

93rd OPERATIONS GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE

93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) constituted, 28 Jan 1942
Activated, 1 Mar 1942
Redesignated 93rd Bombardment Group, Very Heavy, Jul 1945
Redesignated 93rd Bombardment Group, Medium, May 1948
Inactivated, 16 Jun 1952
Redesignated 93rd Operations Group

STATIONS

Barksdale Field, LA, 1 Mar 1942
Ft Myers, FL, 15 May-2 Aug 1942
Alconbury, England, 7 Sep 1942
Hardwick, England, 6 Dec 1942-19 May 1945
Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, Jun 1945
Pratt AAFld, KS, 24 Jul 1945
Clovis AAFld, NM, 13 Dec 1945
Castle AFB, CA, 21 Jun 1946-16 Jun 1952

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Mildenhall, England, 11 Dec 1951-16 Mar 1952

ASSIGNMENTS

Eighth Air Force
Strategic Air Command, 21 Mar 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-24

B-29

B-50, 1949

COMMANDERS

1LT Robert M. Tate, 1 Mar 1942

Col Edward J. Timberlake Jr., 26 Mar 1942

LTC Addison E. Baker, 17 May 1943

Col Leland G. Fiegel, 9 Aug 1943

LTC Harvey P. Barnard Jr, 27 Sep 1944

Col William R. Robertson Jr, 5 Dec 1944

LTC Therman D. Brown, 6 Apr 1945

Maj Jacob A. Herrmann, 29 Jul 1945

LTC William W. Amorous, 6 Aug 1945

Col Henry W. Dorr, 5 Oct 1945-unkn

LTC Kenneth Grunewald, 1946

Maj Arthur R. Pidgeon, 1946

Maj Loyd D. Griffin, 1946

CWO Steve Stanowich, 1946

Cpt Joe W. Moore Jr., Oct 1946

Cpt Allen Milnes, 1946-unkn

LTC John C. Thrift, Aug 1947

Col Glendon P. Overing, 1 Sep 1948

LTC Colin E. Anderson, 3 Nov 1949

Col John E. Dougherty, 1 Dec 1949

BG Robert H. Terrill, Feb 1951

Col Richard H. Carmichael, 16 Apr 1951

Col John E. Dougherty, 19 Oct 1951-16 Jun 1952

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Egypt-Libya

Air Offensive, Europe

Tunisia

Sicily

Naples-Foggia

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
North Africa, 17 Dec 1942-20 Feb 1943
Ploesti, Rumania, 1 Aug 1943

EMBLEM

Azure, in front of a bend parti per bend sable and argent between two globes of the last with latitude and longitude lines of the second, the one in chief bearing a wreath vert and the one in base bearing a cross of four arrows, points out of the first, gules, or and of the fifth, a lightning flash bend sinisterwise or. (Approved, 4 Sep 1953)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Engaged in antisubmarine operations over the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, May-Jul 1942. Claimed destruction of 3 U-boats. Left Ft. Myers from 2 Aug. 1942 for Ft. Dix, arriving 15 Aug. 1942, ground echelon embarking on Queen Elizabeth 31 Aug. 1942. Disembarked 5 Sep. 1942 at Greenock, Scotland. Air echelon moved Grenier Fd, NH. from Ft. Dix and received new B-24D. Made first formation crossings of Atlantic early Sep. 1942.

On October 9, Colonel Ted Timberlake led 24 group airplanes on the 93rd's first combat mission against locomotive manufacturing facilities at Lille, France. The first mission was typical of things to come. German fighters attacked the formation as they were inbound to the target and the skies filled with flak as the Liberators began their bomb run. Several airplanes were hit by ground fire but, miraculously, only one B-24 failed to return from the mission. Captain Alex Simpson's Big Eagle was hit by flak over Dunkirk and went down. Five members of the crew were killed in action while Simpson, Lt. Nick Cox, Lt. Carl Garrett and Sgt. Michael Reardon became POWs. Sergeant Arthur Cox managed to evade capture and made his way to neutral Spain, with the assistance of the French underground. Several of the returning bombers had been hit by flak or fire from the fighters. When the strike photos were developed, they showed that damage to the factory had been minimal. After their baptismal mission, the men of the 93rd were prevented by bad weather from flying any more missions in October, but in November 1942 the group flew eight missions to targets in France that were aimed primarily at U-boat bases and maintenance facilities. While the rest of the group was engaged in bombing activities, the 330th squadron was detached to the Coastal Command for antisubmarine activities over the Bay of Biscay.

