

On Christmas Eve, the President had announced to the world the appointment of General Dwight Eisenhower to lead the combined final assault on Germany. Back to England came Lt. General Carl Spaatz and Major General James Doolittle. The tide of the air attack on Germany mounted.

In January the 8th Air Force, nearing its second anniversary, rained a greater weight of bombs upon Germany and the continent than in any previous month. In this stepped-up program, the 92nd Bombardment Group dispatched its greatest number of planes -207-, put its greatest number -168- over targets, and generally fulfilled its assigned role in the accelerated tempo which on January 26, evoked from General H.H. Arnold the following message:

"Congratulations to all members 8th Air Force on your second anniversary, 26 January. Be truly proud of the history you are making daily by achievements, excellent coordination of all and complete cooperation with the RAF. My best wishes are extended. A victory trail is being blazed by your bombing results on Germany."

The Group was alerted 17 times, briefed 12. 8 missions were flown. 7 aircraft were lost during the month, or 34% of the number dispatched. Abortions for the month totalled 9, or 44% of the number dispatched.

January opened with three typical English-winter days--foggy and rainy. The operational month started on January 4, with the Group lashing twice, on successive days, at the shipyards and sub-marine pens of Kiel. Two aircraft, piloted by 2nd Lt. Joseph J. Hughes of the 326th Squadron,

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and 2nd Lt. Raymond J. Mancu of the 407th Squadron, did not return from the initial raid on Kiel.

In succession followed raids on targets as far apart as Ludwigshafen, Cschersleben and Lingham. The Group's largest attacks came at the end of the month. 38 aircraft - the largest number to date - were over the target at Frankfurt on January 29. One plane, piloted by 2nd Lt. James F. Holdren of the 407th Squadron, failed to return. Two days later, 35 aircraft of the Group bombed Braunschweig. Two aircraft of the 407th squadron, piloted by 2nd Lts. Wayne H. Larsen and David C. Russell collided and exploded about ten minutes after leaving the target area. Four parachutes were seen from the aircraft.

Of the 7 planes lost during the month, the 407th Squadron suffered most severely with 4; the 326th lost 2 and the 325th, 1. (See Appendix A.)

Awards for January were 5 DFCs, of which 4 were for the completion of missions, 5 Purple Hearts, and 106 Air Medals. (See Appendix B.) Oak Leaf Clusters were awarded to 2 holders of the DFC, 90 holders of the Air Medal.

On January 4, W/Sgt. William H. Bryan of the 407th Bombardment Squadron was recommended for the Legion of Merit, subsequently presented to him by Brigadier General Robert B. Williams at Division Headquarters the following month.

This award, first in the history of the 92nd Group, was earned by W/Sgt. Bryan's record as crew chief from September 1, 1942, and particularly for the successful maintenance of aircraft assigned him for 36 consecutive operational missions without a mechanical failure. This commendable record

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was attained despite the number of technical difficulties encountered during the early days of the USAAF in the European theatre, unfavorable weather, and, often, a skeleton ground crew. 1st Sgt. Bryan, whose home is in Newark, N.J., has been with the Group since its activation in April, 1942.

On January 17, Captain Blair G. Belongie of the 326th Squadron, was awarded both the DFC and the Oak Leaf Cluster to the DFC. Each award was for exceptional flying skill on separate occasions. On July 26, one engine ceased to function shortly after Capt. Belongie's ship entered the enemy coast. Enemy fighters knocked out another engine, and Capt. Belongie, flying at less than 200 feet to reduce the effectiveness of enemy fire, headed back toward England. A third engine cut out as he reached the coast and, unable to find a suitable landing field, he chose the English Channel. The entire crew was rescued safely.

Captain Belongie's aquatic affinity was again in evidence on the September 6 mission to Stuttgart, when after successfully bombing the target his ship was severely damaged by flak. The damage sustained increased the fuel consumption to such a degree that ditching was inevitable. He skillfully maneuvered his aircraft to within two miles of the English coast and for the second time, improved upon Icarus. The entire crew was rescued within 30 minutes.

Officer promotions during the month were 1 to Major; 2 to Captain; 6 to 1st Lt. (See Appendix C.) 7 Officers and 3 enlisted men completed their tour of duty. (See Appendix D.)

There were two violent deaths on the station during the month - one the suicide sometime during the night or morning of January 11/12, of Pvt Albert W. Smeatt, 19067671, 327th Bomb Squadron. The investigating officer returned a finding of death by pistol shot, "while mentally unsound....incurred in the line of duty." The other death, that of Sgt. Richard (WMI) Driedziech,

10000039, 407th Bomb Squadron, was the result of a bicycle accident just outside the station area on the night of January 30.

The social high point of the month was reached on January 13, when, after months of planning and weeks of painting and preparation, the American Red Cross Aeroclub opened, with an orchestra and free refreshments featuring the occasion. Since this club for enlisted men was the first one available to the Group since its arrival at Redington, it was greeted with considerable enthusiasm. The Aeroclub consists of a large canteen with about 35 tables and an extensive snack bar; a lounge with a fireplace and combination radio-phonograph; a library with writing desks and fireplace; a card room featuring popular games, and a game room with two snooker tables and two ping-pong tables. The Aeroclub is under the direction of Miss Hannah Cooper, of Mullins, South Carolina, formerly with the 379th Group, and Miss Patricia Neal, of Portland, Oregon, previously with the 100th Group, is Program Director.

An enlisted men's council, consisting of 12 men representing every squadron and organization in the Group, was organized on January 11 to advise and to implement the Aeroclub program.

On January 7, Special Services aided by volunteers began construction on the "arena", a concrete rectangle designed for tennis, basketball, outdoor dancing, etc. Concrete pouring was completed ten days later.

Conversational classes in French and German were begun under the auspices of Special Services on January 17, with an initial attendance of 50. The transfer of one of the instructors two weeks later temporarily suspended this activity.

The January War Bond Drive, begun on the 1st, resulted in a 20% increase over any previous month. Total subscription was \$3009. The 446th Sub Depot, with a subscription of \$1406 was far in the lead among organizations.

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On January 25, Captain Robert E. Tauscher of Headquarters Squadron was appointed Group Intelligence Officer, succeeding Major Joseph R. Hannon, transferred for training as an Army of Occupation Official.

At month's end, the 92nd Group could be proud of a record number of bombers placed in the skies of Europe. Prouder still were 1st Sgt. H. V. Powell and crew of the 320th Squadron., whose Fortress was the only bomber to successfully complete every mission during the month.