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According to the English newspapers, it was the coldest December in 54 years. Judged by American standards - to GI's inured to Maine or Minnesota winters- the weather during the last month of 1944 was chillier than usual, but nothing to get excited about. The lowest temperature recorded by the Weather Detachment was 18 degrees; that could be shrugged away. Water froze in the pipes of washrooms and urinals, but that was remedied. A thin film of ice frequently coated the runways, but a sanding detail made them safe. The most unpleasant feature of the weather did not yield to solution; as usual, the worst part was not the temperature but the visibility.

Fog held the 92nd Group on the ground on all but 11 days, although crews were alerted and briefed for 17 operations. 6 times a last-minute "scrub" nullified the plans, the preparation, the nerve strain, the work. Worst of all was the deteriorating

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military situation in the West: while crews chafed under a succession of non-operational days, Von Rundstedt, fully exploiting the weather, made a spectacular break-through in the Ardennes forest, in an almost exact duplication of his original break-through in May of 1940. To 92nd Group GI's, accustomed to a steady diet of good news from the battlefront, the Von Rundstedt salient came as an unpleasant surprise. The German offensive opened the week before Christmas, and on the 19th, 20th, 21st and 22nd, the Group was unable to fly-- days when strong tactical air support might well have turned the tide. Besieged Bastogne, held by elements of the US Third Army, did not yield, and at month's end the salient appeared to have been checked, held and on the verge of being pinched off.

The 92nd Group, in 11 missions, dispatched 425 aircraft, of which 414 attacked targets. Abortive aircraft numbered 14, or about 3½ %, a higher figure than for the preceding two months. Operational loss due to enemy action was held to 1 aircraft, or 2/10 of 1 % of planes dispatched; however, several explosions and crashes in England as well as on the Continent resulted in crew fatalities and destroyed aircraft. 6 of the month's 11 missions used PFF bombing technique, 2 were GH and 3 visual.

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Tactical targets predominated, with railway marshalling yards and fighter airdromes usually the objects of attack.

December 4th saw the operational month begin, with Lt Col Robert R. Riordan, Group Air Executive, leading the 1st Air Division in a raid on Kassel. Due to 10/10 cloud cover, bombing results were unobserved. All aircraft- 48, which included a screening force of 12- returned safely. The next few missions were without particular incident; the targets the familiar ones, Merseburg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt.

On the Stuttgart raid, Sgt Ferdinand A. Lancour of the 325th Squadron, engineer of 2nd Lt Harry S. Culver's crew, displayed considerable courage in attempting to close open-and-jammed bomb bay doors. Improvising a tool, Sgt Lancour prevailed upon two crew members to hold him head downward; dangling precariously with 27,500 feet of space between himself and the earth, he tried in vain to repair the damaged doors. Although the attempt was unsuccessful, crew members were loud in their praise of Sgt Lancour's initiative and fortitude.

On December 11, on the mission to Frankfurt, the aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt Ralph K. Rollins of the 407th Squadron was severely hit by accurate flak over the target. With 3 engines gone, Lt Rollins ordered a bail-out in the Metz area; the crew

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parachuted safely and the ship crashed in an open field.

On December 15, Lt Col William H. Nelson, CO of the 407th Squadron, led the Group in an attack on the marshalling yards and railway shops of Kassel. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) The complete success of the mission was marred by an accident on take-off; 2nd Lt Lyle W. Ruka, 407th Squadron pilot, noticing that his airspeed indicator was not functioning, did not elect to take-off in the cloudy weather, and attempted to stop his plane when partly down the runway. The attempt was unsuccessful and the aircraft crashed off the end of the runway and burst into flames. All members of the crew escaped injury; the bombs exploded soon after the area was cleared of the medical personnel and crash crew dispatched to the scene. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) A nearby plane was damaged beyond repair by the explosion.

One of the month's most successful missions came on December 23, when 37 aircraft of the Group, led by Lt Col James K. McLaughlin, Group Operations Officer, visually attacked the marshalling yards at Ehrang, Germany. Bombing results were described as excellent for the Lead and High Squadrons, and the 1st Air Division's success earned a commendation from Brig General Howard M. Turner:

> "I wish to extend to you and all officers and men of the Bombardment Groups which participated in

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mission of 23 December 1944, my congratulations for the excellent manner in which the mission was executed. Operating in extremely adverse weather conditions these units exhibited a high degree of determination and skill in clearing the Division Area, attacking the marshalling yards at Ehrang and landing in weather conditions equally as adverse, without loss of a single aircraft. Excellent bombing results were obtained. Convey to participating officers and men my appreciation of a job well done..."