Early December brought bad weather in England and no missions were flown. Then General Ira Eaker, the Eighth Air Force commander, notified Colonel Timberlake to take three of his squadrons and go to North Africa for a 10-day mission. The 10 days would turn into nearly that many weeks. The 328th, 330th and 409th squadrons left their base at Alconbury, England on a long flight that would end at Tafarouri Aerodrome, a former French airfield outside Oran in Algeria. The 329th squadron remained behind, along with most of the maintenance and other support personnel. The 93rd was sent TDY to supplement the fledgling Twelfth Air Force, which had been recently activated in North Africa. The airfield at Tafarouri was very muddy, and even though two missions were flown, the group was moved to Gambut Main, an airfield in Libya, where the men of the 93rd were now attached to the Ninth Air Force. From Libya the 93rd flew missions against German and Italian targets on both sides of the Mediterranean in support of the North African Campaign. In Libya the 93rd worked with the 98th Bomb Group, which had arrived from the United States, and the 376th Bomb Group, which was in the process of forming in Libya from an assortment of B-24s that had been operating from Egypt after arriving in the theater piece-meal. Major Keith K. Compton, the 93rd's operation officer, was transferred and promoted to take command of the new 376th.

The group remained in Africa until late February, when orders came down to return to England. But instead of returning to Alconbury from whence they had departed, the 93rd was going to a new base at Hardwick, which had been constructed during their absence. After the return of the man body of the 93rd to England, the group resumed bombing missions. The 93rd continued to fly missions from England through May, but in early June the group was taken off of operations along with the 44th to begin training in very low-altitude operations.

Lt. Col. Addison Baker, the former squadron commander of the 328th BS, took command of the group. On June 26, 1943 Baker led the 93rd out of England for La Senia Aerodrome at Oran. The 93rd was back in North Africa, but this time the whole group was there, along with two other Eighth Air Force B-24 groups. On June 27 the group moved again, this time to Terria, a base in Libya. The three Eighth Air Force B-24 groups joined the 98th and 376th of the Ninth Air Force as every available B-24 in the ETO was concentrated in North Africa. After their arrival in Libya the 93rd joined other Liberator groups on missions to Italy and Sicily in support of the invasion of Sicily, which took place on July 9. Ten missions were flown out of Libya against targets on the north shores of the Mediterranean, including the first mission to Rome on July 19, and then the group stood down in preparation for the most famous Liberator mission of the war, and possibly the most dangerous mission ever flown by American bomber crews - the low-altitude mission against the Ploesti Oil Fields in Romania. Located in the foothills of the Transylvanian Alps, Ploesti was the major source of petroleum products for Axis forces in the Mediterranean.

In the belief that a "knockout blow" against Ploesti would shorten the war in Europe, the Allied leadership at the Casablanca Conference decided to attack the refineries. Col. Jacob Smart, a planner on the staff of Army Air Forces commander General Henry H. Arnold, believed that a low-altitude attack would not only allow pinpoint accuracy, it would also catch the defenders by surprise and reduce casualties, which were expected to be very heavy. The plan called for the 93rd to be the second group in the lead formation, with the group split into two forces. Force A was to

hit the Concordia Refinery complex while Force B was to hit the Standard Petrol and Unirea Sperantza blocks, which were labeled Targets White Two and Three, respectively. "Tidal Wave," as the mission was named, started to go wrong when German detection devices in the Alps picked up the ignition systems of the 178 Liberators as soon as they took off from their bases around Benghazi on Sunday, August 1, 1943. All Axis air defenses were alerted that a major mission was underway. Though the Allies did not appreciate its magnitude, a massive defense system had been built up around the refineries, making Ploesti possibly the most heavily defended target in the world. Dozens of large caliber anti-aircraft guns had been installed around the complex while literally hundreds of smaller automatic weapons defended against attack by low-flying aircraft. Barrage balloons were positioned around the refineries, though the planners had anticipated that the wings of the low-flying B-24s would cut their tethers. There were also several squadrons of German and Romanian fighters based in the region, as well as in neighboring Bulgaria and other countries along the route.

