

# **491<sup>st</sup> BOMBARDMENT GROUP, HEAVY**

## **MISSION**

## **LINEAGE**

491<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (Heavy) constituted, 14 Sep 1943

Activated, 1 Oct 1943

Inactivated, 8 Sep 1945

## **STATIONS**

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 1 Oct 1943

El Paso, TX, 11 Nov 1943

England, 1 Jan 1944

North Pickenham, England, Feb 1944

Metfield, England, Mar 1944

North Pickenham, England, 15 Aug 1944-Jun 1945

McChord Field, WA, 17 Jul-8 Sep 1945

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Eighth AF

## **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

B-24H

## **COMMANDERS**

Col Dwight O. Morteith, 10 Oct 1943

Maj Jack G. Merrell, 20 Dec 1943

Col Wilson H. Banks, 5 Jan 1944

Maj Alex E. Burleigh, 19 Jan 1944

LTC Jack G. Merrell, 29 Jan 1944

LTC Carl T. Goldenburg, 12 Feb 1944

Col F. H. Miller, 26 Jun 1944

Col Allen W. Reed, 20 Oct 1944-1945

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

#### **Campaign Streamers**

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

#### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citation

Misburg, Germany, 26 Nov 1944

#### **EMBLEM**

#### **MOTTO**

#### **NICKNAME**

#### **OPERATIONS**

Most of ground echelon transferred to B-29 groups and 8AF required to raise new ground echelon from personnel in UK Group transferred less personnel and equipment to 2BD Hq. as of 1 Jan 44. Apparently planned for 14CBW and North Pickenham designated as base in Feb. 44, but in view of advanced state of training of 492BG, 491BG rescheduled for Metfield. Four established groups in 2BD ordered to raise and train an additional squadron ground echelon each, one of the five ground echelons in each group then selected for 491 BG. These transferred to Metfield 25 April 44. Air echelon continued training in US, moving Pueblo AAB, Col. early Jan. 44. Began movement overseas 21 April 44 via Florida, Trinidad, Brazil, Dakar and Marrakesh. Some key ground personnel (145) ex USA on 11 Apt 44.

On 1 Jan 1944 the group, less the air echelon, was transferred without personnel and equipment to England, where personnel were assigned later. The air echelon continued to train in the US until it joined the group in England in May 1944. Began operations early in Jun 1944 and attacked airfields, bridges, and coastal defenses both preceding and during the invasion of Normandy. Then concentrated its attacks on strategic objectives in Germany, striking communications centers, oil refineries, storage depots, industrial areas, shipyards, and other targets in such places as Berlin, Hamburg, Kassel, Cologne, Gelsenkirchen, Bielefeld, Hannover, and Magdeburg; on one occasion attacked the headquarters of the German General Staff at Zossen, Germany. While on a mission to

bomb an oil refinery at Misburg on 26 Nov 1944, the group was attacked by large numbers of enemy fighters; although about one-half of its planes were destroyed, the remainder fought off the interceptors, successfully bombed the target, and won for the group a DUC. Although engaged primarily in strategic bombardment, the group also supported ground forces at St Lo in Jul 1944; assaulted V-weapon sites and communications lines in France during the summer of 1944; dropped supplies to paratroops on 18 Sep 1944 during the airborne attack in Holland; bombed German supply lines and fortifications during the Battle of the Bulge, Dec 1944-Jan 1945; supported Allied forces in the airborne drop across the Rhine in Mar 1945; and interdicted enemy communications during the Allied drive across Germany in Apr 1945.

On 28 October 1943, Col. Dwight Morteith, 491st Group CO, left Davis-Monthan with a detachment of 48 officers and 74 enlisted men for a period of special training at the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics (AAFSAT), Orlando, Florida. Traveling by rail, the group arrived on 3 November and on the 17th moved to Pinecastle AAF, about 10 miles south of Orlando. Here the men were to operate as a group under a simulated combat situation. After sampling the living conditions for a few days, the men got the feeling that it was impossible to get any closer to that objective without actually leaving the States.

On Thursday the 18th, the Group received its first field order at Pinecastle and during the next nine days flew eight missions, most of them in company with a cadre from the 489th which was undergoing similar training. On a mission to Corpus Christi, the 491st suffered its first loss. Aircraft 42-40365, a B-24D loaned from the 9th Bomb Group at Pinecastle and piloted by Lt. Arthur R. Emerson, was unable to gain altitude after takeoff. It hit a radio truck at the end of the runway, then struck a steel boxcar, hit the ground, burst into flames and exploded. The bombardier, badly injured, was the only survivor from the crew of seven.

On Sunday, 28 November, the men left Pinecastle to return to their home station, which had become Biggs Field, Texas, during their absence. Upon arrival, they learned that most of their ground echelon had been transferred to Pratt, Kansas, to augment a B-29 group. Then Colonel Morteith, 491st CO, also left for the Superforts at Salina on 20 December. As the days dragged by, 491st personnel strength was further reduced by transfer to other groups until only four full crews and a few extra crew members remained, in addition to the Group Staff. The gutted 491st with no assigned aircraft, no ground crews, and at this point very little hope of ever getting any, spent a pretty miserable Christmas at El Paso. It was difficult to continue any sort of training program. Crew members were sent to a course conducted by the 330th Combat Crew Training School, but found they had more experience than their instructors, and so the two units wound up reversing roles. The pilots flew test hops and ferry missions for the local sub-depot, as well as gunnery training missions for the 330th - anything to keep their hand in.

But on 7 January 1944, orders came through for the Group to move to Pueblo Army Air Base for combat training. An 852nd Sq. T/Sgt. summed it up: "As with a sweep of the hand the useless feeling became a thing of the past. Feverish activity became the order of the day... we felt the show was on at last."

Upon arrival at Pueblo, the 491st personnel were assigned to the 471st Combat Crew Training School for additional instruction. Again, it was found that in most cases, the 491st level of training exceeded that of the 471st instructors, and so roles were again reversed. Additional crews arrived almost at once, bringing the Group total to 24. These new crews were part of a sizable detachment that had left Tucson together after completing Phase I training. When their train reached Alamogordo, late at night, many of the crews got off to become the air echelon of the 492nd Bomb Group, while the 491st crews continued on. The incident was to prove strangely similar to a second meeting of these two groups - a meeting that would take place only six months later, but under circumstances considerably more grim.

Although the situation was still far from settled, (the Group had three different CO's during January) things were looking up. The 471st was redesignated a Heavy Bomb Group and moved out on 24 January, leaving the 491st in sole possession of the buildings, equipment and - most important of all - aircraft! During the next five days with 28 operative B-24s, the Group flew a total of 39 hours. The Morning Report for 31 January listed total Group strength at 142 Officers and 180 Enlisted Men.

February, though, was the month. On the 3rd, 48 full crews arrived from Blythe, California, to bring the 491st up to full strength in that department. February at Pueblo also saw the 491st acquire continuity of leadership - a requirement for effectiveness the Group had not previously enjoyed. On the 12th, Lt. Col. Carl T. Goldenberg assumed command with a sense of dedicated purpose that immediately gained the respect and, soon, the deep admiration of the crews. They were willing to fly their tails off for "Goldy" and he gave them every opportunity to prove it.

The month brought tragedy, also. On the 21st, six miles north of Eads, Colorado, a B-24 carrying Crew #1 of the 852nd Squadron came out of a cloud nose high, stalled, fell off in a left spiral and the pilot never regained control. Two gunners got out, but four officers and three enlisted men did not. A second practice mission on the same day gave 16 crews a realistic taste of things to come when a gaggle of P-47s jumped the formation near Grand Island, Nebraska. For a half hour the Thunderbolts really gave the Libs a working over. Many of the crews had never seen a fighter from the air before and came away duly impressed. A week later another mission was reduced to somewhat of a shambles when the 491st B-24s were "attacked" near Amarillo, Texas, by a flight of B-26s. No claims by either side came out of the melee that followed, but a good time was had by all.

March brought a long-awaited moment. On the 2nd, the Group's first flyaway B-24 came in and at last the 491st had an aircraft it could really call its own. Number 42-110146 was delivered from the Tucson Modification Center with 11.5 hours flying time recorded. By the end of the month, 42 more had arrived.

March also saw some departures. Because of space and weight limitations of the B-24s that would be flown overseas, one gunner from each crew was to go by ship. On the 28th, this contingent, under the command of Capt. Leslie R. Willson, left by rail for staging at Topeka. After staging, they were to join another 491st ground detachment at the Port of Embarkation. This second group,

which left on 11 April led by Capt. Verle C. Pope, consisted of a varied assortment of technicians, turret specialists, armorers, intelligence clerks, prop specialists, photographers, and others possessing equally esoteric MOS numbers. In addition to the Crew Chiefs (who traveled with the aircraft, replacing the dispossessed gunners) this heterogeneous outfit of 145 men represented the only ground echelon the 491st would take overseas. As will be described, activities were already underway elsewhere to supply the large remainder of the required ground support personnel.

The general level of training of the Group at this time was well above average. As we have seen, most of the original cadre that came to Pueblo had been training and flying together for almost two years. The Blythe crews had already completed combined Phase II and III training in California, and in effect were repeating the same program at Pueblo. Delays still plagued the 491st. A Preparation for Overseas Movement (POM) flight was judged unsatisfactory because of some straggling in the high altitude formations. And, after the first rush, the flyaways came in slowly and behind schedule. These problems, plus some debate at higher levels as to the Group's ultimate theater of destination, led to at least two postponements of departure date. In the meantime, the boys worked overtime on their formation flying until they had achieved a level of skill that soon would gain for the 491st an enviable reputation - as well as undoubtedly save many of their lives.

Then late in April, the word arrived: "The Flight Echelon, 491st Bomb GP. ...will proceed... to Herington, Kansas, for purpose of staging and processing..." The movement was to be conducted in five flights over the period April 21-25. Lt. Col. Goldenberg led the first flight of 20 aircraft on the 21st, giving the field a polite "fly by" before heading east for Herington. On succeeding days these "fly bys" became faster, lower, and a "hell of a lot more fun" until the last flight's on-the-deck antics led to the unfortunate confrontation by General Longfellow. Continuing that episode in Shy's words, the General "... subjected us to considerable bloodletting. in due time and after assuring him that 'the guilty ones would certainly hear from us' we hastily took off, climbed on course and departed - straight, level, and at a very safe altitude. Evidently commitment to a combat zone was adjudged to be adequate punishment, as nothing official followed us to our destination."

Upon arrival at Herington, it was found that Lt. Rock's plane (42-110185) had suffered considerable structural damage. It was left there for repairs and the crew forced to continue their overseas trip via some unglamorous ATC bucket seats. Some "face" was salvaged, when the necessary accident report reflected that "...the gear was raised prematurely on takeoff and turbulent air caused subject aircraft to settle back onto the runway. Only a superb piece of flying by the pilot managed to lift the aircraft into the air and on to Herington..."

The history of the Group's main ground echelon began in England on 5 February 1944. On that day the Commanding General, Second Bomb Division, 8th Air Force, addressed an order to eight of the B-24 Groups under his command which said, in effect: "The air echelons of two B-24 Groups (the other was the 493rd) are presently training in the U. S. and are expected to arrive in England in April. From your present four squadron ground echelons, form a fifth, which will be as strong and efficient as any of your present echelons. After you have done this, send me the rosters of the five and I will pick one to leave your group and join one of the new groups. I may pick the new squadron - and I may not." (Actually he picked only two new squadrons out of the eight formed.) In this

manner, the men for the 491st Group's 852nd, 853rd, 854th and 855th Squadrons came respectively from the 93rd, 389th, 446th and 448th Groups. All were formed and chosen by the First of March and on 25 April, the same day the last planes of the air echelon left Pueblo, the men began arriving in force at the new home of the 491st Bomb Group - Metfield, England.

