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In comparison with the speedy victories of August, the month of September, 1944, dragged painfully along for those of blithe spirit who felt that any day would see the end of the war in Europe. The dynamism of the earlier month, when France had been freed in a matter of days, carried past the calendar-turn, liberated Belgium in early September and pointed toward the Netherlands. On September 17, the climactic point of the month was reached in the great airborne invasion of Holland, and the odd names of ancient Dutch towns-- Eindhoven, Nijmegen, Maarheeze-- came into the front-line dispatches. In these airborne invasions-- the largest ever undertaken-- the 92nd Bombardment Group played a supporting role.

Thereafter, the tide of battle, while not receding, did little more than stay level. Three factors-- increased enemy resistance, the necessity for regrouping and consolidation, and poor weather-- combined in the stabilization of the front.

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The position at Arnhem became untenable, and after a bitter week's fighting the salient was withdrawn; the British troops involved furnishing the world with one of the war's greatest sagas of courage. In six days time the name of an obscure Dutch city became immortal.

Bad weather-- the worst September in several years-- sharply restricted the operational activity of the 2nd Group. The Group was alerted and briefed 17 times, the least number of alerted days since February. Only 14 missions were flown, the smallest number since April. 443 aircraft were dispatched during the month, of which 401 were over targets. The abortive rate climbed somewhat; 19, or 4% of aircraft dispatched. Aircraft losses were the most severe since April; 14 crews did not return, 3% of the number dispatched. The most disastrous period in Group history occurred on September 11 and 13, when 12 planes were lost in consecutive missions to Merseburg. The Luftwaffe, many times rumored dead or dying, had a renaissance; its strength, formerly dispersed throughout Western Europe, was now concentrated within the borders of the Reich.

12 of the month's missions were strategic, and the targets were familiar-- Ludwigshafen, Kassel, Osnabruck, Munster. Only 2 missions were classed as tactical-- on September 17, when 30 aircraft successfully bombed gun emplacements and bridges in the

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Nijmegen area, a few hours before the great paratroop landings; and on September 19, when 24 planes struck at the Ordnance Depot at Unna, Germany, which supplied one of the German armies manning the Siegfried Line. The success of the 8th Air Force in the former operation was attested to by the following commendation from Lt General Lewis H. Brereton, Commanding General, 1st Allied Airborne Army:

"I should like to express my appreciation of splendid support given the 1st Allied Airborne Army by your Air Force on D and subsequent days of our operations in Holland. Escort and cover provided by your fighters and aggressive offensive action by your bombers and fighters in attacking enemy batteries, flak installations responsible for successful completion of troop carrier mission. Bomber resupply beautifully executed. Many thanks to all ranks for outstanding aid."

As if in prophecy, the month opened with 4 straight days of inactivity, caused, according to the Weather Office, by "a succession of low pressure systems which brought precipitation and low ceilings, affecting both local and target areas; as well as a stagnation of high pressure areas producing fogs over bases," -- an explanation far more diverting than the weather. On September 5, 30 planes were dispatched to attack the mammoth I.G. Farben Industrie chemical plant at Ludwigshaven. Battle damage was severe but all aircraft returned safely. The operational month had started.

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First losses of the month were sustained on the mission of September 8-- again to Ludwigshafen-- when 7 crew members bailed out of the burning aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt Thomas J. Havard, Jr. of the 325th Squadron. The bail-out occurred in the Metz area and, although Lt Havard and his co-pilot, 2nd Lt Hugh E. Waterman, managed to crash-land in France, the 7 crew members were classed as missing in action. They were 2nd Lts Harold V. Shaw and Leon C. Linden, Sats Harold L. Brouette, Gilbert A. Schnauffer, Thomas G. Hughes, William B. Mooney and Cpl Jesus Ortiz.

An aerengine factory at Sindelfingen, Germany was the target on September 10; as a sequel, a story-book adventure, unique and not unpleasant, befell the crew of 2nd Lt Horace L. Spencer of the 325th Squadron. Temporarily regarded as missing in action, Lt Spencer and his crew turned up at the base 48 hours late. The plane that brought them home was not their own-- it was the personal C-47 transport of famed Lt General George S. Patton, Jr. Each crew member wore the Bronze Star, and several bottles of champagne were brought with them.

