Of these, 29 were Marshalling Yard targets, 4 were Oil Refineries, 4 were Airdromes, and 1 was a Tank Works.

Analysis shows the relationship of these targets to the general strategic bombing program. The counter-oil program had been highly successful, and these four oil targets, all in the Vienna area, represented the objective of the final policing required to keep to the absolute minimum any usefulness to the enemy of these oil resources. The attacks against marshalling yards followed the familiar pattern of strangling the enemy's supply and troop movements in connection with current operations. Perhaps the most surprising feature of the objectives attacked in March was the resumption of the counter-air program. These missions were ordered in response to

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

immediate tactical considerations: the enemy's jet-propelled project had developed to the point that appreciable numbers of Me-262 aircraft were to be seen on certain airdromes in the Air Force area and some of them had been seen in operational use; further, the Russian advances in SILESIA and CZECHOSLOVAKIA had required the enemy to move large numbers of his operational aircraft in use on the Eastern Front to airdromes in the rear, including airdromes within the Fifteen Air Force area.

Indeed, there had been some resurgence of the enemy aircraft activity during the month, since enemy aircraft were seen in numbers totaling up to 131 on 17 mission (most of these missions on which enemy aircraft were seen were on or near the HUNGARIAN front, although on 8 March three enemy aircraft were seen in North ITALY); no enemy aircraft were, however, encountered during the month. The four counter-air missions were highly successful. In each case units of this Wing dropped fragmentation bombs with the objective of destroying aircraft. The claims of 23 destroyed, 14 probably destroyed, and 8 damaged on the two missions against NEUBERG A/D and of 31-8-11 at KBELY and LETNANY A/D'S near PRAGUE proved to be conservative, so that the missions to NEUBERG were effective against jet-propelled aircraft, and the mission to PRAGUE was even more effective in the destruction of enemy aircraft from the RUSSIAN front.

Other notably successful missions were as follows:

4 March, SZOMBATHELY M/Y; 8 March, VERONA, ITALY, the Porto Nuovo M/Y; 14 March, NOVE ZAMKY (ÉRSEKUJVÁR) M/Y; 19 March, MUHLDORF, AUSTRIA, M/Y; 20 March, AMSTETTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y; 21 March, NEUBURG, GERMANY, A/D; 23 March, GMUND, AUSTRIA, M/Y; 24 March, NEUBURG A/D; 25 March, PRAGUE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, Kbely and Letnany A/D's; and WELS, AUSTRIA, A/D; and 26 March, BRATISLAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, Rangier M/Y.

To some extent the effectiveness of these missions can be shown in the statistics of bombing accuracy. For example, at SZOMBATHELY 26.1% of the bombs hit within 1,000' of the briefed aiming point; at MUHLDORF the percentage was 33.3; at AMSTETTEN it was 69.8; at BRATISLAVA it was 36.3. Since the missions against airdromes dropped frags (fragmentation bombs), these were not scored, nor was the devastating attack on GMUND, when, except for a few 250 pound GP (general purpose), the load was 100 pound bombs. This mission is of very special interest,

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

in view of the principle that for maximum effectiveness the 500-pound GP bomb is considered essential; reconnaissance photographs demonstrated conclusively that this highly concentrated attack in which almost all bombs used were of the 100 pound weight completely devastated the yard, and causing tremendous damage to rolling stock and gutting the car repair shops.

The mission of 19 March 1945 is of particular interest since it marked the first anniversary of the 55th Bombardment Wing's combat operations. During the year 189 Wing missions were flown. It was a great contrast to observe, on 19 March 1945, the dual force effort totaling 161 B-24 aircraft make rendezvous and to recall the two attack units totaling 33 B-24's which flew the first Wing mission against the marshalling yard at METKOVIC, YUGOSLAVIA, dropping 61 tons of bombs. On Mission 189 the marshalling yard at MUHLDORF, AUSTRIA, was the target, and 156 B-24 aircraft dropped 383.5 tons. During this twelve months of operations a total of 189 Wing Missions were flown (the 460th. Bombardment group executed 177, the 464th flew 159, the 465th flew 163, and the 485th flew 160; a total of 659 Bombardment Group missions), 21,491 aircraft were dispatched, of which 16,650 effective sorties dropped 36,971.5 tons of bombs. On neither the first nor the 189th mission was there opposition from enemy aircraft, but in the interim bombers of this Wing had validated claims of 278 aircraft destroyed, 125 probably destroyed, 106 damaged in aerial combat, while 73 were destroyed and 52 damaged on the ground. The first Bombardment group of the Wing, the 460th., flew its first mission one month and eight days after the arrival of the first contingent of its personnel; this achievement indicates the determination of the Wing Commander to have his organization operational at the earliest possible date. In order, the 460th., 465th., and the 485th. Bombardment Groups became operational on 2 May, 5 May and 10 May, 1944; on this date, 10 May 1944, the entire Wing was operational. This minimum time, taken into consideration together with weather conditions and the "normal" difficulties of setting up bases and effecting combat readiness, indicates an achievement of heroic proportions, and warrants historical notice of the calendar anniversary.