The gunners and ground personnel from Pueblo joined them on 5 May. The two groups traded questions at about an equal ratio - the new arrivals anxious to know about night life in the surrounding neighborhood and the ETO "old hats" asking, more pointedly, "Where are your damn airplanes?"

By this time, the "damn airplanes" were spread out over several thousand miles of the South Atlantic Ferry Route. Herington had been muddy and miserable, but the Group was too excited to care much. Local artists appeared and, for five dollars and up, took on all commissions to provide the 491st planes with appropriate individual insignia. These ran pretty heavily to the usual unclad females with appropriate captions.

The crews were issued both cottons and woolens, thus giving no firm indication of final destination. Betting pools, ere organized to cover every eventuality.

From Herington the planes went to Morrison Field (West Palm Beach, Florida) where they received their first 100 hour inspection. "It was at Morrison also where we had to put more unsung artists to work painting panties and/or bras on all the young ladies on the ships, as the ATC had some prudish rules. Spoiled some great pictures, too..." (Strauss).

The planes left Morrison singly and at night. One hour after takeoff each pilot was permitted to open the secret orders for his crew and it was only then they knew for sure they were headed for England and the Eighth. Waller Field, Trinidad, was the first stop. Then came Belem and Fortaleza (or Natal, where some stopped as an alternate to Fortaleza). Here the crews emptied the Post PX, the most popular purchase being leather sand boots. These later became a mark of distinction in the 491st, serving to identify the wearer as an "original" rather than a replacement.

The hop across the Atlantic began in early morning, with the planes still flying singly. Destination was Dakar, where everyone was just a little shook by the noise and vibration when they landed on a pierced-steel plank runway for the first time. Engines covered against sand and dust, the crews slept in tents or in their planes under generous portions of mosquito netting.

The next leg, to Marrakech, French West Morocco, provided some excitement. Toward the very end of the flight were the Atlas Mountains, some of which rise to nearly 14,000 feet. To avoid the climb, the briefed route led through a handy pass that was supposed to be at around 8000'. Arriving at the range after dark, one aircraft after another flew up 'passes' that turned out to be blind alleys.

One pilot who wasn't worried about the route, though, was 1st Lt. Charles Getz in 42-110186. His navigator (2nd Lt. Ken W. Plummer), though young, had graduated first in his class and Getz had

purposely obtained him for his crew via a close friendship with the Assignment Officer. In fact, things had gone so well on the trip thus far that the crew had broken out some long black cigars purchased in Brazil and were really enjoying the trip. "Every so often, Ken would stick his head up in the astrodome, grin, and wave that stogie at me. Then his appearances got fewer and farther between until we realized it was his first cigar. Flying over the Sahara, the only green thing we could see was poor Ken. He was so sick that he couldn't even pick up his octant." Best-laid plans thwarted, Getz went up to 18,000 and Plummer gave up cigars. (But retained his ability. He finished the war as Sq. Navigator of the 852nd.) Fortunately, all of the other crews were able to avoid the mountains, although very few, if any, ever found that 8000' pass.

The flight from Marrakech to England - though made at night and under combat condition - was uneventful and after breakfast at Land's End, the planes flew the base leg to Station 366, Metfield. The first aircraft arrived on 15 May and the last on the 30th. Other than Rock's plane, which rejoined the Group later, no aircraft were lost or seriously damaged on the trip over.

Those last days of May 1944 were probably the busiest any of the men ever spent. There were indoctrination lectures on every conceivable subject - beginning at 0800 and often lasting far into the night. Battle stations were assigned and air raid alarms were forever interrupting the training schedule. Then there were the practice missions - learning "how they do it in the Eighth" (which turned out to be quite different from how they did it in Pueblo, Colorado).

While these problems were no different from those that faced every newly-arrived group, the 491st did have some that were fairly unique. In the ground echelon, for example, the experienced personnel that had been drawn from the other ETO groups had had many months in the theater and rather naturally expected to run the ground show; while the small detachment of like ratings that had trained with the air echelon had similar feelings. "When the ground boys from the States came over to set up shop, the clash that resulted was more or less inevitable... and much bitterness was the result." Another split personality situation existed between administrative men and the operational men. "Again, this was due to the fact that they were thrust together in the ETO entirely unknown to each other, having no previous chance to form a basis of cooperation or relative standard of personal evaluation. Even the most inexperienced eye could observe the existence of two distinct cliques and the hesitancy with which they dealt with each other."

Time was the medicine needed to heal these divisions within the 491st, but time was in extremely short supply. The Group, scheduled to go operational on 10 June, was under heavy pressure to beat that date if at all possible because of the impending invasion of Europe.

Goldenberg, seemingly able to go without any sleep at all, met the challenge head-on. As mentioned above, the last aircraft arrived at Metfield on 30 May. Just three days later, on the second of June and eight days ahead of schedule, the 491st flew its first combat mission.

In the early morning of 2 June 1944 the regular procedure for a practice mission was initiated. The teletype came down with complete data covering a simulated attack on an English town, crews were thoroughly briefed and then told to stand by for takeoff shortly after noon. at approximately

1100 the Tanoy announced that the mission briefed earlier was scrubbed and crews standing by were to report at 1300 for another briefing. Nobody really believed it but the rumor spread anyway \_ first combat! It was confirmed at the briefing, an extremely hurried affair in contrast to the leisurely pre-practice mission sessions. Target: Bretigny Air Field, on the southern edge of Paris.

Meanwhile the ground men sweated over a complete change of bomb load without the benefit of electrical bomb hoists. Each squadron was supposed to have four but none had been given to the Group as yet. Quartermaster was informed that 450 flak helmets were required and were to be obtained "by whatever means at your disposal." (They came up with them.) Confusion, to coin a phrase, reigned \_ but 36 aircraft eventually got off and, after a "fair to poor" Group assembly, tacked onto the high right of 41 B-24s of the 489th and headed for occupied Europe via Selsey Bill. Lt. Col. Jack Merrell, Deputy CO, led the 491st.

In the analytical language of the 8th AF Daily Summary the mission was reported as follows: "In the afternoon, 242 B17s and 77 B-24s were dispatched against six railway targets in the Paris area and Bretigny Air Field... Of the 77 B-24s dispatched against Bretigny, 13 bombed the primary, the remainder being hindered on their bomb run by cloud and ground haze. Thirty-nine tons of 2000 lb. GP were dropped on Bretigny A/F from 17,000 feet with fair results. The remaining B-24s attacked two airfields; 47 A/C dropped 140 tons of GP on Creil with fair results and 14 A/C dropped 44 tons GP on Villeneuve (sic) A/F with unobserved results. Five B-24s were lost to moderate-to-intense, accurate flak over targets and two more crash landed in England. In addition, 58 B-24s suffered minor damage and one major damage. There was no enemy A/C opposition and 52 P-51s and 48 P-38s provided escort. They reported an uneventful mission without claims or losses."

1st Lt. Bill Evans' crew was just a little uneasy about flying the "first one" in one of the Group's recently acquired B-24Hs (42-95310) while their own J, the LUCKY BUCK, was out for repairs. Lt. Russell E. Tickner, a bombardier, was awed at the sight of the massed invasion shipping that crowded the Southern English coast. First Lts. Getz and Hogentogler shared the apprehension that accompanies any adventure into the unknown sharpened a bit, perhaps, by the fact that each of these 852nd Sq. first pilots was 19 years old.

Sgt. Edward J. Freil, a nose gunner, couldn't get over how green and utterly peaceful the shores of France looked as the mission approached them. the peace was soon broken by some light and inaccurate flak. At the same time some escorting Lightnings made a pass over the B-24s of the 855th Squadron. "I heard a hell of a bang and told the top turret gunner to hold his fire \_ those were P-38s. I was a little embarrassed when he said he hadn't fired anything \_ what I was hearing was the sound of the flak popping around us."

The mission had hit the French coast three minutes early but made the first CP right on the button. at that point things came a little unglued. The leading 489th Group elected to ignore the briefed dogleg route to the target, located on the southern edge of Paris, and bored straight in through the flak the original route had been chosen to avoid. This change in plan succeeded in losing the 854th Squadron of the 491st, of which more later.



Leaving the IP the 491st "tightened it right up," rolled up the bomb bay doors, and headed straight and level for the primary at 19,000 feet. The flak was very heavy.

"We were #2 position in the low squadron — Lt. Evans was #6 off our right wing. We had fallen into position for the bomb run and at that particular moment I looked over at Evans and gave him a wave of the hand. Exactly then, I saw a burst of flak completely blow the #1 engine from its nacelle. The #2 engine also seemed to be hit but kept running..." (Stahl)

"We were flying #5 position on Evans' right wing. I saw the ship peel off and down, coming very close to the low element behind us and missing them only because they went into a very steep dive. The #1 engine had been shot away and there was just a ball of intense fire in its place..." (Jennings)

"We were lead ship in the low element. All of a sudden my copilot jammed the wheel all the way forward and as I went 'up against the belt' I saw Evans' plane slide over the top of the windows above my head. He was burning and couldn't have missed us by more than a few feet. We pulled up and continued our bomb run..." (Getz)

The low squadron of the 489th dropped on the primary, Bretigny, but the ground haze was so thick the remaining force elected to try the secondary, Creil A/F, located north of Paris. Again deviating from the briefed route, which involved going around the city to avoid the flak, the 489th headed directly for Creil by way of the Arch de Triumphe.

Meanwhile, the 854th Sq., led by 1st Lt. William M. Long, came down the run from the IP all alone. The lead bombardier got a good visual on Bretigny through the haze and the rest toggled on his drop.

Bombing at Creil for the main force was fair and the 489th headed for home \_ again by the most direct route. Unfortunately this took the formation over Beauvais, Rouen and Dieppe, and through a great deal of additional flak. One by one, four B-24s of the 489th were picked off and nearly every other plane in the formation was damaged to some degree. Nor was it quite over when the Group arrived at Metfield \_ landings had to be accomplished in darkness and halfway through the operation a runway change became necessary. After some anxious moments when it seemed as if every airborne B-24 was heading for the same piece of sky, everybody got down safely.

The usual telegrams came in. General Doolittle (8th AF) considered it "...noteworthy that your initial mission was flown eight days prior to your scheduled operational date." General Hodges (2nd BD) congratulated the ordnance and armament section on the "...very great number and weight of bombs moved in a relatively short time."

Col. Dent, 95th Bomb Wing CO, probably summed it up best: "Congratulations on the completion of mission #1. In spite of short notice, inadequate briefing time, change of bomb load and a night return, your organization accomplished its mission in a commendable manner. The ingenuity and determination exhibited today, when coupled with outstanding formation flying and well aimed

bomb patterns, will make your unit well qualified to take part in future attacks on the enemy."

All things considered, it wasn't a bad start for the 491st. there were a few afterthoughts. It was discovered that the 854th hadn't dropped on Bretigny at all \_ the airfield they had spotted through the undercast was Villeneuve, north of the assigned primary and within the confines of Paris. Lt. Long and the 491st brass were called up to Wing Headquarters at Halesworth to explain why the 854th had ignored orders not to drop on any target adjacent to the built-up areas. (This problem sort of evaporated when a strike photo arrived showing that the Squadron had clobbered the target without a single bomb falling outside the confines of the field.)

Then there was the fact that one crew was MIA \_ and the sobering thought that there would be many more in the months to come. Lt. Evans' plane had last been seen far below the formation trailing smoke and obviously in serious trouble \_ but its eventual fate was unknown.