The explanation seemed almost fictional. Bailing out of their blazing, flame-riddled aircraft over no-man's land, the crew parachuted down into France just behind the advancing patrols of the US Third Army. Picked up by forward elements

of an Ordnance Battalion, Lt Spencer and his crew were turned over to General Patton's Headquarters within a few hours after landing. Summoned to the general's staff Headquarters the following morning, they anticipated a routine interrogation. Instead, they were met personally by the legendary general who, after congratulating them on their safe arrival in friendly territory, decorated each man with the Bronze Star, posed for and autographed a group picture, and placed his private plane at their disposal for the trip back to England. Members of the crew who shared this experience with Lt Spencer were 2nd Lts Paul K. Supp, Sergeant J. Ableman and Harry J. McCrossen, Jr, S/Sgts Thomas F. Jenkins and Jack Sorett, and Sgts John L. Houk, Leslie G. Spillman, Jr and John P. Hensley.

On September 11, the synthetic oil plants at Herseburg, often visited by the 92nd Group, were again attacked. On this day the Luftwaffe reappeared in strength. While making a second run on the target, the Group encountered a terrific flak barrage and the formations became slightly scattered. Just as bombs away, 15 enemy aircraft-- FW 190's and ME 109's-- attacked the lead group. The attacks were savage, made in elements of 3 abreast, firing 20 MM shells. 8 aircraft of the 92nd Group were lost to the combined flak and fighter assault-- as catastrophic a day as any in Group history. These aircraft were

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piloted by 1st Lt John S. Glasco and 2nd Lt Max W. Cook, of the 333th and 327th Squadrons respectively, and 2nd Lts Thomas A. Andrew, Harold Wallace, William B. Kennapin, Horace S. Potter, William J. Hollonie and Leonard L. Smith, all of the 407th Squadron. Additionally, T/Sgt Leonard B. Kennedy, radio operator of 2nd Lt Russel J. Bundeson's crew, bailed out over the target, apparently misinterpreting an order to stand-by. Sgt Kennedy was a member of the 327th Squadron.

First reports placed the day's losses at 12, but 4 crews returned or were accounted for the next day, having either landed or abandoned aircraft in France or Belgium. Among these was Major Jack S. Griffin, Commanding Officer of the 327th Squadron, who flew in the lead aircraft piloted by 1st Lt Neil S. Holbrook of the 407th Squadron. Major Griffin was hospitalized for a few days on the Continent, after a crash-landing near Paris.

Merseburg was again the target on September 13, and again the Group suffered severely; more particularly the 327th Squadron. 4 aircraft of this squadron were lost, including the lead plane piloted by 1st Lt Howard C. Donlon, which received a direct flak hit ten miles east of the target and exploded. Other missing aircraft were piloted by 1st Lts Harry J. Eck and Jack A. Peck, and 2nd Lt Warren D. Stallings. Nor was this the extent of the day's bad news: the plane piloted by 1st Lt Elvan E. Hendrick-

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son, also of the 327th, crashed at Woodridge, England, killing T/Sgt William B. Post, and S/Sgts Robert L. Shackelford and Frank Mililewski, radio operator, ball turret gunner and waist gunner, respectively.

Of the 14 aircraft crews lost in action during September, the 407th and 327th Squadrons were hardest hit with 6 and 5; followed by the 326th with 2 and the 325th with 1. (See Appendix B).

Awards made during the month were 123 DFC's, 17 Purple Hearts, and 109 Air Medals. Oak Leaf Clusters awarded were: 9 to the DFC, 172 to the Air Medal.

Officer promotions during the month were 14 to Captain, 56 to 1st Lieutenant. (See Appendix C). In September, 48 officers and 60 EM completed tours of duty. (See Appendix D).

September 27 was an historic day for the 92nd Group, on two counts. The Group completed its 200th combat mission when 33 aircraft successfully attacked the railway marshalling yards at Cologne. On the same day, Lt Colonel James W. Wilson became Commanding Officer-- the Group's third commander since activation in the early spring of 1942. He succeeded Colonel William M. Reid, who had been hospitalized since August 26, recovering from a flak wound incurred on the mission that day to Gelsenkirchen.