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

As a final point of special interest, attention may be called to the effectiveness of the period of 19-26 March, when on eight consecutive days a maximum effort was put forth with the result that 1,041 aircraft dropped 2,259.42 tons of bombs. When these totals are compared with the totals for the entire month (2,249 effective sorties dropping 4,774.045 tons) it is seen that on these eight days almost one-half of the effective sorties was flown and little short of one-half the month's tonnage of bombs was dropped. Fully to appreciate the significance of this achievement requires the awareness of the herculean labor of ground crews to keep the aircraft operational and to maintain the steady supply of gasoline, bombs and other ammunition; these personnel, as well as combat crews who executed the mission, were directly involved in the coordinated task of accomplishing so great a result in strategic bombing.

The month of March marked the clearing of the German territory West of the Rhine and the beginning of the swift strike toward the enemy's final positions. It marked the closing up to the Oder River of the Russian troops massing for the assault on BERLIN. In this month the Russian troops massing for the assault on BERLIN. In this month the Russians closed toward VIENNA; it has been noted that 30 March was the date of the Wing's final mission to that much bombed city.* Likewise this month marked the final mission against targets in HUNGARY, and so, too, against YUGOSLAVIA. All these changes in the overall situation were keenly watched and appreciated by the 55th Bombardment Wing personnel, with satisfaction in the fact that their efforts had done much to enable the ground force offensive against HUNGARY, YUGOSLAVIA and AUSTRIA, and with the determination that as the remaining operational area grew rapidly smaller the effectiveness of the aerial offensive should be the greater.

4. There was one change in key personnel during the month of March. On 29 March 1945 Lt. Col. Frank A Rogers, Jr. Adjutant, was transferred to Headquarters, Fifteenth Air Force, per Paragraph 9, SO No. 86, Headquarters Fifteenth Air Force, dated 27 March 1945. On 31 March 1945 Major Edward J. McClure, CWS, was detailed Wing Adjutant.

* March 30, 1945. The Soviet troops entered Szombathely, Hungary and occupied the country for 45 years.

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

5. Promotions of key personnel were as follows: Captain Earle L. Osborne, Commanding Officer, Headquarters Squadron, was promoted to Major (Par. 10, SO No. 58, Hqs. Fifteenth Air Force) on 2 March (date of rank 27 Feb 45); on 21 March Major Clarence E. Reuter, Wing Surgeon, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel per Par. 15, SO No. 76, Hq. Fifteenth Air Force, date of rank 17 March 45; on 29 March Major Louis B Whitfield, Gunnery Officer, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel per Par. 10, SO No. 86, Hq. Fifteenth Air Force, date of rank 27 March 1945. (SO = Standing Order)

6. There was no ceremony for award and decoration in March, 1945.

7. During the month of March, 1945, Colonel Charles A. Clark, Executive Officer, initiated the policy of weekly Staff Section inspections, held on Saturday mornings. All General and Special Staff Officers accompanied Col. Clark on inspections of the entire Wing Headquarters. Late in March there was also initiated, on Col. Clark's recommendation, a considerable re-arrangement of Wing Headquarters Staff Section office rooms. This change was made for two reasons: the overcrowding of certain sections, particularly A-3, and the means to secure a superior arrangement of space between A-2 and A-3 for the more efficient planning of missions. The basic objectives of the moves involved the shifting of the room spaces of A-2 and the War Room, so as to place the War Room, in which mission planning is accomplished, between A-3 and A-2. In order to secure needed space to obviate the overcrowding in A-3, it was necessary to move all Staff Sections in the main (East) corridor of the Headquarters Building.

The Map Room was moved to the room which formerly housed the Weather Section, following the Weather Section's move to two rooms on the ground floor of the Headquarters Building; this move had been made possible by the changes in the set-up of the 323rd. Service Group which vacated much of the space formerly used. A-4 moved into the former Map Room, A-1 moved into the room previously occupied by A-4, and the Adjutant Section moved into the room formerly occupied by A-4, and the Adjutant Section moved into the room formerly occupied by A-4, and the Adjutant Section moved into the room formerly occupied by A-1. This enabled the use of the space formerly occupied by the Adjutant Section for the re-location of A-3.

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

This aspect of the move had the added advantage of placing Lt. Col. Seeds, A-3 and his assistants, Maj. Jones and Lt. Col. Bonin, immediately adjacent to the office of the Wing Commander. In further detail, A-3 Officer Assistants had more adequate space, and the A-3 clerks for the first time had sufficient area for their work. All these moves were beneficial in that before moves were made the rooms were whitewashed, painted and thoroughly cleaned so that light was much better in all of the offices. (These Staff Sections will all be photographed in new locations as supplement to the Pictorial Section of this Unit History as forwarded for the month of November, 1944.)

(Notes on this document:) The second section "Part 2." of this report contains the Essential Documents as outlined below but the details on the 16mm microfilm are too small to read without the aid of a microfilm reader. (The "Cover Page" of this section "Part II" of this report is on the following page.)

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

Part II.

ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS

1. Operations Orders
2. Intelligence annexes
3. Weather Annexes
4. Weather Reports
5. Statistical Summaries
6. Consolidated Narrative
Mission Reports
7. Route Out Charts
8. Bomb Fall Plot Photographs
9. Bomb Fall plot Diagrams

Available on this Website now are the following Documents:

1. OPERATIONS ORDER NUMBER	#109	3 Mar. 1945	Plan Baker
2. INTELLIGENCE ANNEX NO.	#109	3 Mar. 1945	
3. OPERATIONS WEATHER ANNEX	#109	3 Mar. 1945	
4. MISSION WEATHER REPORT	#109	3 Mar. 1945	
5. MISSION SUMMARY	#181	4 Mar. 1945	

S E C R E T