Actually, the flak burst that had blown the #1 engine off Evans' Liberator also shattered the cockpit glass and stunned the pilot. The plane dropped about 3,000 feet before he regained control, and there the flak really zeroed in. A second hit knocked out the #2 engine, a third blasted away part of one rudder and two more holed the plane knocking out the intercom and severing the rudder and elevator controls. A few minutes later #3 ran away and wouldn't feather. The shattered B-24 struggled over Paris at 130 mph on one good engine, three tons of bombs still poised over the open bomb bay doors. (All crews were briefed not to salvo bombs over France.) Losing altitude fast, it became evident that there wasn't a chance the plane could make it and Evans rang the bailout bell about 15 miles north of the city. All got out including Evans, who discovered at the last moment that his chute had come open inside the plane. "I saw shroud lines blowing all over the place and figured somebody was hung up. Then I saw they were coming out of my own chute pack. I grabbed as many as I could and just fell out the bomb bay \_ luckily they all pulled clear."

All were subjected to German fire from the ground but only one, the ball gunner, was hit. Pvt. Raymond G. LeMay was dead before he touched the ground \_ his body nearly cut in two by machine guns. He was the first man to be killed in action with the 491st. The navigator, 2nd Lt. Malcolm L. Blue, was killed in landing after his chute had been partly burned by incendiaries. Of the remaining eight, four were captured and four were able to escape via the underground. By a coincidence the plane crashed and blew up on the German airfield at Beaumont-sur-Oise \_ a target that had just been attacked by 12 B-17s on the same mission.

The Group's second mission was on 4 June. Considerable difficulty was again experienced in getting the Group assembled and in the process 1st Lt. Clifford R. Galley in SACK RAT (44-40206) went into a high speed stall and crashed near Sizewell, killing all on board. Galley had just joined the 491st as a lead pilot and had 26 combat missions. Efforts to assemble in briefed formation were finally abandoned and the pilots improvised a new one on their own. Bombing orders stipulated that bombs were to be dropped only on the leading Pathfinder A/C (supplied from outside the Group) and all hands were pretty disgusted when the PFF crew missed badly and the 491st had to salvo into their error. The Germans fired a few rockets from the ground at the formation with no effect.

Mission number three showed little progress on the assembly problem, as the following quotations bring out:

"LEADER'S REPORT: (PARMELE) LED 95TH WING, THIRD WING IN DIVISION...ASSEMBLY POOR. LEAD GROUP, 49IST, SLOW IN FORMING AND LEFT BUNCHER EIGHT 18 MINUTES LATE..."

"LEADER'S REPORT: (SHY) ASSEMBLY POOR. ROUTE POOR TO IP, GOOD TO TARGET. MANEUVER AT IP GOOD. NO RALLY, ROUTE OUT AS BRIEFED. PLENTY OF ASSEMBLY WORK NEEDED."

D-Day dawned early for the 491st — CQ's woke the crews at 0030 for briefing. The frustrations of the ensuing hours are perhaps best described by quoting the diary of a participating EM: "At the war room everything was in a state of confusion. For the first time MP's were stationed at the doors checking everybody. Inside, the briefing officers had covered the target map with a sheet and a guard was there to dissuade peekers. After a while Col. Goldenberg came in and walked briskly up to the platform. The room grew really quiet, and he stood there for a minute looking at us. His eyes were tired, he was unshaven, and his clothes appeared to have been slept in. The men loved him, and when he spoke, the affection he had for 'his boys' was uncontrolled. 'Gentlemen, a day you will be able to tell your children and grandchildren about: D-Day. Time is short so all I have to say is good luck and give 'em hell.' He walked from the room and out the door of the pilots' briefing room, a tired man with the lines of responsibility plainly etched upon his face.

"The room was silent for a moment... we had a warm feeling of being 'in on the big one'... But as luck would have it the target was obscure and the Group had to return without dropping rather than chance hitting our own troops. The men were bitter upon return, freely cussing the fates that had deprived them of their opportunity. A second mission to the same target in the afternoon didn't fare much better..."

The mission the next day provided a new wrinkle - the releasing gear in the bomb racks didn't get along with the bomb loading of 250 lb. clusters. Twenty-eight hung up over the target and some of these fell through bomb bay doors on the trip home. As a result, four of the bombs were accidentally dropped northwest of London and four more in Portland Harbor.

The mission of 8 June is described in another diary quote, this time from a First Sgt. in the 853rd:

"Bad start today. I woke 14 crews at 2 a.m. Five were stood down. A sergeant on Christian's crew shot himself while on guard about 2 a.m. Christian was stood down. While leaving his ship idling a gunner from Snow's crew walked into one of the props and was instantly killed. I feel uneasy about today's mission but I hope I'm wrong. As I write, it is 6 a.m. and I'm off to breakfast.

"8:15 - Lt. Sharp's LUCKY PENNY (42-110169) lost an engine on takeoff and after Sharp tried desperately to keep airborne he dragged one wing and crashed on the field. He blew up like a firecracker. Two of his four 1000-pound bombs exploded and played hell with several B-24s parked nearby. Sharp, Rowan, Foster, Schopa, Buchanan, Rudolph, Jones, Frack, and Dathyn all got the black ring and they can't even find their parts. One hell of a mess."

Forming trouble was again experienced on this mission when assembly was attempted above 24,000 feet with contrails. "The formation was all screwed up and then, when we reached the target, we made three distinct runs without dropping. The PFF ship messed up the mission unforgivably..."

To add to the confusion, the Germans were having a field day on the radio. They jammed Buncher Eight and transmitted from the continent on the same frequency, causing quite a few planes to become completely disoriented. One crew (1st Lt. James "Paddy" Ormsby), thinking they were over England, let down through the undercast at 5,000 feet and found instead a very hot reception from enemy guns on the French coast. Luckily, neither PADDY'S WAGON nor its occupants suffered any serious damage.

Weather kept the entire Eighth on the ground on 9 June, but the following day the 491st went to Conches Air Field in France after another futile attempt to effect an orderly assembly at 25,000 feet with contrails. The next day the Group flew its second "double" with a morning mission to Creil A/F and an afternoon go at Porcares Bridge. The existing string of five missions without losses was broken when 42-95301, flown by Lt. Warren C. Moore, lost two engines to flak over Creil and Moore had to ditch it in the Channel. He received a DFC for his excellent handling of the aircraft. The comments of the Lead Navigator on the mission, made it clear that the 491st still had not licked its primary problem:

"GROUP DID NOT ASSEMBLE AS SCHEDULED. LEAD SHIP NOT IN EVIDENCE. NEITHER WAS ANY PROPER FORMATION IN EVIDENCE. PILOT ERROR OR IMPROPER PROCEDURE COULD BE THE ONLY ANSWER..."

Probably it was a little of both. The pilots were being asked to form at higher altitudes than they had ever done in practice and with more heavily loaded planes. To make matters worse every B-24, including the elusive lead plane, seemed to look alike when three dozen or more aircraft were all milling around at altitude looking for a point of beginning.

The nature of the problem had already suggested its own solution, and on the mission of 12 June the LIL' GRAMPER made her debut. She was an old B-24D painted in orange with blue polka dots, extremely war weary but highly visible. Taking over as Assembly Aircraft, the aging GRAMPER led her younger charges through a lecture-perfect assembly on her first time out. The same mission also saw the bomb bays full of frag clusters behave and fall on the target instead of England. Rockets fired at the formation again were ineffective and there were no losses. Most important, the chronic assembly problem stayed licked for good. It had taken nine days, nine missions and the LIL' GRAMPER to do it. One is tempted to compare this statistic with the fact that the Group went operational eight days ahead of schedule. With less than all of the problems (let alone their solutions) identified.

The 491st clicked off 18 missions in the next 18 days, eight of them NO-BALLS against the V-1 launching site complex. No mission was without incident, but several deserve mention.

On the 15th, UNINVITED (44-40124, 1st Lt. William L. Stokley) was holed badly by flak over St. Cyr and gunner Leondis O'Bryant caught a fragment directly in the face. Making his way toward the flight deck, he found the engineer and radioman both unconscious, their oxygen masks blown off. Despite his own injuries, which included the loss of one eye, O'Bryant put his own mask on one of the men, located walk-around bottles for the other man and himself, and stayed with them until they revived. In spite of the sieve-like condition of UNINVITED (the men later counted over 300 holes in the plane) Stokley brought it home and down without further injury to any of the crew

"Lt. Stokley did a masterful job in bringing UNINVITED in with no flaps and no brakes on June 15th. The crew tried 'chutes for brakes without too much success..." Sgt's diary on parachute- assisted landing. (Winston) Sweating out a return, Parmele, Merrell, Goldenberg, Goff, and Shy watch landing operations from the upper deck of the Metfield tower.

Both 1st Lt. James C. McKeown and his B-24 were seriously mauled by flak on the same mission. McKeown, badly hit in the ankles and groin and bleeding profusely, was laid out on the flight deck and given what aid the crew could accomplish, including several injections of morphine, while the co-pilot, Lt. Bob McIntyre, took over and brought the Liberator home on three engines. Arriving over the base, McIntyre found he would have to land the crippled aircraft in a strong cross wind -- something he had never done before. The first pass was unsuccessful -- at which point McKeown got up off the floor and, in spite of a serious loss of blood and the intense pain in his ankles brought about by the strong rudder pedal pressures required, landed the plane safely. McIntyre claimed later that his pilot couldn't wait to get down to collect his Purple Heart while McKeown (who was actually awarded the Silver Star) claimed he was afraid if they stayed airborne any longer the crew would give him more morphine -- and, according to Mac, a needle in the hands of a nervous gunner was as bad as the flak.

There were two missions on the 20th, and the flak was "the heaviest most of the guys have seen yet." HEAVENLY BODY (42-110155, 1st Lt. Dudley E. Friday) was hit by a shell that came up through the flight deck and went out the top of the fuselage, taking the radio operator's seat with it and leaving a hole nearly two feet in diameter. Fortunately the shell didn't burst and no one was injured. First Lt. Charles Stevens' crew in 42-95171 was not so lucky. One burst of flak shot away the entire nose section, instantly killing the navigator, Lt. Harold R. Meng, and the Bombardier, Lt. William F. Weck. The plane left the target area with two engines gone, a third was lost over the Channel and the remaining engine was losing power as Stevens brought the wreck in.

With the nose completely blown off by a burst of flak on 20 June 1944, this Liberator made it back to England, where Lt. Stevens, pilot, brought it in for a one engine crash landing on the beach near Dover.

"Stevens made a magnificent one-engine crash landing on the beach near Dover, but Fulbright (S/Sgt. Thomas E. Fulbright) and Peak (S/Sgt. Bernard E. Peak) jumped before the landing and delayed their chutes too long. Both were instantly killed. Meng's body blew right out of the ship when the flak hit. Stevens came back yesterday, is taking it hard. Larry Silk (S/Sgt. Lawrence J. Silk)

on Strain's crew got hit on the same mission and Jarrett (Sgt. Robert N. Jarrett), tail gunner with Lt. Boyd in JAIL BAIT, was killed by a hunk of flak that cut his spine in two. It's one hell of a war." (First Sgt's diary)

On 25 June the Group returned to Paris and again lost one to the vicious flak over that city. The B-24 (44-40129) flown by 1st Lt. Marvin W. Butler of the 855th took a direct burst in the bomb bay and broke in two just aft of the wing. "The tail section floated down slow and easy like a big box kite," but nobody saw any chutes.

With the missions coming hot and heavy the crews were grabbing sleep and chow whenever they could. Under the circumstances dress had also come to be on the informal side. One afternoon a group of men were in the mess hall grabbing a quick bite when the Passive Defense Officer came in and called their attention to the fact that nobody was wearing his gas mask as required by regulations. During the "discussion" that followed, the PDO was ejected from the building -- only to return a few minutes later and fire a tear gas grenade into the mess hall. Even after 20 years the mention of the incident to those present evokes more hostility than humor. It was a senseless act.

One of several H models acquired just after the group arrived in England, 42-95218 was inadvertently lettered with composite squadron code, 3X. It should have carried 6X for the 854th Squadron. Lost 21 July 1944.. (Winston)

The staff displayed better form in the following incident, quoted from the official Group Narrative: "Another outstanding performance reported by the Quartermaster Corps. One thousand baby-thwarting devices were issued to one amazing individual by the name of Lt. (John S.) Pabst, who made immediate use of the entire 1,000. No, he isn't the world's greatest lover. He is merely a communications man who got the bright idea that these articles would make excellent protective covers for microphones to keep out the English dampness."