The coincidence stretched farther. Col. Wilson's home

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was in the same section of northwestern Ohio as that of Colonel James B. Sutton, the Group's first C.O. Additionally, Col. Sutton, who had not flown with the 9th Group since 1941, flew on another mission with the Group during part of the month and participated in several missions-- notably the one brought home to Hershey on September 21 and 23. On the latter, Col. Sutton flew as tail gunner.

Col. Wilson, 47, graduated from West Point in 1939. Completing a tour of duty with the 8th Air Force in 1943, he returned to the US after being wounded. On temporary duty in the United Kingdom during August and September of 1944 to carry out a special assignment for General H.H. Arnold, he was reassigned to the 9th Group September 27, 1944. While Squadron 80, Group Air Executive and Chief of Staff of the 1st Combat Wing, Col. Wilson flew with the 306th Group and led a number of very successful missions over Germany and occupied territory. Decorations awarded to Col. Wilson include the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the DFC, the Purple Heart and the Air Medal with 5 Clusters. Two days after assuming command of the Group, Col. Wilson flew on the mission to Munster, September 30.

It was timely, in connection with the completion of 100 combat missions, to review some figures. The 100th mission, blasting the Cologne marshalling yards with 104 tons of explosives, came just two years and three weeks later than the 1st mission, when 12 1/2 tons were dropped on the Avions Potel aircraft factory at Meaulte. During the period intervening, the Group had been entirely off operations for five

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months. Total tonnage dropped in the 300 missions was well over 10,000; oddly enough, exactly 200 enemy fighters had been destroyed. 182 tons was the largest load on any one mission-- this total on June 18 when tactical targets in France were blasted in support of the Normandy invasion.

September brought other personnel changes. Lt Colonel James J. Griffith, long-time commanding officer of the 407th Squadron, returned to the US early in the month. He was succeeded by Major William H. Nelson, Operations Officer of the 407th, who in turn was succeeded by Major Lloyd O. Chapman, as Operations Officer. Major Frank B. Ward, Jr., Operations Officer of the 328th Squadron returned to the US early in September, being relieved by Capt. Robert S. Preston, Jr. Capt. Preston followed Major Ward two weeks later, and was succeeded by Capt. Frederick T. Prassee, who had recovered from the flak wound which sent him to the hospital in August. On September 24, 2nd Lt Arthur J. Walters became Station Cryptographic Officer, succeeding 1st Lt Merlin W. Cunningham, transferred. 2nd Lt Joseph S. Stinson was appointed Station Agricultural Officer on September 25, succeeding 2nd Lt Stanley Loupos.

There was one major aircraft accident on the field during the month; luckily, personnel involved were not seriously injured. On September 26, during take-off, the aircraft tilted

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by 1st Lt Leuel P. Blitz of the 33rd Squadron had a tail wheel blowout. The plane veered off to the right, barely became airborne, struck two mechanics tents. The wheels were retracted when it was seen that it was impossible to remain airborne, and a belly landing was made. A fire developed rapidly in one engine and spread over the wing. Medical personnel on duty at the end of the runway and at the Control Tower rushed out to the plane in two ambulances and collected the 9 crew members, heedless of the fact that the burning plane, fully loaded with bombs, might explode at any minute. 3 of the crew members were slightly injured; time was even taken to allow one of them to be placed on a stretcher before being loaded into the ambulance. The bombs on the plane exploded about fifteen minutes after personnel were removed from the scene of the accident. Medics who assisted at the scene of the crash were Capt. Joseph W. Messey, Sgt Franklin G. Helton, Cpl Charles E. Brokschmidt, Pfc Donald E. Ellefson and Louis Golino.

Training programs were well-maintained during the month. The Group Gunnery section added 6 new Instructor-Gunners to its staff, all of whom graduated from the Central Instructors School. It was planned that the instructors would fly several missions each month, and assist in all phases of gunnery training when not flying.

