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August of 1944 took its place among the decisive months of history when the Allied armies, penned for weeks in the Cotentin peninsula, overflowed into Northern France. At first it was a trickle into Brittany and then a stream toward Paris and the Seine; finally it was a flood that swept away the German armies and carried all the way to the borders of the Reich. In the history of World War II, August marked the high tide of Allied fortunes in the West-- Paris and virtually all of France was liberated, the German army in the North was encircled and cut to pieces, first in the Falaise pocket, then against the Seine. Air power, as always, played a considerable part in the achievement of these successes.

For the 92nd Bombardment Group, August 1944 was also an historic month. It marked the Group's second anniversary in the ETO, as well as being the second largest operational month in Group history. During those two years, the 92nd had become the oldest heavy bombardment group in England; had flown close to 200 missions, destroyed 199 enemy aircraft, probably destroyed

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37 more, and damaged 23. A significant commentary on the growth of its striking power was readily at hand: in August of 1943, the Group dispatched 171 aircraft on 9 missions; in August of 1944, 19 missions were flown and 324 aircraft dispatched.

The Group was alerted 21 times, briefed 20. Of the 324 aircraft dispatched, 506 were over targets. Abortive aircraft totalled 9, or 1% of planes dispatched. 3 aircraft were lost, 4 in the attack on Peenemunde on August 25-- the highest single loss since April. 12 missions involved the familiar strategic targets of German industry; 7 were classed as tactical.

The first mission of the month was also the largest one: 43 aircraft were dispatched as Lead, Low and High Groups of one combat wing, and High Group of another, to attack the airfields at Orleans/Bricy and Chateaudun, France, on August 1. First losses of the month were sustained on the August 3 mission to Merckwiller, Germany, when aircraft piloted by 1st Lts Neil L. Curtiss of the 326th Squadron and John V. Hendrickson of the 323th Squadron were victims of a savage fighter attack.

On this same mission, 2nd Lt J. Jack Crafton of the 326th Squadron distinguished himself by successfully landing his blazing aircraft, after ordering a bail-out over the home field. Four members of the crew jumped from 300 feet, with no more serious injury than two sprained ankles; the co-pilot, bombardier, navigator and engineer elected to stay with the ship, which was consumed by flames a few minutes after being landed. Back

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credit accrued to Lt Crafton for his decision; a pilotless, burning Fortress hurtling over a populated countryside might well have caused civilian casualties and damage.

Thereafter, the Group flew 5 consecutive days without a loss, until on August 9, over the Karlsruhe area, an aircraft piloted by 1st Lt William F. Schramm of the 88th Squadron went down.

1st Lt William C. Chun of the 88th Bombardment Squadron, the 82nd Group's only Chinese, was lead bombardier on the August 15 mission to Frankfurt. Seconds before bombs away, Lt Chun was struck in the leg by flak fragments. Ignoring his injury in his concentration on the bombsight, Lt Chun released squarely on the target. Despite the painful nature of his wound, it was not until after checking all crew members for possible injuries that Lt Chun revealed his own.

The weatherman interfered with what promised to be the most active month in Group history. From August 18 to 24, a low pressure system settled over the British Isles and Western Europe, and the low ceiling, rain and drizzle forced both ships and crews into inactivity. During these 5 straight days of stand-downs, the liberation of Paris was prematurely reported, the Roumanians were reputed asking for peace, and to many optimists the end of the war seemed not only in sight but at hand.

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These rosy visions were roundly dispelled. On August 24 at Herseburg, August 25 at Peenemunde and August 26 at Gelsenkirchen, the Group flew its most difficult and hazardous missions of the month. The jet-propelled ME-163 was encountered in force at Herseburg; the flak was heavy and accurate at Peenemunde and Gelsenkirchen. 4 aircraft were lost at Peenemunde, 1 at Herseburg, and battle damage was particularly heavy. Captain Frederick I. Prasse of the 327th Squadron, Assistant Group Operations Officer, flew as co-pilot in the lead aircraft over Herseburg, and was wounded in the hip when a burst of flak struck the ship on the bomb run.

Out of the Herseburg mission came one of the Group's greatest stories of collective fortitude, skill and courage. The aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt John Bosko of the 327th Squadron was struck directly in the open bomb-bay by a flak burst while on the bomb run. Miraculously, the bombs did not explode. The burst tore out the right side of the bomb-bay, reduced the radio room to a shambles, punched a gaping hole in the fuselage and severed aileron and elevator controls. Sgt Gordon V. Wescott, the ball turret gunner, was fatally wounded, died a few minutes later.

The aircraft fell out of control, and in Lt Bosko's words "wallowed through the air, losing about 2000 feet a minute."