The lead elements of the Tidal Wave force reached the vicinity of the refineries before they were attacked. An unfortunate error by Col. K.K. Compton led the formation into a turn short of the Initial Approach Point. The formation of B-24s was headed for Bucharest, though Colonel Baker and other pilots and navigators in the formation were aware of the error. Seeing the stacks of the refinery through a veil of rain showers to his left, Colonel Baker led the 93rd into a left turn to attack the refineries, even though they were out of position for an attack on their assigned target. By this time enemy fighters had found the formation and the Battle of Ploesti was underway. After breaking formation with the errant 376th, Colonel Baker took the two forces of the 93rd down to treetop altitudes. As they approached the refinery complex, the low-flying B-24s encountered terrible ground fire. Since the targets for which they had been briefed were on the other side of the city, the 93rd made for targets of opportunity, which happened to be the targets that had been assigned to the 98th and 44th groups, which had fallen behind the lead formation and lost all visual contact with the airplanes that preceded them. Airplane after airplane was hit by ground fire; crew members were killed and wounded and some airplanes were shot down, but the two elements of the 93rd group held their formation. Colonel Baker's airplane took numerous hits as it approached the refinery and caught fire, but the 93rd group commander held his course and led Force A over the target he had selected as the stricken bomber continued to take hit after hit. Two miles from the bomb line Baker jettisoned his bombs in attempt to keep the Liberator in the air. After crossing over the stacks, the airplane pitched over on one wing and crashed in a wheat field. Baker and his copilot, Major John Jerstad, would be awarded the Medal of Honor for leading their group over the target in their burning airplane. Of the thirty-nine 93rd B-24s that took off from Benghazi, thirty-four reached the target. Only fifteen came away from the target in formation and of those, only five escaped with little damage.

To replace Lt. Col. Baker, Colonel Leland Fiegel, who had been with the 93rd for a brief time in the United States, was brought to Africa to take command of the group. There was a stand-down of a week and a half after Ploesti, then on August 13 crews from the group participated in the first US attack on the aircraft factories at Wiener-Nuestadt, Austria. Three days later the B-24s bombed Foggia, then went there again three days after that. On August 24, the Eighth Air Force groups began their return to England. When the group returned to England, the surviving veterans who

had completed the required 25 missions were sent home and their places were taken by replacement crews that had just arrived from the United States. The battle-weary B-24Ds also began to be replaced, by brand-new B-24H and J-models that featured a power turret in the nose. Because of their limited strength after Ploesti, the B-24 groups were assigned primarily to diversion missions to draw fighters away from the B-17s and for attacks on targets in France.

But only a little more than two weeks after they returned to England, the men of the 93rd, along with their peers in the 44th and 389th, were alerted to return to North Africa, this time to Tunis. Once in North Africa, the B-24 groups joined the remnants of the two Ninth Air Force Liberator groups in attacks on targets in Italy and Austria, including a second attack on Wiener-Nuestadt, a mission that turned out to be another costly day for the B-24s. Fortunately for the men of the 93rd, most of the losses were taken by the 44th, which had a reputation as a "hard-luck" outfit. After Wiener-Nuestadt, the 93rd and the rest of the Second Air Division returned to England. For the rest of the war the Eighth Air Force B-24s would operate along with their sister groups which flew B-17s in the aerial assault on Germany. Even though the group was no longer "travelling," it was still very much in the war. The 93rd arrived back in England with the other two Eighth Air Force Liberator groups as the US Army was beginning a huge buildup of heavy bomber forces to attack German targets in preparation for the invasion of Normandy. The Circus arrived back in Europe just in time for their first anniversary as a combat unit. The 93rd had flown 72 missions in one year of combat, including the most dangerous bomber mission of World War II. But there was more to come. While the Eighth Air Force Liberators were in Africa, their B-17 counterparts had continued a bombing campaign against targets in Germany and occupied Europe. The 93rd joined the other Liberator groups and the B-17s in a continuation of the air war against Germany. The first missions were flown against targets such as submarine pens at Vegasack and Danzig, Poland. On October 14 eighteen 93rd Liberators joined the mission to Schweinfurt, Germany. But the B-24 groups were unable to assemble in the bad weather that had built-up in their assembly area and only the 93rd and 392nd were able to depart for the target. Colonel Leland Fiegel, the 93rd commander, was in the lead airplane. When his force had dwindled down to only 22 airplanes, he realized they were too small to continue on to the target. Instead, he led the Liberators on a diversion mission to draw attention away from the B-17s who ran into disaster over the target.