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In September, the Link Trainer section began familiarizing new pilots with the SOS 51, a system for instrument landing that differed from the usual beam by being purely visual, intercepted by the Runway Localizer instrument consisting of two pointers, one vertical for course corrections, the other horizontal for the glide path. With complete understanding of this new procedure, it was felt that blind landings could be made in more safety.

At the end of August, success in the 6th Air Force Victory Squadron War Bond Drive had been assured; the official closing of the campaign on September 2 was in the nature of an anti-climax. Final results: 435,165. Goal: 435,334.

During the month, as the success of Allied arms gradually liberated more and more of the Continent, many personnel previously reported missing in action returned to the United Kingdom. 42 were members of the 2nd Group, bringing the total of evaders to 103. An unusual experience was that of 1st Lt John J. Bradley of the 327th Squadron, reported missing after the raid on Gelsenkirchen November 5, and 2nd Lt Ford W. Babcock of the 328th Squadron, missing after the January 4 mission to Aiel. Imprisoned in the Brussels Civilian Internment Camp, they escaped when patriots derailed the train in which they were being evacuated to Germany. In the face of the advancing Allied armies, the Germans abandoned

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train and prisoners.

Socially, the north provided a diversity of entertainment, and the Post Theater in addition to the usual quota of movies, played host to one USO show and two GI shows, all attracting capacity crowds. A feature of the north's entertainment program was the presentation of a local-talent show called "Off the Boat Too Long," presented for two performances on the 17th, and repeated for two more performances on the 21st. Cpl Chandler Bowsky of Headquarters Squadron and 2nd Lt James L. McElroy, Jr., of Special Services, were prominently identified with the production, both in the planning and in the actual playing. Critics felt that whatever the show lacked, judged by professional standards, it more than made up in exuberance and spontaneity.

On September 1, two veterans of the Normandy campaign, Lts Brown and Sutter, of a tank and infantry division respectively, told of their experiences and answered questions at the Red Cross Aeroclub in the afternoon, and the Enlisted Men's Bar and Lounge in the evening. On September 11, an MP, Lord Cranbrook and Professors Steele, Minorfsai and Wilson of Cambridge University appeared at the Post Theater in a general discussion program, attended by more than 100 officers and men. A Group Equipment Display, engineered by 1st Lt Walter Fleg of Special Services, was held at Hinwick Hall on September 18 for the benefit of the crippled children resident there, as well as for citizens from neighboring villages.

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parachutes, flight suits and other paraphernalia were exhibited, to an attendance of about 300. On September 30, RAF personnel from Henlow presented a series of boxing matches on the arena.

The Red Cross Aeroclub underwent minor renovations at the beginning of the month, with certain sections of the walls being repainted, and new linoleum laid. New duck boards were installed at the entrance. Two dances were held during the month, with food served buffet-style in the card room. A new note was added to the festivities on each occasion when Special Services sent over 200 flowers-- chrysanthemums the first time, carnations the second-- for the girls to wear in their hair. WREs, JAAF's, and WAOs were in attendance.

Weekly bingo games continued to be a feature of the Red Cross entertainment program, as well as music, bridge and snooker. The S-2 program-- a detailed discussion of the war fronts, with emphasis on the air war and the 62nd Group's participation in it-- was a Wednesday night feature for the first two weeks of the month. Attendance was so large that the program was moved to the S-2 briefing room for the rest of the month.

Coca-Cola consumption fell off slightly during September, with only 233 pounds being taken in at the PX fountain. Weather seemed to be the factor chiefly responsible for the decline. Total PX sales for the month were 3600 pounds, which included 525 pounds worth of Christmas gift orders. This Christmas gift total, much

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smaller than the year before, reflected the dogged GI optimism about being home for Christmas.

In the Enlisted Men's Bar and Lounge, bingo for cash was played twice each week and proved popular. If the weather had reduced Coca-Cola drinking, it had no effect on the beer situation; 33 barrels were steadily consumed each week.

At month's end, Allied armies in the West were against the vaunted Siegfried Line; their hurricane advance became not much more than a probing wind. At Station 109, the optimistic revised their calculations and the home-by-Christmas idea receded as the majority settled down to face their third winter in the LTC. "Settled down" was perhaps a misnomer. There was a new Commanding Officer on the base, and his car appeared in unexpected places at unexpected times.

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