Without doubt the June loss that was felt most keenly by the crews occurred, not in the air, but in the chain of command; on the 26th Lt. Col. Goldenberg left the 491st for the 339th Fighter Group, It was a great blow to the air echelon who had learned their trade under "Goldy", and these men openly speculated among themselves as to the wisdom, sanity and other qualifications of those responsible for the decision. But the pace of the war was too fast to allow much time for reflection. Without a break in the mission schedule, the new CO, Col. Frederic H. Miller, took over the 491st.

By the end of June the Group could look back on an eventful month with no small amount of satisfaction. The assembly problem had been cured and in the air the Group looked good. The overtime spent on formation flying back at Pueblo was paying off and already the 491st was being credited with flying "the best B-24 formations in the ETO." They had completed 29 missions in 29 days for a total of 895 sorties, more than any other B-24 outfit in the Eighth and exceeded only by three veteran B-17 groups -- the 303rd, 379th and 384th. During the last two weeks of the month the 491st led the Second Bomb Division (all 8th AF B-24 groups) in tonnage of bombs dropped, hours of combat flown, number of sorties per assigned crews, number of sorties per assigned

aircraft, lowest loss of aircraft and lowest loss of personnel.

These records had been set in spite of the fact that every other group seemed to have word of the missions hours ahead of the 491st, with the result that the ground men were constantly pushed to the limit to make deadlines. Commenting on the events of the 20th, for example, the Group Narrative states: "Some colonels from Division were down to give the briefing for the morning mission the once over. If anything, they saw a good example of the difficulties our briefing officers have to work under. An afternoon mission was worked up and dished out in rapid fire fashion. Within ten minutes the routes and other briefing matter had to be set up for four different NO-BALL targets."

Bomb loading was still accomplished without the help of the missing electric bomb hoists. Up until the end of June, none were on the field and the laborious process of hoisting bombs mechanically was the necessary substitute. Maintenance and engineering personnel were also doing without much sleep; the TO's for these units had been set up to service 48 B-24s while the 491st had shown up with 72.

With the coming of July, the 491st found itself often going to Germany. Here, the Liberators of the group fly through the flak over Kiel on 6 July. (Winston)

July saw a general change in targets from tactical to strategic, and over Germany on the 7th the Group encountered enemy fighters for the first time. The Luftwaffe came off second best, losing two confirmed Me-109s to tail gunner S/Sgt. Robert V. Ruffin in Capt. Long's BACK TO THE SACK (44-40249). In the main, the 109s and 190s left the tight 491st formation alone and went after other groups. The 492nd was particularly hard hit, losing one entire squadron, plus others, for a total of 12 B-24s.

On the 11th, Maj. Stephey (853rd CO) led 36 aircraft over Munich and the next day Maj. Strauss (852nd CO) took 45 to the same target. He brought 44 back. The loss, July's first, was 1st Lt. Gordon W. MacDonald. His B-24 (42-51113) was last sighted near Stuttgart with nothing visibly wrong but losing altitude and unable to keep up with the formation. The crew salvoed their bombs but were still dropping at a rate that made the 550 mile return trip to Metfield out of the question. Finally, MacDonald did a 180 and headed for Switzerland. He and his entire crew made it safely and were back with the 491st five months later. On the 13th, one of the June replacement crews, flying the still-injured McKeown's 44-40200, crashed on the return to Metfield. Five were killed, including the pilot, 2nd Lt. Max R. Shea.

Although there was no mission flown on 15 July, that was the date the 491st literally blasted itself into 8th AF prominence. On a sunny Saturday afternoon 1,200 tons of HE and incendiaries blew up in a series of terrific explosions that wrecked the Group bomb dump and rocked the Metfield countryside for miles around.

Five lives were lost, although none was from the 491st. The military reverberations were not long in coming -- with Lt. Gen. Doolittle, Maj. Gen. Hodges and Maj. Gen. Kepner heading the inspection committee that showed up on the 17th. Five B-24s, mostly from the 854th, were written off and six others badly mangled. The 491st went non-operational for three days while they put things back together again.

The Group contributed 36 of the 1,068 heavy bombers dispatched against southern Germany on 21 July. The results were not very satisfactory. The Primary was covered by 10/10 clouds and the squadrons were hard pressed to locate TO's through the undercast. In addition, the Group lost four aircraft. 2nd Lt. Stanley V. Scott took 42-95218 into Swiss territory with a fire in #2 and an escort of nine P-38s. He crash landed near Dubendorf without injury to any of the crew.

2nd Lt. Walt Kales in LUCKY BUCK (42-110158) also found himself with a burning engine deep in Germany. After eluding some fighters by taking advantage of cloud cover at 12,000 feet, he and copilot 2nd Lt. Larry Walker nursed the plane westward for 45 minutes. The burning #1 would not feather and eventually the available supplies of gas and altitude became alarmingly low. By then the engine and part of the left wing were glowing red and the LUCKY BUCK seemed to be rapidly vibrating to pieces. "You only needed to take one look at the pilot -- or co-pilot for that matter -- to know this was it. They looked like they weren't going to be able to hang on to it for another minute. I thought when they let go of those controls the ship was going to do a slow roll." (Cook)

"I think we set a new record for getting out. Walker spilled his 'chute inside the plane (An experience shared by Lt. Evans, as previously described. By coincidence, Walker's escape was from Evans' original aircraft.) and he and Kales didn't finally get clear until around 1500 feet. Nine men were never so glad to get out of one B-24." (Grant)

Loss number three was 41-28987, here described by the pilot, 2nd Lt. Earl W. Newton. "We flew into contrails and overcast near Stuttgart. Upon breaking into the clear, I found our group leader and several other ships reforming. We ended up in lower three position and continued on to the target with about enough ships to make a squadron. Then the flak hit us and our #2 failed. The formation was holding 180 mph indicated and even by dropping our bombs and advancing power we were unable to keep up. I turned and headed for home, dropping down a few hundred feet into the clouds. We threw out everything we could but then lost #3. At that point we headed for Switzerland. In about two minutes #1 failed. I ordered the crew to bail out and just as I did so #4 ran away. Believe me, I had one hell of a heavy glider on my hands at that point." All of the crew except engineer S/Sgt. John R. Miller survived the bailout to become POWs.

In the final loss of the day, ten men abandoned 42-51218 over the coast of England. Pilot 1st. Lt. Sig Liebfeld had brought a badly battered B-24 and his crew a long way in an attempt to get home. He alone did not survive; he drowned in the channel, 200 yards from safety, and was awarded a Silver Star posthumously.

On the 24th and the 25th the 491st took part in the well known close support missions that were to pave the way for the breakout at St. Lo. On the first day, because of poor visibility, the Group did



not drop and thus avoided the unfortunate "short bombing" results experienced by some of the other groups. When the mission was successfully flown the following day, the crews to a man felt they had really accomplished something. The sense of satisfaction in seeing the bombs hit from only 12,000 feet and the knowledge that they were saving American lives seemed to make this mission the most worthwhile they had yet flown.

Toward the end of July, in an effort to improve Liberator performance, all ball turrets were ordered removed from 8th AF B-24s. The turrets were considered of little value against German fighter tactics at the time, and the weight reduction did make the planes fly better. The next mission, caused some soul searching at Group and Wing Headquarters.

"Our formation was steaming along on top of an overcast when suddenly something came up through the clouds like a rocket, passed directly between two of our squadrons, and went out of sight going straight up. It scared the daylight out of us and it must have been a pretty wild ride for the German aboard, too. No one fired a shot -- we had no idea what it was at the time." (Shy) It was, of course, an Me 163. The exact date of this encounter is uncertain, but has been narrowed to the period 24-29 July and may represent the first sighting of this German rocket powered aircraft by 8th AF B-24s.

The first two weeks of August 1944 kept the pressure on with 13 missions in 14 days. On the 5th the 491st led the Second Air Division (formerly Second Bomb Division) for the first time; target Brunswick, results very good. Losses during the month continued at a low rate. On the 3rd, 2nd Lt. Marshall W. Field and his crew, July replacements, were shot down by flak over France in 44-40241. The 11th saw 42-10492 (1st Lt. Charles H. Christian) take a direct hit between the #3 and #4 engines just at bombs away over Saarbrücken. "The prop of number four was blown off. Number three started smoking and was seen to feather later. Ship was under control when last seen but losing altitude and air speed." (Hershey) An interesting example of wishful hoping is contained in the following statement taken from another pilot at interrogation: "At 1508 hours nine objects were seen to drop out of Lt. Christian's aircraft but we did not actually see any open chutes." In fact, all of the crew rode the plane down and Christian brought them in without injury near Nantua, France.

The Group lost an old friend on the 13th -- Lt. Rock and his crew left 42-50572 with two engines aflame over Le Havre. All survived but, of course, it wasn't known at the time. It was the crew's 30th mission.

Col. Miller led the Group on the 14th, which turned out to be the last mission the 491st was to fly from Metfield. His Air Commander's Report is an interesting example of how doctrine was still under active development: LEAD GROUP IN WING - SECOND WING IN DIVISION - GOOD ASSEMBLY - ROUTE IN AS BRIEFED - EXCELLENT RESULTS - EXCELLENT RALLY - ROUTE OUT AS BRIEFED - LIGHT ACCURATE AA FIRE AT CHALON - COMMENTS: SUGGEST CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO ROUTING OVER PARTS OF CONTINENT NOW HELD BY ALLIED FORCES - WOULD HAVE SAVED ABOUT 350 TO 400 MILES OF EXPOSURE TO FLAK TODAY - FLIGHT FORM CALLED FOR 12000' AT END OF DAL AND 21000' ON ENTERING ENEMY COAST - IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN 29 MIN ALLOWED IN FLIGHT

PLAN IF 2 BD DOCTRINE IS ADHERED TO 100% - CHAFF REQUIRED ON PART OF ROUTE COMING OUT BUT NOT ON SAME SECTION OF ROUTE GOING IN - THIS DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE SENSIBLE - PRACTICE OF HAVING GROUP MAKE A 180 DEGREE RIGHT TURN TO UNCOVER AND BOMB IS POOR FOR UNCOVERING AND SPACING - REASON IS, LOW LEFT, WHO IS SECOND TO UNCOVER IS ALWAYS BEHIND AS A RESULT OF BEING ON OUTSIDE OF THE TURN - THIS DELAYS LOW AND CAUSES EXCESSIVE LAG INTERVAL BETWEEN LEAD AND LOW AND EXCESSIVELY SHORT INTERVAL BETWEEN LOW AND HIGH - ONLY THING HIGH CAN DO IS LAY BACK IN TURN, OR ESS - MANEUVER SHOULD BE A TURN TO LEFT WHICH WILL AUTOMATICALLY TEND TO SPACE UNITS.

Meanwhile things had not gone well for the 492nd Group, which had gone operational on 11 May. Flying out of North Pickenham as a member of the 14th Bomb Wing, the 492nd, for reasons not germane to this account, became a favorite target for the Germans who knocked down eight 492nd B-24s on 19 May, fourteen on the 20 June mission to Politz and, as mentioned earlier, twelve on 7 July. In less than three months, in fact, 492nd losses had reached a startling total of nearly 60 aircraft -- a rate that could not be continued.

The ill-fated 492nd was taken off operations and, in reality, broken up. The designation 492nd was assumed by a provisional group, the 801st, which continued to operate as a special unit engaged in night operations over Europe -- the so-called CARPETBAGGER missions.

To replace the 492nd, the nod fell to the 491st. On 15 August the latter packed up bag and baggage and by nightfall the move from Metfield was practically complete. The next two days were spent getting things straightened out and on the 18th the Group flew its first mission from North Pickenham. (The 489th, while it remained at Halesworth, was transferred to the 20th Bomb Wing, thus putting the 95th BW out of the bombing business. The 489th returned to the States in November 1944 for conversion to B-29s.)