Other missions were aimed at German V-bomb sites in the Pas de Calais region of France and still others were against German oil refineries and synthetic oil production plants. As the planned - though secret - date for the planned invasion of Normandy approached, the heavy bombers were dispatched against transportation targets in France. On D-Day itself, 93rd crews joined other Eighth Air Force heavy bomber crews on missions in support of the landings. With Allied ground troops on French soil, the heavy bombers were used primarily in a tactical role for several weeks. It wasn't until June 18 that 93rd crews returned to strategic bombing, in a mission against fighter bases in the vicinity of Hamburg. From then on for the rest of the war, 93rd and other Liberator groups alternated between strategic and tactical targets. In early August the Allies broke out of the Normandy beachhead and began a rapid advance across France. General George Patton's Third Army moved so fast that his tank columns quickly outran their lines of supply. The Ninth Air Force troop carrier groups were heavily burdened, so some Liberator groups, including the 93rd, were taken off of bombing operations and assigned to transport duty. The airplanes were filled with 5-

gallon "Jerry" cans of gasoline, and were flown into newly captured German airfields in France where the cargo was transferred to trucks for delivery to the advancing tanks. Fuel was not the only cargo carried by the B-24s. Some missions transported "mercy" supplies, such as blood plasma as well as food, automobile parts and even drinking water. By the end of August more than 25% of the 93rd's strength was devoted to transport missions. The most dangerous of the "trucking" missions, as the Liberator crewman referred to the cargo missions, were the airdrops in support of the Allied airborne army which landed by parachute and glider in the vicinity of Arnhem, in Holland.

Since the Ninth Air Force Troop Carrier Command was heavily tasked with moving reinforcements to the area, the job of delivering supplies fell to B-24 crews, including the 93rd. On September 18, the 93rd dispatched 18 Liberators on a drop mission in support of the paratroops. The drops required very low altitude flying that brought back memories of the Ploesti mission of the year before. As the low-flying Liberators approached the drop zone, German anti-aircraft gunners opened up on them. Two 93rd Liberators were shot down on the drop mission that day, while five others were lost by other groups. In December the Germans launched a massive counterattack against Allied forces in Belgium. Bad weather kept the heavy bombers on the ground for several days, but on Christmas Day the weather finally broke and the 93rd joined other Liberator groups attacking German transportation in support of the troops fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. The German offensive lost steam as the motorized battalions ran out of fuel. Their lack of fuel was a tribute to the tremendous work that had been done by Eighth and Fifteenth Air Force heavy bombers over the preceding years. As the new year dawned, it became more and more apparent that the war in Europe was winding down. Though the German Luftwaffe was still a potent threat, its lack of fuel and experienced pilots kept it from living up to its potential.

By April the mission planners in England were running out of targets. On April 30, 1945 the entire Eighth Air Force stood down because there were no targets left to bomb. The air war in Europe was over. When the war in Europe ended, the Circus had achieved an unparalleled record. Not only had the 93rd flown more missions than any other B-24 equipped group, it had done so while achieving the lowest rate in casualties. While flying 396 missions and 8,169 sorties, the 93rd lost only 100 airplanes in combat. Forty other 93rd airplanes were lost in non-combat related incidents and accidents. Casualties among the men of the Circus were 670 KIA/MIA. Gunners assigned to 93rd airplanes were credited with 93 enemy fighters and 41 probables.

Redeployed USA May/Jun. 1945. First aircraft left UK 24 May 1945. Ground echelon sailed Queen Mary 15 Jun. 1945 arriving New York 20 Jun. 1945. Personnel to Camp Shanks 20 Jun. 1945 then 30 days R & R.

First Mission: 9 Oct 1942

Last Mission: 25 Apr 1945

Total Missions: 396

Total Credit Sorties: 8,169

Total Bomb Tonnage: 19,004 tons

Aircraft Missing in Action: 100

Other Operational Losses: 40

Enemy aircraft Claims: 93-41-44

In June of 1945, the group returned to the U.S. re-equipped with B-29 Bombers. It moved to Castle AFB, California and became a part of Strategic Air Command in March of 1946. There it achieved and maintained combat readiness for global strategic bombardment in the early days of the cold war and was a premier guardian of peace throughout the cold war era.

In 1949, the wing received its first B-50, an improved version of the B-29. It struck up operations overseas with the deployment of its tactical force to RAF Mildenhall, England (July 1950-Jan 1951) in response to communist aggression on the Korean peninsula.

The 93rd continued to move forward throughout the 1950s, re-equipping with the most advanced aircraft available, including SAC's first B-52 Stratofortress in June of 1955 and SAC's first KC-135A in January of 1957. It became SAC's primary B-52 aircrew training organization in 1956.

As SAC's alert commitment grew during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the 93rd provided a strong and capable force for deterrence. Cold War tensions reached new heights during this time period with events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

Throughout the height of the Vietnam era (1968 - 1974) the wing operated a special B-52 aircrew replacement training unit to support SAC's B-52 operations in Southeast Asia.

