

SECRET

HISTORY OF THE 95TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP.

The Ninety Fifth Bombardment Group with Colonel Alfred A. Kessler Jr., Commanding, was activated by Authority of Special Order 295, October 23, 1942, Headquarters, Army Air Base, Geiger Field, Washington. The Group composed of a cadre from the Thirty Fourth Bombardment Group consisted of 45 Officers and 203 enlisted men. With the Group, were activated four squadrons, which were the 334th, commanded by Captain Wilder, the 335th by Captain McKnight, the 336th by Captain Cole and the 412th by Captain Mumford.

After performing normal duties for a period of 5 days orders were issued October 29, 1942, transferring the group to Ephrata, Washington, where it arrived at 1300, October 31, 1942. The strength of the group at the end of October was 42 officers, 1 warrant officer and 231 enlisted men.

Here, at Ephrata for the first time, most of the officers and men of this embryo group, learned what living conditions in the "Field" could be like - no nice, warm barracks were provided, as in the past, tents without floors, heating stoves without fuel and the general mess was very unsatisfactory. The lack of school buildings, hangers, and buildings for group and squadron headquarters was a serious handicap to proper and efficient training.

These conditions were helped considerably within a few days through a continued effort and drive of the Group Commander, Colonel Kessler.

On November 20, the group was alerted and dispatched all available planes with their complete crews, to search for an enemy force supposedly

SECRET

SECRET

approaching California's shores, which proved to be a false alarm.

Due to bad weather and other unfavorable training conditions the Group was ordered back to Geiger Field to continue training and arrived at that base November 24, and was again, because of weather conditions, ordered to Rapid City, South Dakota, where it arrived December 14, 1942.

Strength of the Group at the end of November, 1942 was 191 officers, 2 warrant officers and 944 enlisted men.

Weather conditions being favorable the group, now for the first time since activation carried on a practically uninterrupted training program until January 20, 1943, when sub-zero weather made it necessary to place a squadron at a time on a detached training mission to Pueblo, Colorado. This made it possible by the end of January to complete 2nd Phase training with averages of over 20 hours per Combat crews for the month of January 1943.

Strength of the Group at the end of December, 1942, was 221 officers, 9 flight officers, 2 warrant officers and 1386 enlisted men.

Two airplane accidents marred the Group's here-to-fore perfect record during the month of January. The 1st being a forced landing near Pierre, S. D., when after 3 crew members had "baled out" the plane landed without damage to the other members of the crew, but considerable damage to the plane.

The other was near Ordway, Colorado, when during a blinding snow-storm which caught the crew in the air, crashed and killed all members and destroyed the plane. The members of the crew were as follows:

2nd Lt. E. E. Woodward	Pilot
2nd Lt. L. A. Catron	Co-Pilot
2nd Lt. Norval W. Kelly	Navigator
S/Sgt. Haskell S. Young	Bombardier

S/Sgt. Carl Simpson	Radio Gunner
S/Sgt. C. J. Burris	Gunner
S/Sgt. C. D. McDonald	Engineer-Gunner

Strength of the Group at the end of January 1943 was 219 officers, 9 flight officers, 2 warrant officers and 1312 enlisted men.

On the 1st of February the Group started its final phase training which with help of good weather and determination of all members of the Group the Ninety Fifth had its most successful training period. The four squadrons had well above 80 hours per crew to complete its third phase training at the end of the month. The only unfortunate happening was an accident near Huron, South Dakota that killed all on board. The crew members were:

1st Lt. Oliver L. Walker	Pilot
2nd Lt. Howard D. Stevens Jr.	Co-Pilot
2nd Lt. Norman K. Mattice	Navigator
2nd Lt. George J. Morris	Bombardier
T/Sgt. Gerald W. Baker	Engineer
T/Sgt. Charles R. Hooberry	Radio Operator
S/Sgt. James D. White	Ass't Engineer
S/Sgt. Michael Mitzka	Ass't Radio Operator
S/Sgt. Charles Missena	Gunner

The strength of the Group at the end of February 1943 was 216 officers, 9 flight officers, 2 warrant officers and 1286 enlisted men.

During March, time began to drag somewhat, the Group knew it was going to leave Rapid City, and became more restless as time went on.

On March 5th the four members of the advanced echelon departed for Atlantic City from where it was to proceed to our overseas station. On March 11th the air echelon left for Kearney, Nebraska for its final processing. Now the only remaining personnel of the Ninety Fifth Bomb Group at the Rapid City Army Air Base were the ground echelon. The rest of the month was spent completing crating and processing requisitions for needed

SECRET

supplies and personnel. The personnel shortages had been a continued headache. The Group should have never transferred out its overages so soon.

On March 27th this now trained Group had its first review which worked out very successfully. A comment made by a paratrooper witnessing the performances stated that it was the best he had seen in the past eight months including those given by the Infantry.

The strength of the Group at the end of March was 224 officers, 1 warrant and 1312 enlisted men.

On April 17th the first two trains departed from Rapid City for our unknown destination. The following morning the last two departed. This was the first time any outfit had left on time since any unit had left from this base. The railroadmen also stated it had been the most orderly troop movement it had ever been their pleasure to assist. The fact afforded much pleasure for both officers and men of the ground echelon. April 21st the four trains arrived at the New Jersey staging area, Camp Kilmer. Preparation for processing was begun immediately and in three days the 95th was completely processed, the first Group to finish and to be passed in our shipment. On arrival at Camp Kilmer we were greeted by the four members of the advanced party who were still in the United States at Camp Kilmer. On the 24th this same party left again.