The climactic operational day of the month - and the Group's most disastrous day since September- was December 24th, the day before Christmas. On that day, the 8th Air Force mounted the largest single attack in its history, with over 2000 heavy bombers participating in a direct tactical assault on the airdromes in the Frankfurt area, and on road junctions, bridges and communications centers immediately behind the German bulge. The Field Order called for as many aircraft as the Group could put up, and the 92nd dispatched 50, making up the High Squadron of the 40th "D" Composite Group as well as all squadrons of the "A" Group. Primary target was the Giessen airdrome, a fighter base near Frankfurt used by the Luftwaffe in support of the Von Rundstedt offensive.

The day's misfortunes started at take-off; the aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt Robert K. Seeber of the 327th Squadron, a

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new pilot, took off in fog which prevented a clear view of the trees about 200' yards to the left of the runway at its end. Lt Seeber began to turn to get on course before much elevation was attained, encountered prop wash and, losing altitude, crashed into the treetops. The burning aircraft exploded about two minutes later. Due to the heavy fog and the position of the aircraft, deep in the woods known locally as Roberts Farm, it was not immediately located by the ambulances and crash crew. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) 6 crew members were killed (see APPENDIX B); the 3 survivors were Lt Seeber, 2nd Lt William H. McQuinn, co-pilot, and Sgt William J. Brockmeyer, engineer.

1st Lt Charles H. Nesbit, Equipment Officer of the 325th Squadron, distinguished himself by his coolness and courage in carrying several crew members out of the wreckage, heedless of the possibility of further bomb explosions. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Unfortunately, the three men rescued by Lt Nesbit were too seriously injured to survive, even with the medical attention afforded them. On one occasion during the morning, Lt Nesbit was within 100 feet of a bomb when it exploded, and miraculously escaped injury or death by dropping to the ground.

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The attack on the Giessen airdrome, led by Major Albert L. Cox, Jr, CO of the 325th Squadron, was successfully carried out, despite severe flak in the target area, and the object of the mission- to crater the surface of the drome and render it unserviceable- was regarded as accomplished. But at interrogation, disquieting reports were heard. Aircraft piloted by 1st Lts Donato Yanitelli of the 325th Squadron and Joseph B. McConnell of the 407th Squadron were unreported. Also missing were aircraft piloted by 2nd Lts Harry G. Williams,Jr, Joe B. Spencer, and Donald K. Lathrum, all of the 327th Squadron. S-2 reports took longer than usual to assemble and digest; because of weather conditions a number of aircraft were diverted to Bury St Edmunds and Great Ashfield, bases respectively for the 94th and 385th Groups.

A mysterious and sinister story was told at interrogation. Crews reported that a single B-17 had approached the formation just west of the Malmedy area, called the leader of the High Squadron and asked permission to come in. The request was granted and the B-17 took #4 position in the low element. Almost immediately, some strange details were noted: the newcomer, a shiny Type G, had few identifying marks. There was no US star on fuselage or wings; the dorsal fin and vertical

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stabilizer were painted red, an 18 inch yellow band was painted around the nose between the astro dome and nose plexiglass. The nose was reported empty, but the top turret and ball turret were manned and the guns swinging. Shortly after the aircraft came into the formation, gunfire which had hitherto been meagre and inaccurate became suddenly very accurate. At this time the stranger was lagging about 250 yards behind. The formation leader ordered all guns trained upon the aircraft, and attempted to call it on the radio but without success. The aircraft bombed with the rest of the formation and disappeared north after the target.

It was a strange and strained Christmas Eve; one by one the reports filtered in. Lt Yanitelli had crash-landed at Lille, with 2 engines gone and with several minor injuries to crew members. Lt Spencer was unreported. Lt Williams had been seen heading toward Allied battle-lines with 2 engines on fire.

At 1830 hours, Lt Lathrum crashed at the diversion field at Bury St Edmunds in attempting a landing; cut out of the traffic pattern on his first approach and coming around on his second, his plane was unable to gain sufficient altitude, presumably because of engine failure. Striking some treetops, the aircraft crashed and burned. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) 7 crew members were killed outright; 2 survivors were taken to the 65th General Hospital, where one died from his injuries two days later. (See APPENDIX B.) Sgt Isaac E. Harder, tail gunner,

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was the sole survivor.