The business of tail markings suddenly assumed greater-than-normal significance to the 491st at this point. The 14th Wing featured bare metal (and silver fabric) fins with black stripes, vertical for the 44th and horizontal for the 392nd. It was assumed the 491st would adopt the diagonal black stripe formerly assigned to the 492nd. To the 491st crews, who were well aware of the reputation that particular insignia enjoyed with the Luftwaffe, this seemed an unnecessary bow to conformity. Without official action or protest, the green tails the 491st had donned at Metfield remained until the Germans got the word on the reorganization.

The other groups of the 14th Bomb Wing were ETO veterans, the 44th having gone operational in November of 1942 and the 392nd in September 1943. The Wing was commanded by Brig. Gen. Leon Johnson of Ploesti fame. The men of the 491st felt they had hit the big time at last and were eager to demonstrate their prowess alongside the 44th and 392nd.

Three missions later they got their chance -- on 25 August the 491st was picked to lead the entire 8th Air Force into Germany. It was a perfect mission all the way. The navigation was on the nose and the bombing nearly perfect with the lead squadron putting 75% within 2000' of the MPI, the high squadron doing even better, and the low squadron placing an amazing 100% within 500 feet.

Some Me 109s nosed around shortly before the target but again ignored the 491st and went after some of the groups further back. The mission was led by Lt. Col. Merrell.

The Group posted only one crew MIA during August operations at North Pick, and the loss, on the 24th, did not appear to be without hope for the ultimate safety of 2nd Lt. Norman J. Rogers and his crew. WHAM BAM (42-110107) dropped out of formation 15 miles north of Hanover with one engine smoking and feathered but under good control, and it seemed to be a good bet that its occupants would sweat out the rest of the war as POWs. On the ground, things took an ugly turn. Rogers and five others were beaten to death by a civilian mob and their bodies dumped in a cemetery at Russelheim. Two other crewmen were left for dead with them but survived and were later made prisoners.

Bad weather restricted 8th AF operations during the first seven days of September although the 491st visited Karlsruhe on the 5th. It returned to the same target on the 8th, again without loss. Then it was Saturday, the 9th, and these entries were made in the Control Tower Log:

0400 Briefing.

0800 36 A/C on ops. 264 -K aborted.

0805 Crash 2 miles south of field. All notified.

0830 Notified by Bodney Flight Control that there were 3 survivors from crashed A/C.

0840 Notified by Capt. Barns at Station Hospital that A/C was ours. Survivors were Lt. Warczak (pilot), S/Sgt. Chaves and S/Sgt. Boling. A/C was #489 F. Notified by Watch officer that 489 crashlanded after #1 and #4 caught fire at 900 ft. Survivors escaped through slit in fuselage. Load of incendiaries exploded.

It was the start of a bad week for the 491st. On the 11th the Group had another brush with the Luftwaffe. One aircraft (44-40226, Lt. Cloughley) was listed as MIA but several days later it was learned that MAH AIKIN BACK had managed to make it to an emergency field at Romilly, France with three gunners wounded and extensive battle damage.

The next day it was flak over Misburg. PAPPY'S PERSUADER (44-40144, Lt. Eckard) and LAMSY DIVEY (44-40170, Lt. Sparrow) were hit within 60 seconds of each other, each losing #2 and #3 engines. Both dropped down and back. Three minutes later LAMSY DIVEY went down spinning, carrying all but one of the crew to their deaths. Eckard's plane remained under control and all ten of the crew abandoned her in good order to become POWs.

The Group also lost two the following day, the 13th, when AIN'T BLUFFIN' (44-40246, Lt. Kenney) took a direct flak hit in the #2 engine and fell off to the left and down. As it did so, its left wing pierced the fuselage of TIME'S A-WASTIN' (44-40234). Kenney had absolutely no chance of

regaining control of his aircraft but six of the crew, including the pilot and tail gunner, Martin Leibenhaut, a veteran of 76 missions, managed to get clear of the falling plane. All were taken prisoner. The score was worse in TIME'S A-WASTIN'. After stabbing into #234 at about the right waist window, the wing of the other plane ripped back through the fuselage, tearing off most of the tail section. The plane headed straight down. On the flight deck the pilot, 1st Lt. R. C. Wilson, and co-pilot, 1st Lt. Paul W. McCormack, were trapped in their seats -- unable to move against the forces of their falling B-24. Then a moment later TIMES A-WASTIN' blew up and both of them found themselves blown clear by the explosion. One other man, navigator Conrad L. Kantzler, also got free -- he doesn't remember how. All the rest went in with their Liberator.

Four days later, at 1700 hours on 17 September, 40 B-24s came storming over the brow of the hill at North Pick, so low that it looked as if they would take the tops of the trees off. It was a practice mission. The next day the Group flew the actual mission to Eindhoven, Holland.

The 8th AF mission plan called for 28 squadrons of Liberators (252 aircraft) to drop supplies to the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions which had been airlifted behind the German lines the previous day. The drop zones were designated "A", "N", and "W". The 491st would split, with part of the Group leading the 14th Wing to Area "W", and the remaining 491st Libs providing a separate force for the Area "A" drop. The 20th Wing, consisting of the 93rd, 446th, 448th and 489th Groups, provided the Area "N" force. The 20th and 479th Fighter Groups were to provide close support all the way, the 78th and 56th Fighter Groups would operate on anti-flak patrols, while four P-51 Groups would provide area coverage over the drop zones.

The 491st had stood down for four days to practice for the mission. The crews made the most of the legalized buzzing, blowing down haystacks and stampeding cattle from East Suffolk to The Wash. Competition to go was keen among the crews. "A" Flight lead was decided by the flip of a coin, with Capt, Anthony Mitchell outguessing Capt. Shy for the slot. Lt. Charles Griffin, who probably held the record for blowing over more sailboats on The Wash than any other 491st pilot, was turned down because he had completed his tour in early August -- the first member of the Group to do so. He went out and blew over some more in disgust.

Briefing was at 0930. Just prior to takeoff a change was received in the withdrawal route altitude -- aircraft were to climb to the base of low clouds instead of coming out on the deck, The wisdom of this change was not apparent to many of the element leaders, who took the suggestion under advisement.

With the Group's DB-7, LADY JOSEPHINE V, up as monitor aircraft, 40 B-24s were airborne by 1327. At 1433, #117 J, which had aborted on the ground, took off to join the formation. Forty-one were now up and ready, and at 1453 the lead aircraft departed the English coast at 1500 feet for the 34 minute flight to Holland.

The formations entered Europe at 1100 feet, which was very close to the optimum range of the German ground fire. Although rated "meager to moderate" in the overall mission report, this small arms fire accounted for six aircraft (none from the 491st) between the coast and the target. The

squadrons, flying in trail at 30 second intervals, dropped to 600 feet at the IP and 250 feet or less over the target. Each aircraft carried a dropmaster from one of the Airborne units, and these men supervised the actual dumping of the supplies from the bomb bays and ball turret wells. The accuracy was exceptional, with very few bundles falling outside the assigned areas.

Coming off the targets the 491st planes were still all intact, although small arms fire had killed one crewman and injured several others. The gunners found few targets, for the enemy was using very little tracer ammunition and the crews had been briefed to fire only on enemy troops or gun positions definitely engaging them. The majority of the pilots, having decided to ignore the order to climb, came out on the deck all the way. This proved a wise move, for the 491st suffered less battle damage than the other groups that took the higher road home. Still it was bad enough. Shortly after leaving the drop area, the lead plane of the "A" force (44-40210, Capt. James K. Hunter) caught a burst of flak in the right wing section. With only seconds to work, Hunter (who was considered to be one of the best pilots in the Group) picked his spot and started to bring the Liberator in on its belly. At less than 50 feet, the #3 engine burst into flames, the right wing dropped, and was still too low when the plane hit. Hunter actually pulled the plane into the air again after the accompanying photograph was taken, but by then there was no more room. Hunter and eight others were killed as their aircraft demolished itself against the trees and farm buildings shown in the photo. One of the casualties was Capt. Mitchell, who had won the trip -- and lost his life -- on the flip of a coin.

Miraculously, one man did survive, S/Sgt. Frank DiPalma. "I was discovered leaving the plane by some Franciscan Brothers, and treated by several doctors in the vicinity. My mind was blank from the time we hit until the 28th of September." Sgt. DiPalma was hidden by his benefactors in a Catholic Church until the British Army liberated the town of Udenhout.

Second Lt. Edward L. Schmitt's aircraft (44-40414) lost an engine but the pilot was able to nurse it into Belgium and onto a friendly airfield. The plane was washed out in the landing but nobody was hurt. Things were a little grim back at North Pick when only 33 returned out of the 41 that had left on the mission. However the reports began coming in about an hour later. Stahl had crashlanded at Watton with very little port stabilizer. Bridges was down at Woodbridge with heavy battle damage; so were Ostrander and Meglish. Schamahorn and his crew were there too, although nobody knew why any of them was alive. The left gear of their Liberator collapsed on landing, and the aircraft wound up on its back and burning. The final score was an improbable and heartening one aircraft MIA. But nobody wanted to do it again right away.

On the 26th the 491st led the Second Division, this time to Hamm. The mission was flown at 23,000 feet but the flak was up there, too. First Lt. Francis E. Fuhr, who returned from Eindhoven unscathed, had a burst about twenty feet in front of his plane (44-10500). About three minutes later gas began streaming out of the left wing and soon burst into flames. "We debated putting the ship into a dive to try to put out the fire but before we could do anything the wing snapped right between the two engines" (Pearce). The plane went into a flat spiral. "Just as I was ready to go out

the camera hatch, the ship went into a spin. I caught hold of the edges of the open hatch and pulled myself out" (Alleman). An instant later the plane exploded. Three more of the crew were blown to safety, but Fuhr and the rest never got clear. It was the crew's 31st mission.

One more loss -- on the way to Kassel on the 27th -- raised the September total to eight and thus made it the worst month the Group had experienced so far. Second Lt. Harold S. Lew in 42-110186 (which carried the improbable, and grammatically incorrect name of "LE SIMULACRE RENEGAT - L'ESPRIT DES CEUX QUE NOUS ANIMOUS") dropped out near Ostend. The light flak had scored a lucky hit and Lew and crew bid adieu to Ballot Baker. After eluding capture for varying periods, all were rounded up by the Germans

On October's first mission, 2nd Lt. Dan W. Means and his crew were listed as MIA after their plane (42-95104) went down near Hamm with #1 and #2 smoking. Again, despite the chutes "seen" during interrogation, there was no bailout and all of the crew elected to ride the plane down. The unfortunate results: two POW, seven KIA.

Then came the holiday. For the next 26 missions the 491st seemed to lead a charmed life and not a single crew went into the records as missing in action. Several just made it back to emergency fields on the continent -- including 1st Lt. Raymond C. Toll, who managed to put his badly shot up B-24 down on a Spitfire strip without further damage -- and others were banged around a bit coming into North Pick with less than the minimum amount of engines, hydraulic pressure or gasoline. But the loss-free missions continued and the men felt they were on a winning streak -- really beating the odds. As always, the odds never stay beaten forever and in the case of the 491st, the house would collect -- with interest -- in due time.

On the 25th of October 1944, a sleek P-51 Mustang from Steeple Morton dropped its gear at North Pickenham, home of the 491st Bomb Group. Pilot Getz, former Liberator driver, had stopped by to give the old crowd an envious peek at his new mount. Getz, one of several 491st pilots who did fighter tours after completing their missions with the 491st, was assigned to the Second Air Division Weather Scouts, an outfit composed entirely of former B-24 pilots, and whose job it was to precede the 2ADs Liberators on each mission to report on weather conditions at the target. In the good-natured banter that afternoon Getz' former associates would not concede that Weather Scouts were really fighters, even though they flew Mustangs. A month later, there wasn't a man in the 491st who wasn't convinced in all seriousness that the Weather Scouts were among the "best damn fighters in the world."