The hydraulic system caught fire about 40 seconds after the

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ship had been hit, and the fluid spread over the floor of the fuselage and the catwalk in the bomb-bay. S/Sgt Peter E. LeFleur, the engineer, used up the fire extinguisher in attempting to put out the blaze, and when the extinguisher ran dry, tore out with his bare hands the flaming insulation from the walls of the bomb-bay.

5 bombs remained in the shattered bomb-bay, and there was a high probability of imminent explosion; arming wires had been torn out and the vanes were slowly turning, and one bomb was fully armed. S/Sgt Jerome E. Charbonneau, the bombardier, had at one time served as chief of his squadron's armament section. His knowledge of high explosives served him well. Working perilously on the slippery, burning catwalk, Sgt Charbonneau removed the live nose fuse from the armed bomb, and directed Sgt Charles A. Garrison and S/Sgt Bishop D. Ingraham, waist gunner and radio operator respectively, in dealing with the tail fuses, and the spinning vanes. Rendered harmless, the bombs were pried loose with a screw driver.

In the meantime, the aircraft had steadily lost altitude. Exercising the greatest skill and determination, Lt Bosho and his co-pilot, 2nd Lt Curt H. Koehnert, brought the crippled plane across enemy territory. Halfway across the English Channel one of the gas tanks went dry, and the engine supplied by it

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cougled and went head. Five minutes later another engine failed. Over the nearest available airfield, Lt Bosco ordered a bail-out, then safely landed one of the most badly-damaged aircraft in 1st Group history.

Col. William L. Reid, Group CC, figured prominently in the mission to Gelsenkirchen, August 28. Flying as command pilot in the lead aircraft and directing the entire air division over the target, Col. Reid was painfully injured in the leg when a flak burst exploded against the side of his ship. Receiving first aid in the radio room, Col. Reid returned to his position and directed the formation safely home. Before landing at the base it was discovered that the hydraulic system had been so badly damaged as to render the brakes useless. Col. Reid, recalling articles in the Stars and Stripes of aircraft craked to a halt by the trailing of open parachutes from the waist, determined to try the expedient. The chutes billowed out of the waist and radio room hatches, and, although sweeping slightly off the runway, the plane came safely to a stop.

Of the 9 aircraft lost during the month, the 326th and 328th Squadrons suffered the most severely with 3 each; the 407th Squadron lost 2, and the 327th Squadron, 1. (See Appendix B.)

Awards made during the month included 78 DFC's, of which 75 were for the completion of missions, 11 Bronze Stars, 7 Purple Hearts and 107 Air Medals. Oak Leaf Clusters presented were: 1 to the DFC, 1 to the Purple Heart and 42 to the Air Medal.

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(See Appendix C.)

10 1st Lieutenants became Captains during the month; 78 were promoted from 2nd Lieutenant to 1st Lieutenant. (See Appendix D.) 47 officers and 11 E-8s completed tours of duty. (See Appendix E.)

Of especial interest to members of the Group was the often-rumoured award of a Presidential Citation to the First Bombardment Division, a rumour that became a fact on August 9. The citation read as follows:

"The 1st Bombardment Division (H), is cited for extraordinary heroism, determination and esprit de corps in action against the enemy on 11 January 1944. On this occasion the 1st Bombardment Division led the entire Eighth Air Force penetration into central Germany to attack vital aircraft factories. After assembly was accomplished and the formation was proceeding toward Germany, adverse weather conditions were encountered which prevented effective fighter cover from reaching the 1st Bombardment Division. Taking full advantage of the relative vulnerability of the lead division, the enemy concentrated powerful forces against it. The scale of the enemy attack is graphically indicated by the fact that 400 encounters with enemy aircraft were recorded by units of the 1st Bombardment Division. The gunners met these continuous attacks with accurate fire, and the Division continued toward the targets as briefed where bombs were dropped with excellent results. On the return trip the enemy continued to concentrate his efforts on the 1st Bombardment Division. Figures of enemy aircraft claimed by our gunners indicate that the heroism of this division inflicted heavy losses on the enemy in the air as well as on the ground. Two hundred and ten enemy aircraft, the largest number ever claimed by any division of the Eighth Air Force for any one mission, were confirmed as destroyed, 43 probably destroyed and 54 damaged. The division lost 40 heavy bombers and many of those which returned were heavily damaged. Four hundred and thirty

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officers and enlisted men failed to return, 2 were killed and 32 others wounded. The extraordinary heroism and tenacious fighting spirit demonstrated by the 1st Bombardment Division in accomplishing its assigned task under exceptionally difficult conditions reflect highest credit on this organization, the Army Air Forces, and the armed forces of the United States."

Participation of the 92nd Group in the January 11 mission: 23 aircraft dispatched, 22 over targets (Oschersleben and Halberstadt), bombing results, good; claims confirmed, 10 enemy aircraft destroyed, 4 probably destroyed, 1 damaged. Losses: 2 aircraft, piloted by 1st Lt William B. Lock of the 326th Squadron and 2nd Lt Joseph A. Tryens of the 326th Squadron. Wounded: 4. Battle damage: 1 major, 15 minor.