It was not until a day or two later that full details were available concerning the others. Lt Spencer's crew was missing in action. (See APPENDIX B.) Lt McConnell's crew had bailed out and the aircraft had crashed at Ohey, 10 miles east of Namur. 3 crew members were killed; 2nd Lt Anthony Piekarcz, the navigator, whose parachute opened but did not fill out, S/Sgt Harold H. Paske, ball turret gunner, who would not jump and rode the ship down to his death, and T/Sgt John F. Booth, radio operator, whose parachute tangled in the horizontal stabilizer, dragging him down with the ship. Lt McConnell struck a picket fence in landing, and broke both legs. S/Sgt John J. Caravello, the tail gunner, landed close to the German lines, blundered into them, walked out unscathed.

Lt Williams' aircraft was first hit by flak 20 miles inside the German lines; 2 engines were knocked out and a fire started on the flight deck. The aircraft dropped out of the formation, salvoed the bomb load on a small German town south of Schleiden and attempted to reach friendly territory. Over the enemy lines at 10,000 feet, the ship was further struck by accurate ground fire and the two remaining engines were rendered useless. Lt Williams put the aircraft into a flat

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glide in a desperate attempt to reach safety; at 4500 feet he ordered a bail-out. All of the crew made successful jumps; two members- S/Sgt Joseph R. Gray, ball turret gunner and Sgt Neal H. Modert, bombardier- landed behind the German lines. Sgt Gray made his way to Stavelot by nightfall, where he met a majority of the crew; Sgt Modert was picked up by an advanced US infantry platoon on Christmas morning.

The hoary platitude that "it never rains but it pours" was applicable on the afternoon of December 24th, when the day's misfortunes were augmented by a serious fire in a Nissen hut used for pyrotechnics storage. The fire broke out at about 1400 hours, and the Fire Fighting Platoon responded with every available man and full equipment. After moving two trucks loaded with flares from the side of the burning hut, the firemen attempted to extinguish the flames. After twenty minutes, with the fire gradually coming under control, the firemen were ordered away from the blaze because of the possibility of heavy explosions. An hour and a half later, with the danger of explosion apparently passed, the firemen were ordered to put out the blaze. Damage was estimated in the neighborhood of $20,000. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

The Group was idle for the next 3 days; the mission scheduled for Christmas Day was scrubbed after briefing, and "stand down" was the order for the following two. On December 28th,

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36 aircraft bombed Koblenz by PFF technique; on December 30th, Col James W. Wilson, Group Commanding Officer, led a GH attack on a railway bridge at Bullay. On the Bullay mission, the aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt Joseph M. Van Stratton of the 327th Squadron aborted from the formation because of engine failure. Returning to base he was ordered to proceed to the Wash to jettison the bombload. After jettisoning, Lt Van Stratton decided to land at an RAF base at East Kirkby, Lincolnshire. With one engine out and visibility bad, he overshot the runway and started another circuit in the traffic pattern. A second prop began windmilling, the plane was pulled up to clear a hill and stalling out, crashed and burned. All crew members were killed. (See APPENDIX B.) The loading list revealed a macabre heightening of the tragedy; Sgt Charles H. Chambers, regular bombardier of the ill-fated crew of Lt Lathrum, was flying that position with Lt Van Stratton. Saved from death a few days before by a last minute "scratch" from the loading list of December 24, Sgt Chambers was assigned to Lt Van Stratton's crew. Observers soberly recalled the legend of the "appointment in Samarra."

The month's final mission came on the last day of the year, with 33 aircraft attacking Kordel, Germany, using GH technique. On the return, the aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt Eugene Lietman

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of the 327th Squadron was forced to land at a fighter base at Le Culot, after engine trouble prevented his keeping up with the formation. All crew members returned safely.

That was the operational month. In terms of missions flown, it was the smallest month since January; in terms of aircraft attacking, the sixth largest month of the year. At year's end, a statistical review revealed these facts: the 92nd Group had flown 181 missions during the year of 1944, had dispatched 5310 aircraft, had lost due to enemy action, 96 crews. The percentage of aircraft lost to aircraft dispatched was 1.8 %.

Awards made during the month included 14 DFCs, 1 Soldier's Medal, 5 Bronze Stars, 2 Purple Hearts and 83 Air Medals. Oak Leaf Clusters were awarded: 1 to the Silver Star, 8 to the DFC, 531 to the Air Medal.