The events leading to this change of heart began in the late hours of 25 November as the teletype in Group Ops began ticking off the field order for the following day's mission. The Eighth would be after four major targets in Northern Germany. Objective for the 491st: The one remaining oil refinery still in production at Misburg. The target was no stranger to the Group -- it was over Misburg on 12 September that the 491st had lost Sparrow and Eckard. But that was over two months ago and the Group just wasn't losing airplanes these days. Still, there were some who noted that the strike at Misburg would require deeper penetration into Germany than any of the other targets for the following day.

Briefing was at 0530 and by 0904 thirty-one aircraft were up and forming. At 1012, 44-40162 A+ aborted with a gas leak and, shortly after the formation left the English coast at 1030, another aircraft, 42-95341-W, turned back with no radio.

At 1111 hours this formation crossed the enemy coast as a part of the bomber stream. At almost the same time, some 150 enemy fighters attempted an attack on the B-17 groups at the head of the column. The Fortresses at this time were just approaching Dummer Lake, the point where the stream would split into segments to attack the four different assigned primaries. The German fighters were successfully driven off by the B-17s' fighter escort, assisted by additional area coverage fighters called in to help. The action, drifted southward with the Fortresses as they headed for their targets at Alten Beden and Bielefeld.

For the 491st the mission was uneventful until some 45 minutes later when it passed the Dummer Lake area. At 1155 three enemy jets were observed flying parallel to the formation about 2000 yards to the left. They made no move to attack but stayed with the Group long enough (it was reasoned later) to chart its strength, course and speed.

The IP, which the 491st reached at 1226, was the town of Wittingen. Located some 16 miles east and north of the target, it thus marked the deepest point of penetration and, in effect, the Group would bomb on the way out. Just prior to the IP-turn a large number of enemy fighters appeared in the distance, southeast of the bombers. They made no move toward the Liberators but were "just playing around in the clouds" as if daring the Mustangs and Thunderbolts to come over and mix it up. The chance seemed too good to miss and the entire close fighter escort, consisting of 197 P-51s and 48 P-47s, went storming after the Germans, estimated at from 150 to 200 strong. In a matter of minutes they were fully engaged, leaving the B-24s on their own. Area coverage fighters, as noted above, had already been diverted to meet an earlier appearance of the enemy.

The Air Commander, 854th CO, Lt. Col. Parmele, now faced a decision only he could make: "...whether to uncover his three squadrons in the face of imminent enemy attack or to preserve the Group formation and meet the enemy with a united front. Realizing that superior bombing results could only be achieved by uncovering, he unhesitatingly ordered this maneuver." The 491st wheeled into the Big Turn and came out on the bomb run. Almost immediately a chance mishap occurred in the lead aircraft of the low squadron -- the nose gunner brushed against the bomb toggle switch with his shoulder. (At this stage of the war most Lead and Deputy Lead aircraft carried an extra, or pilotage, navigator who normally occupied the nose turret. This put four people in the nose compartment of a B-24 which was considered overcrowded with three.) The entire squadron, as briefed, dropped on their leader and 30 tons went down into open fields 15 miles short of the target. In order to avoid further exposure to flak, which had become heavy since the IP, the low squadron veered away from the formation and angled for the rally point south of Hanover, bypassing the target.

This opened a gap between the lead and high squadrons and the low squadron was now off to the left by itself. With all fighter escort lured away, the stage was set for disaster. It came swiftly.

As if by prearranged signal, which it undoubtedly was, the flak suddenly ceased and another, previously unseen hoard of 100 plus German fighters (nearly all FW 190s) struck the high squadron like a scythe. They came in line abreast from six o'clock high, 10 to 15 at a time. The second pass took out the two B-24s of the high right element, Stevens and Budd. Moments later, just as the squadron was approaching the release point, Moore and Stewart were hit badly but managed to make it over the target before going down. Hite, Cloughley and Eklund followed soon after. The two remaining aircraft, Butler and Bennett, tried to join up with the lead squadron but only Bennett (ARK ANGEL 44-40073) made it.

The fighters now swung southwest and turned their attention to the separated low squadron, pressing their attacks home with almost reckless determination. They obviously wanted to finish their slaughter before the decoyed fighter escort could disengage and return. The pattern was the same, wave after wave in line abreast, followed by individual attacks from almost any angle to finish off the cripples. One FW 190 came screaming down from 6 o'clock very high and sliced through a few feet of space between the Lead and Deputy Lead Liberators. The crew of the latter, AIRBORNE ANGEL, estimated the German missed their plane by less than ten feet. Warczak's unnamed B-24 blew up (Warczak did not survive this one, his second B-24 explosion in two months) and a few moments later Wynn's SCARFACE also exploded. Vukovich's B-24 fell off in a vicious spin that trapped everyone inside.

the Liberator gunners were scoring too. T/Sgt. Gerald Burbank, top turret with Lanning, tracked an FW 190 as it came in from 4 o'clock. He opened fire at 700 yards. At 500 yards he began getting hits in the cockpit area and the 190 stopped firing, the pilot undoubtedly dead. The e/a continued to bore in, the nose going down just before a collision seemed inevitable.

Burbank's own plane had problems. Its bomb bay doors had not been open during the low squadron's premature release and as a result two of the doors were left dangling below the aircraft. The sight of the mangled metal of a cripple brought the fighters like flies.

In the lead bomber 1st Lt. Lester Faggiani blew up a 190 from the nose turret. Faggiani was the pilotage navigator but hadn't taken time to swap places with the regular nose gunner. At the other end of the plane, tail gunner S/Sgt. Donald Newsholme flamed another 190 while S/Sgt. Walter Jarzynka in the right waist took care of a third, sending it down in an uncontrolled spin.

The fighters accounted for three more B-24s before leaving the low squadron for more unfinished business. HARE POWER (Weitz) went down with its bomb bay on fire. First Lt. Robert W. Simons' GREASE BALL caught a fusillade of 20 mm explosive shells that killed two gunners, knocked out all communications and most of the controls, and set fire to the bomb bay. The plane dropped like a rock with only three of the crew able to get out. HOUSE OF RUMOR (Meuse) was also burning. As the pilot rang the bailout bell, bombardier 1st Lt. Harry W. Sonntag went through the plane making sure that everyone had the word. "I found Yuzwa (NG), Caruso (LW) and Byrnes (TG) completely ignoring the order to bail out. Yuzwa (S/Sgt. Samuel Yuzwa) absolutely refused to stop firing and put on his parachute." Sonntag was blown out while checking the rear escape hatch and the three



gunners went down with the plane.

Meanwhile the lead squadron, having reached the target unmolested, bombed with good results. With at least some warning as to what was coming, they had tucked it in as tight as possible and the gunners were ready when the first wave of fighters hit. Again they came in from 6 o'clock. S/Sgt. Michael F. McNamara, right waist gunner in Martin's aircraft, flamed an FW 190 on the second pass and S/Sgt. William E. Marsden, left waist in the same plane, exploded another soon afterward.

First Lt. Thomas J. Talbot, a bombardier manning the nose turret in Murff's plane, BIG'UN, also got a destroyed on one of the early passes as a 190 came in high, over flew his target and began his breakaway too late. Talbot picked him off going away and the pilot bailed out. The gunners in PADDY'S WAGON, flown by Lt. Campbell, were busy and accurate, with top turret, right waist and left waist each claiming a kill. Top turret and right waist in Greer's #462 shared a 190 and waist gunners in both #482 and #164 got probables.

Understandably, the radio had been filled with suggestions that the fighters return and do their fighting where it would do the most good. The first to respond to the urgent call were eight P-51s of the Second Air Division's Weather Scouts. Led by Bob Whitlow, who was to become the first Athletic Director of the Air Force Academy, the eight Mustangs waded into the 100 plus enemy fighters, broke up the coordinated attack and kept the 190s busy until reinforcements arrived. When they did, it was a fairly good turkey shoot, resulting in claims of 47-1-20.

With the pressure off, the remaining 12 B-24s of the 491st reassembled into a single formation and headed for home. The concentrated attack on the bombers had lasted only 15 minutes, with some sporadic passes for an additional ten. The high squadron had been completely wiped out and the low squadron had lost seven out of ten. (Lanning managed to make it over Belgium where the crew bailed out.) Due in large part to the timely appearance of Whitlow and company, all nine Liberators of the lead squadron were, if not wholly intact, at least still airborne.

The first returning aircraft to land was Greer. His plane had two flat tires and came to a stop at the intersection of two runways, blocking both. One by one the others came in, nearly half of them with wounded or dead aboard. The reaction of the ground crews at the hardstands of the 853rd Squadron are described below -- hardly award-winning prose but nonetheless authentic.

"Today nine crews departed on ops. The ETR was 1600 hours. A few minutes after the ETR a squadron and a half of the 491st planes appeared over the field but, as none of our ships were among them, we waited for the second formation to appear. But the clock moved around from five, to ten, to fifteen minutes and then to half an hour... At first it never occurred to us that maybe our ships had gone down. But gradually, after we had checked and rechecked with the tower, gradually we began to realize that such a thing could happen -- that maybe it had happened. We fought the thought for a long time, tried to make ourselves believe that the ships had come down in France or Belgium, or at least some of them would come back... But after interrogation, there was no hope left at all. Reports vary as to the number of chutes seen. One gunner estimates 95% of

the men got out. Others are not optimistic. A reasonable estimate would seem to be between 50-75% of our 84 men got out safely..."

Hope ran higher than reality. Of the 84 men of the 853rd, 50 were already dead and many of the rest badly injured.

Stevens had been flying his first mission since 20 June, when he crashed at Dover as previously described. Just after the first fighters hit, his engineer, F/Sgt. Joseph L. Boyer, yelled, "They're coming in again!" An instant later he was killed by a 20 mm shell, his body falling out of the open bomb bay doors. Moments later the plane exploded. Stevens, blown clear, again survived.

THE MOOSE (1st Lt. Warren Moore) was hard hit on the first pass, which left #2 burning, the bomb bay on fire and the intercom and hydraulics out. "Our engineer (T/ Sgt Francis S. Hawkins) went into the blazing bomb bay and opened the doors manually. He must have been burned badly." (Moore) Bombardier George K. Patten had been manning the nose turret and had tracked an enemy fighter too far, jamming the turret. Navigator Ross S. Houston worked frantically to try to crank the turret back so that Patten could get out but it was no use. Two explosions in the aft section sent the plane down out of control and Houston was forced to leave Patten trapped. Five survived.

Stewart's crew were on their 30th mission. Five managed to bail out before IDIOT'S DELIGHT blew up.

Butler's DORTY TREEK was shot to a shambles in the air. "There were two more fighter attacks between the time I ordered bailout and the time I left the aircraft. Yergey (B) and Fuller (RW) were dead, Callicrate (LW) had a bullet through his arm, Jones (E) and Ostrander (CP) were badly burned, and Trombly (TG) had been shot through the hand. The aircraft was covered by fire and all the engines shot out when I left the plane." Kamarainen (Radio) was beaten by civilians when he landed, but survived.

Bennett, in ARK ANGEL, succeeded in joining up with the Lead Squadron. "He slid underneath us. His whole Martin (upper) turret was missing and there was a large hole in the right wing. He couldn't keep up and was last seen at 1258 hours still losing altitude." (Fandell) Nobody knows what happened after that; nobody in ARK ANGEL lived.

Little is known also of the events aboard PROBLEM CHILD (Hite), FIREBIRD (Budd) or Cloughley's unnamed B-24. Of the 28 men manning these planes, 24 were KIA. German records do state that the wreckage of these aircraft, together with Warczak's from the low squadron, were so close together that it was impossible to determine what bodies belonged to what B-24. The remaining 853rd aircraft, Ecklund's, fared better; the entire crew bailed out and were taken prisoner.