The Medical Department of the Group put in a busy month and was especially active on August 3, when a 305th Bomb Group plane returning from the mission to Merkwiller, crashed and burned near Wymington, only a few miles from the base. Medical personnel and three ambulances were dispatched to aid the one ambulance sent from the 305th. Four crew members were critically injured, given treatment and carried directly to the 49th Station Hospital; five crew members were killed in the crash and their bodies taken to the mortuary at Shelveston.

On August 27, the U.S. Army Bleeding Team #6 collected 51 500cc bottles of blood in three hours at the station. On August 28, 110 bottles were taken and on the following day enough additional blood was donated by members of the Group's ground personnel

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to bring the total collection to 325 bottles. This whole blood was used to aid US wounded in France, and for distribution to Military Hospitals in England. The team was composed of one officer and 8 EM.

First major personnel change of the month came on August 4, when Lt. Col. Robert B. Keck, Group Operations Officer, returned to the US. He was succeeded by Major James A. McLaughlin, who had been acting as his assistant. Col. Keck's departure was viewed with genuine regret; he had been one of the key officers of the 92nd Group since its activation, one of the original pilots of the trans-Atlantic crossing and had participated in the first rains made by the Group in 1942.

Early in the month, Major McGhee Word, Jr., CO of the 328th Squadron, returned to the Zone of the Interior on a 30 day leave; his post was temporarily filled by Captain Ernest C. Hardin, 328th Operations Officer. Captain John G. Prosch, Group Gunnery Officer, returned to the Group on August 20 from the US, where he had been attending Gunnery School.

Following Col. Reid's injury on August 26, Lt. Col. Andre R. Brousseau, Air Executive, became acting CO of the Group.

Reflecting military successes on the Continent, 48 hour passes and furloughs were re-introduced during August after a 3 month suspension; the Station Alert Detachment, formed in early May as a security measure during the pre-invasion days,

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was disbanded.

On the first of the month, in accordance with the new plan in effect throughout the 1st Division, PFF equipment and facilities were installed. Hitherto, the PFF system had been maintained only at a few stations, each installation serving 3 Groups. Radar navigators were drawn from Chelveston and Alconbury, and the system organized under the command of 1st Lt H.C. Davis. Personnel included Capt. Ralph Hansen, 1st Lts F.L. Faber and A.D. Milinger, and Lts W.T. Doolittle, F.P. Keene, R.C. Klinger and G.J. Gruen. During the month, 9 missions using PFF technique were flown.

The British Sunday press, curiously juxtaposing extreme optimism with a restrained viewing-with-alarm, produced several "horror" stories during the month suggesting the possible use of gas-filled bombs as one of the enemy's vaunted "V" weapons. According to the Station Gas Defense Officer, this was one reason for a noticeable increase in GWS training by Unit Gas Officers during August. The training covered Collective Protection, Gas Mask Drill, Incendiaries and Use of Protective Clothing.

The first full month of operation of the two Bombsight Trainers showed a total of 157 hours, by far the biggest training month, as against a total of 121 hours in July. The Link Trainer program also showed an increase over the previous month, with

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lucky bingo players. Free beer, made possible by bar profits, was the rule one night each week.

Red Cross Aeroclub activities included the standard entertainment features- Bingo, bridge, snooker and ping-pong. About 1000 books were added to the Aeroclub library early in the month. Worth W. Haffner, of Dallas, Texas, succeeded Tom Lordship as Red Cross Field Director, taking his headquarters at Chelveston. Mr. Haffner, in civilian life identified with Chamber of Commerce activity in Texas, came directly here from the Red Cross Field Director's Office at Belfast, Ireland.

Sales figures of the PX revealed a gross total of 3010 pounds for the month, of which 306 pounds were taken in by the Soda fountain-- about 28,000 glasses of Coca-Cola. The PX began accepting camera film rolls for developing and printing. A survey of its operation since the first of the year disclosed a total gross of almost 36000 pounds, handled at a charge of .004%, considerably less than the official 1% handling allowance.

The first internee of the 32nd Group to be repatriated was 1st Lt Dick W. Floyd, pilot of the 32nd Squadron, who arrived in England on August 8, after landing in Sweden after the March 3 mission to Berlin. As of August 31, the totals for the Group were: MIA, 302; KIA, 113; PX, 478; Interned,

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100; Macapet, 31; Restricted, 1.

As of August 31, the 19th Group had slightly exceeded its quota in the 3th Air Force Victory Squadron War Bond Drive, with the end of the campaign still 2 days away. All over the station, in general, morale was high. Morale was highest, perhaps, in S/Sgt William P. Siegman of the 440th Sub-Depot and 1st Lt Kenneth Werner of the 337th Squadron. In war bond lotteries they won, respectively, \$1000 and \$500.

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