One of the vivid memories the men who served their country overseas in this war will carry with them all of their lives is the voyage across. For many it was the first long, salt water trip in their entire lifetime and for those who had crossed the ocean in the gay days of peace time the trip sponsored and paid for by the Army was far, far different. For everyone, regardless of rank, length of service or position in civilian life it was an experience which will remain with them forever.

In a great many ways the men of the 95th were lucky in being able to sail on the proud English ship, the Queen Elizabeth. She has made many trips across the ocean traveling the submarine infested waters of the Atlantic alone depending on her great speed for her safety. Some convoys take nearly a month to reach the British Isles but the Queen Elizabeth completed the journey in six days. For the first two days at sea the men could see the planes and blimps of the United States Navy hovering over the water near the big ship searching for any sign of any enemy submarine. But after those two days the Queen Elizabeth with her crew and an enorm-

ous number of passengers was alone with nothing but water to be seen in every direction. Once in a while a school of porpoises could be seen playing along side of the ship and once a large convoy was sighted, but as convoys were likely to be followed by subs the crew turned the big ship sharply away. The men considered themselves lucky to make the trip in such good time and actually it was safer to be on the Queen Elizabeth than on a ship in a slow convoy, even if it did give them the jitters to look over the ocean and realize that their ship was all alone in enemy infested waters.

The ship was boarded in the afternoon of a bright day in May. The Group was led to the promonade deck and were told to drop their guns and equipment on the spot and from the looks of things it was going to be an all night affair. It can't be described how crowded it was all along the entire length of that roofed but otherwise open deck. It was impossible to stretch out at all and one man couldn't move without touching some part of another G.I. body. The tempers were short and the bodies were tired and countless times a fight seemed imminent but somehow that added inconvenience was avoided.

Regardless of the crowding and inability to get into a comfortable position everyone fell asleep--a sleep caused by fatigue of their bodies from carrying a gun and heavy blanket roll and field bag all day. Sometime during the early hours of the morning a great stirring and commotion took place, the 95th was definitely moving to another spot. The men were taken into a room below deck. All around there were tiered bunks stacked so close that they had to lie almost flat and then slide themselves in. One improvement was that they could stretch out and there was something, even though hard, to lie on. Sleep came again to these tired men and the next thing they heard was the tannoy blaring. It was eleven o'clock and they were informed that at noon they would move again. It was then that the plan was evident. Two shifts were to use the bunks and promenade deck for sleeping. From noon until noon one shift had the bed and from the following noon until the next the second shift took over, leaving the first shift to sleep on the decks. It wasn't long before the men were getting to know the ship and were finding numerous cubby holes and different spots where they could sleep for the night.

The chow lines on the ship were most certainly the biggest in the Army. The line wound round innumerable corners, along halls and up and down stairs. A soldier waited in it for fifteen or twenty minutes and then would move ahead a short distance at a great speed. Then he would wait again and the entire process would be repeated. The first day there was a little organization but not much. It took some of the men two and one half hours to eat. Some of this time was spent in standing in lines that were going out of the mess hall, in their eagerness to eat some of the men got in the wrong line when crossing over. There were so many lines the men couldn't tell which was which. Once in the mess they ate in a hurry and moved quickly to a room where mess kits were washed. Eating took no more than ten minutes. Getting into the mess hall took only half an hour if one were extremely lucky. The food was served in large dishes which were started at the head of the table and passed from man to man and the unlucky G.I.'s at the end very often came up short.

Strange as it may seem there were not many rumors which sprang up during the voyage. About the only one

that really could be considered big was that standard of all on every troop ship which runs something like this - the German radio announced today that they had sunk this ship. The people back home heard it and they know that some of the men might be on it. One night the ship made a very sharp turn and rumor had it that there were from ten to fifty subs ahead lying in wait for our approach.

Before the trip was very long underway a band was made up composed of various G.I.'s who had brought their instruments with them. On the ship were nurses, Red Cross girls and WAC's. The combination of the band and the girls gave rise to numerous impromptu dances which sprang up in all parts of the ship. The officers had their club where whiskey was obtainable but the dogface had to be satisfied with coke. Black jack, poker and many other forms of card games passed away a lot of the time, several men came to England much richer than when they left the states. The sea voyage romances which blossomed during the trip must be mentioned. The girls were a great attraction and while their quarters were well guarded by M.P.'s against the more eager guys there was nothing to stop them from meeting their dates on a common ground. Before the girls and guys got too palsy

walsy (or maybe after) the officer in charge of the army men on the ship announced over the address system that no girls would be allowed on the sun deck (a great place for pitching woo and other such activities) after blackout hours. The ship had several small P.X's and while the line was plenty long when they were open one could buy candy bars in cartons, almost any amount of cigarettes and other articles like soap, shaving cream and razors.

The public address system on the ship kept the passengers well up on the war news. During the voyage the news was recieved that the Germans had been driven from Tunis and that the African campaign was at a close. This news was welcomed with a great shouting of joy by everyone for they all knew that it was a big step in the direction of Berlin.

The only routine outside of the chow line was the muster on the promonade deck at eleven each morning. At that time the tannoy would come on and at once all men would move to the position assigned to their group on the deck. The muster lasted about a half hour during which time details cleaned the living quarters and hallways of the boat. Outside of that everyone was free to do as they pleased and go almost everywhere they wanted

to. The main purpose of the formation, though, was to get everyone on one deck and teach them their positions to be taken in the event of an emergency.

On the morning of the sixth day everyone awoke to see the Queen Elizabeth moving slowly up a loch which was lined on each side by green clad hills dotted with clean looking, homey cottages. At the inlet's terminal stood a fair sized city. Word went around that they were at Greenock, Scotland and, being true, the sea voyage was over and at last the 95th was nearly to the spot from where it would blast the enemy wherever they could be found.