Casualties in the other squadrons brought the total 491st bill for Misburg to 90 KIA and 52 POW. Verified claims were 7-11-3, which of course did not include any enemy fighters downed or damaged by aircraft which were shot down.

A Sidelight on Misburg is given in a letter from Col. William M. Shy: "The night prior to Misburg we were working up the mission in Group Ops. After the field order came off the teletype, Jack Merrell came down to go over the mission. Meantime, Capt. Verle Pope, our Intelligence Officer, had looked into his crystal ball and established that there was a large number of German fighters in the area adjacent to our target, and that they had been acknowledged through intelligence channels as having quite a potential left. These boys had been rather inactive for a while, and 8th AF believed that they were being held in readiness for one big effort. At this stage of the game our Group had never sustained a concentrated fighter attack, and Jack said he thought we had better shakedown our gunnery equipment and include a strong specialized briefing for the gunners going on this mission. This was exactly what was done, and Jack personally gave the gunners hell the next morning, since the night's efforts had turned up some careless housekeeping in regard to turrets and cleaning of gun barrels. I am sure that some of our crews returned home from this mission as a result of Jack's efforts with the gunners that night. This was typical of his leadership and foresight. I saw a few gunners go up and shake hands with him after landing back home the next day."

A final Sidelight on Misburg comes from the Control Tower Log entries for Monday, 27 November:

0050 Alerted.

0530 Briefing.

0849 17 A/C off on ops...

1725 Sixteen replacement B-24's arrived from Stanstead. Shades of Dawn Patrol.

Weather was the greatest foe of successful missions during December and January, holding the total for each month to thirteen. On 11 December, for example, of the 43 aircraft that took off, only six were able to assemble in the Group formation. Twenty could locate no formation at all and were forced to abort, while the remaining 17 tacked onto other groups and flew with them. It was in this confused situation that two 491st aircraft literally dropped out of sight. Lt. Fandell in 44-40232 and Lt. Meyers in FOUR-FIVE-TIME (41-28820) went into the records as MIA with absolutely no details known. (Later it was learned that Fandell had crashlanded near Verdun. The writer has been unable to uncover any facts whatsoever on the fate of Lt. Meyers and his crew.) The bad weather got worse and the following day's mission left so many of the Group's aircraft at other airdromes that trucks had to be sent out to bring back enough crews to fill out the loading lists for the next day's mission -- which was scrubbed at 0930 the next morning anyway. Scrubbed missions (or recalls), in fact, became the order of the day for the next ten.

If the 491st had any kind of target specialty, it was bridges, and over the months good proficiency had been developed in attacking this type of target. On the 29th of December the Group drew another, a railroad span across the Rhine. a 9/10 undercast prevented a visual sighting and the 29 attacking aircraft bombed by HG with unobserved results. Later events showed that no bomb had

found the target, but by that time nobody blamed the 491st for failing to destroy the railroad bridge at Remagen!

In the semi-darkness of early morning on 5 January the 491st attempted a mission that was designed to relieve pressure on ground troops engaged in the Battle of the Bulge. Again the weather was miserable and it was snowing badly as the ungainly Liberators slowly marshalled into position around the North Pick perimeter track. A green light from the tower and the first B-24, the forming aircraft as usual, took off and bored into the storm. Minutes later it was a torn and twisted, completely ice-covered coffin for ten men. Another green light and another B-24 began to roll forward, already bearing a load of ice accumulated during its wait on the ground. It never gained over fifty feet of altitude, crashing just off the end of the runway.

For the third time, the tower signaled and a B-24 responded. You wonder why. But this one made it, and the next one also. Before any more could take their turn at this particular game of Runway Roulette, the mission was scrubbed.

On 17 January a single shell dealt the 491st another severe blow. B-24 #42-51481, the Wing Lead aircraft for the mission, took a flak burst between the #3 and #4 engines. The wing broke off immediately and the bomber spun down carrying seven officers and five enlisted men to their deaths. The pilot, Capt. Dean B. Strain, was one of the last original Group pilots still flying missions. Cameras being readied for the strike photos followed the spinning aircraft down to the hard ground of Harburg.

It was during January also that the Group lost 74 men from the ground echelon -- "hurriedly packed up and shoved off" to augment the ranks of a sister service, the U. S. Infantry. Although volunteers were called for -- and a few stepped forward -- "the vast majority felt little appetite for leaving. Quite suddenly those minor discomforts and faults which heretofore formed sources for constant, energetic bitching, seemed to become conspicuous by their absence...." It was also observed that the knowledge that more such drafts might be forthcoming caused " ...a noticeable improvement of military courtesy and discipline" among the unchosen.

On the 9 February mission to Magdeburg, 2nd Lt. Kenneth A. Rowe and crew successfully abandoned MISS FRANCIA (42-51267) after it lost two engines on the way to the target. On his way back, Lt. Schmitt lost two of his crew through a misunderstanding. Over occupied Holland, Schmitt's aircraft suddenly developed a runaway prop that resisted all attempts to get it feathered. Losing altitude and still trying to get the propeller under control, the pilot ordered the first 4-bell "prepare to bail out" signal. The copilot pressed the button in once -- where it stuck. The engineer scrambled through the plane yelling above the terrific noise of the runaway prop that it was only the first alarm. there are always some who don't get the word and in this case it was the navigator and tail gunner. Assuming the bell was the final one-ring bail out order, both men jumped and were last seen floating down into enemy territory just as Schmitt got the ailing prop feathered.

A 491st loss that still remains somewhat of a mystery, is 2nd Lt. Howard T. Graham's on 22 February. Graham's aircraft, 42-50462, was last seen at 1340 hours as it disappeared into an

undercast ten miles south of Hanover, one engine feathered and the copilot calling for fighter support. It is known that all nine aboard survived, probably as POWs, but no member of the crew could be located by the writer to provide additional details.

Over Berlin on 26 February aircraft 42-50680 was seen to feather #3, drop out of formation, and take up a due east heading. 2nd Lt. Frank M. Jensen and crew were about to become the Group's first (and only) wartime ambassadors to Russia. "We figured we had enough altitude to make the Russian lines and when we thought we had come far enough we all bailed out at around 4000 feet." (Gamrat) After getting together on the ground, the crew found they had made their objective with 20 miles to spare. The Russians took them to Odessa, where U.S. representatives took over. All returned to North Pick via ship to Naples and plane to England.

Diary note for February: "The plethora of frankfurters and corn-willy continues unabated. And what in hell are those frankfurters made of, anyway?"

Operations during March were many and varied. The 26 mission total was more than any month since June 1944, and included marshalling yards, airfields, oil refineries, an armament factory in Berlin, a tank factory in Brunswick, naval installations at Wilhelmshaven and Kiel, Neuburg's jet aircraft assembly plant, and the "seemingly indestructible railroad viaduct at Bielfield." The Group also attacked the Headquarters of the German General Staff at Zossen, flew a screening force for the entire 8th AF on a mission to Osnabruck, and, on the 24th, flew another unforgettable low level supply mission. On that date the Second Air Division again was called upon to load its cavernous B-24s with supplies for special, low level delivery to U. S. and British troops which were to be dropped across the Rhine the same day. The 2nd AD responded with 240 aircraft, 27 of them from the 491st Group. "The accuracy of the drop was extraordinary. Only three aircraft (assigned to the British Zone) dropped west of the Rhine so that 86% fell in the assigned area and another 10% so close they were retrieved with little effort." Part of this achievement was due to the use of ground-positioned electronic equipment to signal the aircraft that they were passing the drop release line, equipment developed after the unfortunate "short bombing" at St. Lo.

As usual, these results were not achieved without a price; fourteen Liberators were lost, including three from the 491st. "I was flying next to Brown (1st Lt. James W. Brown) and noticed his #3 engine was on fire. I called him and told him about the fire. Brown answered 'Roger' and seemed completely cool as if he had the situation under control. Then a second or two later his ship (42-50749) blew up with a sickening explosion. He wasn't more than 50 feet off the ground at the time." (Kohl) Lt. Paul Fox's plane (44-40162) was seen to pull up into a steep climb with its bomb bay on fire. The pilot was evidently trying to reach a safe bail out altitude, but the plane went out of control, rolled over on its back and crashed hopelessly in an ugly burst of black smoke and orange flame. First Lt. Andy T. Wilson reported his GREEN HORNET (44-40286) was severely damaged by ground fire and he was going to crashland approximately ten miles west of the Rhine. No one escaped from any of the three crashes.

As with the previous low level mission, battle damage of the returning planes was severe, causing many of them to land at the first available field.

On a second mission the same day, 2nd Lt. Richard P. Rice returned over the U.K. with THE FLYING JACKASS (44-40239) badly shot up and the hydraulic system out. He landed at Marston without incident, but the next day a Lancaster came down on top of the parked #239, putting it out of the running for good.

The Group's last operational loss occurred on the 30 March mission to Wilhelmshaven. 2nd Lt. Robert H. Siek, flying the venerable HEAVENLY BODY (42-110155), had been losing altitude constantly on the trip home with an engine out. Ditching finally became inevitable, and the radio operator sent out the word. An Air-Sea Rescue unit was standing by when the plane hit, but the icy North Sea waters took a heavy toll. Only two men were saved.

The end of the month saw another milestone reached by the 491st. Ever since its operational debut the Group had been moving up the list in bombing efficiency, a kind of batting average that was compiled monthly for each group in the Eighth. During the period September through December 1944 the 491st had led the Second Air Division with 62% of its bombs striking within 2000 feet of the MPI. When the March figures were posted, it was found that the 491st had come all the way. For the period January through March 1945, with 91% in the 2000 foot circle, the 491st led the entire Eighth Air Force.

The Group racked up only thirteen operational missions during April, including two tactical strikes with napalm. Total air activity for the month was plentiful, as the Group's B-24s were pressed into service for flying supply missions to France and the practice mission schedule was stepped up. A strange outbreak of nose wheel failures which had begun in March continued during April and several B-24s went into the salvage column via this route. A few of the Group's aircraft, seemed indestructible and during the month General Johnson came down from Wing to present the Bronze Star to Master Sgt. Randolph H. Baker of the 855th Squadron, Crew Chief of 44-40204. Sgt. Baker had taken charge of the unnamed "204" when it arrived at Pueblo and it had now completed some fifty-plus missions without an abortion. Several other Pueblo flayaways were approaching similar records.

The day was April 25th, 1945 -- exactly one year to the day since Capt. Shy's encounter with General Longfellow as the last 491st Liberators left Pueblo for England. Shy was again aboard (one of two original members of the Group to fly the mission -- the other was Lt. Col. Parmele) as 29 491st B-24s cleared the runways of North Pick for their last operational mission over Europe. Strategic targets were few and far between in late April, and today the Group would range to the Czechoslovak border to find theirs, a rail equipment factory at Bad Richenhall.

An hour after takeoff old faithful PADDY'S WAGON came back with #1 feathered, but BACK TO THE SACK, MAH AIKIN BACK; Sgt. Baker's "204" and three other original Pueblo flayaways droned on with the formation.

In general, the mission was uneventful -- CAVU weather, meager and inaccurate flak, no losses, A half dozen Me 262s nosed around but thought better of tangling with the escort of 203 Mustangs.

One Ar 234 was encountered near the target and destroyed by the P-51s. A few of the boys toggled late and hit a forest instead of the factory, but the error couldn't have meant less, for when the last Liberator touched down at 1642 hours that afternoon, the war was over for the 491st Group.