Finally, in August of 1990 the 93rd found itself back at war. At home its support units operated an aerial port of embarkation for personnel and equipment deploying to Southwest Asia (SWA). Overseas its KC-135s refueled planes and ferried personnel and equipment to the region, while its B-52s bombed the Iraqi Republican Guard and targeted Iraqi infrastructure throughout January and February 1991.

The Air Force underwent major restructuring after the war, during which the 93rd lost its air refueling commitment, its KC-135 aircrew training missions, and was redesignated as the 93rd Bomb Wing. Shortly afterwards nationwide base closures targeted Castle AFB and the 93rd inactivated on 30 September 1995. This was not the end of the 93rd. Just four months later it was redesignated as the 93rd Air Control Wing and activated at Robins AFB, Georgia on 29 January 1996. It was to be equipped with the E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (Joint STARS) and it accepted its first production aircraft on 11 June 1996.

From late October through December 1996, the wing deployed to Rhein-Main AB, Germany for operations JOINT ENDEAVOR and JOINT GUARD in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It provided "top cover" for United Nations peacekeeping forces and monitored the warring factions for violations of UN resolutions.

Marking an historic event for the wing, Air Combat Command declared the 93rd ACW "Initial Operational Capable" on 18 December 1997.

As tensions mounted between Iraq and the UN in 1998, the 93rd deployed an element to SWA to monitor Iraqi military movements. In February of 1999 it deployed an aircraft to Europe to support NATO's monitoring of tensions between Serbia and Kosovo. The new wing saw its first combat during operations in Kosovo, playing a major role in the destruction of enemy targets and compiling over 1,000 combat hours. In November of 2001 through April 2002 the wing deployed in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks against the United States in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM.

The 93rd ACW inactivated at Robins AFB on 30 September 2002. Its mission and resources became a part of Air Force history on that day as the Georgia Air National Guard's 116th Bomb Wing (redesignated the 116th ACW) assumed command responsibility for the Joint STARS mission and the first ever "blended wing," combining active-duty and Air National Guard personnel, aircraft, and facilities under one commander.

The 93rd AGOW officials will consolidate the tactical air control party and battlefield weather specialties of the 3rd Air Support Operations Group at Fort Hood, Texas, the 18th ASOG at Pope Air Force Base, NC. and the specialized force protection capabilities of the 820th Security Forces Group at Moody AFB and provide them with a single command and control structure.

Due to their specialized nature and, in several cases, co-location with Army units, these groups have traditionally reported directly to their respective numbered Air Force. "A centralized command organization; however, will allow for the standardization of their training and employment," said Brig. Gen. Michael A. Longoria, the Det. 5 commander who is responsible for establishing logistical needs of the wing.

"These (units) have been given great support by their respective NAF commanders," he said. "That is why we have been able to continually improve our combat capability. It is time; however, to take another step in that improvement and give our great air-ground experts in the Air Force a command structure by which they can stay in this business. The general said the new unit will also allow Airmen to hone their combat specialties while giving them the command oversight that will take care of the "organize, train and equip" tasks they have. In addition to providing a single command structure, the activation of the 93rd AGOW also highlights the similarities that exist between the individual units' missions. "In Iraq, fighting right alongside our security forces Airmen are Army maneuver elements that are embedded with Air Force (tactical air control parties)," General Longoria said. "There is a natural relationship between 'fight-the-base' force protection and the TAC-P's 'terminal-attack' mission of being a liaison to and supporting the Army. We think it is going to be a good relationship that will actually increase our combat capability by bringing these two functions and tasks together."

Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 and the subsequent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Air Force has seen an increasing demand placed on ground-combat capabilities. "The Air Force recognizes the air-ground activity is terribly important and puts a priority on it," General Longoria said. "We take some of our best Airmen and assign them side by side with every Army maneuver division and brigade. The mission of this wing on the terminal-attack side is to support those TAC-P elements and enhance what they do both in war and peacetime." The 820th SFG has also seen a continually high-operations tempo since the onset of the war on terrorism. "There is not a time that the 820th SFG doesn't have a squadron or more deployed," he said. "The

capability the unit has is amazing and we need to keep promoting and taking care of those great Airmen."

Being a constant source of support to the Airmen is the key to his wing's success, the general said. "There will be little doubt that the Airmen and the combat capability that this wing produces is far 'outside the wire' and it's any place, anytime and anywhere," he said. "These Airmen represent the best of the U.S. Air Force and bring air, space and cyberspace power to bear in combat alongside our sister services. I am very proud of them and my job is to take care of them." While ensuring his Airmen are well taken care of, the general said they shouldn't worry about seeing the way they operate change.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.