Beginning on 1 May (i.e., before VE Day) a series of so-called "Trolley" missions was flown to give Eighth Air Force ground personnel a chance to see the results of their contributions to the strategic air war against Germany. No short hops, the six hour flights arranged by the 491st took their passengers all the way to Ludwigshaffen, Aschaffenburg, Frankfurt and Bingen, then down the Rhine to Dusseldorf before returning via Brussels and Ghent. The missions were popular ones, with over 74% of the 491st ground echelon choosing to participate. As a result, the 491st put up some of their largest efforts of the campaign -- including 52 aircraft on 7 May and 51 the following day. As usual on missions of this magnitude there were some forced landings in France and other operational difficulties. One of the latter is reported in the following Control Tower Log excerpts for 14 May:

0600 Briefing for trolley mission.

0730 Ten A/C off on trolley to Bassingbourne to pick up passengers.

0807 Eight more A/C had taken off on trolley when Wing called and scrubbed mission.

0834 Eight A/C landed. Bassingbourne A/C recalled.

1100 Smoke from plane crash seen ENE of field. Ambulance, fire truck and MPs dispatched.

1145 Wendling informs us one pilot and one A/C found. Pilot from Foulmede is OK.

1220 Lt. Edwards, Provost Marshall, says at least two A/C involved in crash.

1250 Second Air Div. Flight Control says that our #519 -G left Bassingbourne at 0837. There has been no report on him since. Overdue action being taken by them.

1705 #519 -G landed.

1730 Lt. Shaw, pilot of #519 -G gives following account of his flight; took off from here 0720, landed Bassingbourne 0750, departed 0837 with 10 passengers, flew Trolley, landed Bassingbourne 1618, departed 1638, arrived base 1705. Did not know mission was scrubbed.

On 1 June 1945 the 491st was alerted for Pacific redeployment. After reaching the Zone of Interior, personnel were to be given 30 days leave after which the Group would reassemble, go through transition to B-29s, and join in the war against Japan.

Preparation for movement to the ZI was under control of the ATC, which laid down strict rules for crews and aircraft involved. The former were required to take additional instrument and night

flying training which, though dull, kept the crews occupied. As for the aircraft, all reconditioned engines having over 250 hours and all new engines having over 520 hours had to be changed, which meant a total of some 80 changes for the 491st. In one period of six days the men really worked up some steam and finished 65, which they figured was something of a world's record. Next, all red-bordered Tech Order compliances had to be brought up to date, including 40 rudder changes and 30 vertical stabilizer changes, 75 ring cowl changes and many other small modifications. Theater compliances then took the stage; 25 in all had to be brought up to date. The majority concerned ditching provisions -- 49 ditching belts were added, plus eight command deck ditching stations and eight escape hatches. Two hundred hour inspections also consumed much labor. Finally, there followed a variety of detailed musts: oil and fuel consumption tests, weighing of each plane, thorough washing and interior cleaning, installation of cargo floors in all bomb bays, completion of all forms and, finally, lashing down all loose equipment such as baggage, life rafts, K-rations, tool kits and wheel chocks. Over 10,000 feet of rope went into the last job. Each plane had to be put through a final inspection and no more than seven days or 20 hours of flight could ensue between the date of inspection and the date the plane departed. This resulted in the various groups "trading around" to maintain eligible aircraft for the flight home. The 491st watched this quite closely, as it possessed about half a dozen "hangar queens" that it wanted to pass along as a gift to some other unit. The opportunity arose when Lt. Col. Jack Merrell's group needed a few planes to fill out a shipment. Merrell had been the 491st Deputy CO from Pueblo on through almost to the end of hostilities. The men all had hoped that he would inherit the 491st, but he was given command of the 389th on 13 April 1945. After smugly delivering their "gifts" to Colonel Jack and returning to North Pick for a celebration, the Group found that he had taken one look and screamed so loudly that the division commander made the 491st take them all back.

A few of the crews "shook hands all around" before climbing aboard these aircraft, muttering things about embarking on their most hazardous mission of the war. The planes were really not that bad, but had more than the usual number of patches in sight.

On the 17th, 18th and 19th of June, 81 Liberators bid final farewells to North Pickenham as they departed enroute to the U. S. The ground echelon remained for a short time to tidy up a few loose ends (including the disposal of over 12 tons of classified waste paper!) but on 4 July they, too, left for home via Scotland and the Queen Mary.

Reassembly took place at McChord AAB, Washington , in mid-August. A few days later the capitulation of Japan made the Pacific trip unnecessary, and on 8 September 1945 the 491st Bombardment Group (H) was inactivated. Its career had been relatively short in duration, long in achievement and succinctly summed up in the following quote from the files of the Eighth Air Force:

First Mission: 2 Jun 1944

Last Mission: 25 Apr 1945

Total Missions: 187

Total Credit Sorties: 5,005

Total Bomb Tonnage: 12,304 tons



Aircraft missing in action: 47  
Other Operational losses: 23  
Enemy aircraft claims: 9-10-3

General Order No. 135, Section 3, paragraph 1, Headquarters Second Air Force, Colorado Springs, Colorado, dated 22 September 1943; directed. the activation of the 491st Bombardment Group. Originally three squadrons composed the Group: 852nd, 853rd, and 854<sup>th</sup> with the fourth squadron 855th being assigned. while stationed at Tucson, Arizona to begin its training. At this point a cadre was dispatched to Orlando Field, Florida to take up its first phase of training. Upon completion, the group then assembled at Biggs Field, Texas for its second phase of training. It was in its third phase of training .which was held at Pueblo, Colorado, that the group actually came into its own as a full fledged group. At Pueblo, Lt. Col. Carl T. Goldenberg assumed command of the group and under his direction and guidance the final bit of training was completed and the group was ready for combat flying. The twenty-fourth of April 1944 saw the first plane take off and wing its way toward England. This was to be the home of the 491st B.G. while it flew into combat against the German nation.

As the flight echelon with a skeleton ground force was on its way toward England, a ground force was drawn together of AAF personnel who were already over in England. These personnel were to be the bulk · of the ground force. The station picked for this group was Metfield Airdrome, formerly occupied by P-47's. As the ground crews were hastily preparing the field for combat operations the first B-24 lowered its landing gear over the field on the 15th of May. Immediately an accelerated indoctrinated program was set up to acquaint the crews with combat procedures and tactics in the E.T.O.

Exactly 17 days later on the 2nd of June, the Group was alerted for its first mission. An airfield in France was the target. From that day on this Group became an important cog in the fighting forces opposed to aggression. From the first day our troops .landed on the beaches of Normandy the Group gave them both tactical and strategical support.

This included D-Day tactical support, bridge bombing, enemy troop bombing, dropping of supplies to advancing paratroops, marshalling yards, refineries, cities, etc. The Group celebrated its 100th mission against the enemy with a party on December 1st, 1944.

The Group had just settled down at its field at Metfield after several months of operation when the bomb dump exploded causing the grOUp to go non-operational for two days. Shortly thereafter August, 1944, the order came to move. North Pickengham, Norfolk was the hew field designated for the group. The moving was carried on. in very quick order so .that only two days elapsed before. Operations were again resumed. Operations were carried out from North Pickengham till this date under the green and white tail marking until we adopted. the traditional black . and white . insignia of the 14th Combat Wing. During the period from September to December, 1944, the 491st Bomb Group led the 2nd Air Division in bombing, with 62% of its bombs within 2000 feet of the M.P'!

Administratively the Group was continually rated excellent. 5,000 officers and enlisted men records were kept up to date daily. The men of the 491st performed their combat, technical and administrative duties in a highly efficient manner, evidenced by the hundreds of awards and decorations bestowed upon them. The paperwork involved to obtain, these awards and decorations promptly and expeditiously was tremendous. The importance of properly reporting battle casualties was an exacting task. There is no doubt that the technical and the administrative men stand side by side with the men who flew in receiving the honor and respect due this Group for its job-well done.

On 24 April 1945 the 491st Bomb Group was alerted to fly, but was "stood down", so its mission on 22 April 1945, which, was its 187th, was the last combat mission flown by this Group. For the two months prior to VE-Day the 491st Bomb Group achieved the honor of becoming the leading Group in the 8th Air Force in bombing efficiency. VE-Day came two weeks later. No other Group has ever been committed to action so fast and flew so many missions in so short a time, achieving such fine results.

On 1 June 1945, the 491st Bomb Group was alerted for redeployment to the Pacific, which would first take the personnel to the United States for thirty days' rest and recuperation leave, then transition training from B-24's to B-29's and subsequent shipment to the Pacific, to join the 8th Air Force which was already operating against Japan.

On 16 June 1945, the first flight of the Air Echelon left for the United States. On the two succeeding days the remainder of the Air Echelon took off. On 4 July 1945 the Ground Echelon boarded trains at Swaffham, England with the Port of Debarkation in Scotland. At this port they boarded the Queen Mary for the trip home.

The entire Group re-assembled at McChord Field, Tacoma, Washington, in the middle of August 1945. VJ-Day came soon thereafter mid the 491st Bomb Group was inactivated on 8 September 1945.

Three men have directed the destiny of the Group since it began combat operations two years ago. They are: Lt. Colonel Carl T. Goldenberg, Colonel Frederic H. Miller, Jr., and Colonel Allen W. Reed. They were ably supported by the following staff members: .

Group Supply Officer (8-4): Captain Neville H. Gibson  
CO, 852nd Bomb Squadron: Lt. Colonel Kenneth R. Strauss  
CO, 853rd Bomb Squadron: Lt. Colonel Harry M. Stephey  
CO, 854th Bomb Squadron: Lt. Colonel Charles C. Parmele  
CO, 855th Bomb Squadron: Lt. Colonel Escar Watts, Jr.  
CO, Air Service Group: Lt. Colonel Leroy Everett  
CO, Air Materiel Squadron: Captain Albert Sells  
CO, Air Engineering Squadron: Major William Neff

The 491st Bombardment Group (H), 2nd Air Division, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy on 26 November 1944. The group dispatched thirty-one B-24 aircraft to bomb the only remaining active oil refinery in Misburg, Germany. As the group, flying as an individual wing, approached the target area, enemy fighters engaged the 1st Division and all area fighter support was diverted to meet this encounter. The group's close fighter support was engaged at the initial point by 300-400 single engine enemy aircraft. The air commander had to decide whether to uncover his three squadrons in the face of imminent enemy attack or to preserve the group formation and meet the enemy with a united front. Realizing that superior results could only be obtained by uncovering, he unhesitatingly ordered this maneuver. As the bombs of the lead squadron went away, more than 100 FW 190's and ME 109's struck the high squadron and a vicious battle ensued to the point of release.

Fighting off savage attacks from determined enemy fighters that closed to within 100 yards, this squadron successfully dropped its bombs on the target and valiantly defended itself until the entire squadron was wiped out. The low squadron was next attacked by the enemy, who using the same tactics downed all but four of its Liberators. These aircraft rallied with the lead squadron and with their mutual fire support held the enemy at bay until friendly fighter support arrived. The 491st Bombardment Group (H), 2nd Air Division, was given confirmed credit for seven aircraft destroyed, 11 damaged, and three probables.

These figures do not include the aircraft destroyed by the fifteen B-24's that failed to return from this mission. Despite the vicious, relentless, and overwhelming numbers of the Luftwaffe, and disregarding intense and accurate flack, the small gallant force, stripped of its fighter support, courageously opposed the enemy for more than 30 minutes to reach this vital target, inflicting heavy damage, on the installations at a time when its operation was imperative to enemy's resistance. Photographs show that extensive damage was done, and much of the destruction may be credited to the valiant airmen who battled a numerically superior force, tenacious in his endeavor to halt the Liberators. By the outstanding valor, professional skill, and determination of the combat crews, together with the technical ability and industry of the ground personnel, the 491st Bombardment Group (H), 2nd Air Division, has honorably upheld the highest traditions of the military service, reflecting great credit on itself and the armed forces of the United States. (General Orders 181, Headquarters 2nd Air Division, 31 May 1945, as approved by Commanding General, European Theater of Operations).

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Air Force Order of Battle  
Created: 18 Jun 2011  
Updated:

Sources  
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.