An Oak Leaf Cluster to the Silver Star was awarded Col James W. Wilson, Group CO, in recognition of the superb airmanship displayed in leading the 1st Air Division in the attack on Merseburg November 2nd, in bringing home a badly-crippled aircraft and in skilfully crash-landing without injuries to personnel.

The Distinguished Flying Cross was presented to Major Albert L. Cox,Jr, CO of the 325th Squadron for especial skill and

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tenacity of purpose on another of the November missions to Merseburg. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) On November 8th, Major Cox assembled and led the Group in extremely adverse weather conditions, successfully bombed and withdrew without loss of personnel. Visual contact was impossible during most of the mission. Indicative of the state of the weather was the fact that the 3rd Bomb Division abandoned its mission entirely, and that approximately one-third of 1st and 2nd Division aircraft also abandoned and returned.

The Soldier's Medal was awarded to 1st Lt William J. Gustafik, 326th Squadron navigator, for his heroic action in extricating 2nd Lt W. C. Edwards,Jr, bombardier, from the wreckage of a crashed plane on September 26th. The aircraft, piloted by 2nd Lt Emanuel Blitz, had crashed at the start of an operational mission, as the result of a tail wheel blowout. Ignoring the possibility of imminent explosion of the bomb-laden plane, Lt Gustafik, having escaped from the wreckage, returned to pull out the bombardier. The aircraft exploded a few minutes later.

For operating the most efficient equipment section of any squadron during November and December, 1st Lt Leonard Gray of the 326th Squadron was awarded temporary possession of a placque. The presentation was made by Col Wilson. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) The 407th Squadron, winners in October, were runners-up.

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During December, 42 officers and 39 enlisted men completed tours of duty. (See APPENDIX C.) Officer promotions during the month were 1 to Major; 7 to Captain; 41 to 1st Lieutenant. (See APPENDIX D.) The majority was attained by Captain Robert E. Tauscher, Group S-2 head since January. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Major Tauscher joined the 92nd Group late in 1943, after service with the Anti-Submarine Command in Newfoundland and England.

An Officers Roster issued during the month showed a total of 495 names, divided by rank as follows: 1 Colonel, 4 Lt Colonels, 21 Majors, 59 Captains, 212 1st Lieutenants, 177 2nd Lieutenants, 17 Flight Officers and 4 Warrant Officers. (See APPENDIX E.)

There were miscellaneous transfers and changes of assignment during the month, the most important being the transfer of Lt Col Bert A. Arnold, Group Ground Executive, on temporary duty to 8th Air Force Headquarters. Although the transfer was a temporary one, at month's end it seemed likely that it would be permanent. Col Arnold had been with the Group since its activation and had successively held the posts of S-1 Officer, S-4 Officer and Ground Executive. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Captain Mellor W. Stevenson, 407th Squadron Ground Executive and former Group Training Officer, was appointed to succeed Col Arnold. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Capt Stevenson joined the Group at Bovingdon in December, 1942.

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Major Julian R. Thornton, Jr, longtime Group Bombardier, returned to the US, and was succeeded by Captain Donald E. Smith, formerly the 325th Squadron Bombardier. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) 1st Lt Warren T. Doolittle of the 327th Squadron succeeded Captain Frank L. Fabec as Group Radar Navigator; 2nd Lt Ralph A. Nauman replaced 1st Lt Benjamin Schottenfels,Jr as Group Radar Officer. 1st Lt Walter Fieg, Asst Special Services Officer, was transferred. Captain Thaddeus E. Brasden,DC, left on December 16 for the US; Captain Worthey C. Boden, MC, Flight Surgeon of the 326th Squadron was transferred to the 7th General Hospital. On December 21st, Captain John T. Owens, DC, was transferred from the 8th AF Dental Detachment at Large to the 245th Medical Disp. Avn. (RS).

Training programs throughout the month were adequately maintained, with no particular changes being recorded. The S-2 training program was consolidated under the direction of Captain Albert O. Smith of the 327th Squadron. Captain Perry H. Burnham, Asst Group S-2 Officer, began a weekly series of Intelligence Summaries and war news reviews for unit commanders; the meetings were held on Tuesday mornings.

On December 16, the station was notified of an aircraft crash at about 1010 hours between Bozeat and Wollaston. Ambulances, crash crew and MPs were dispatched. The aircraft was from the

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379th Bomb Group, on an operational mission, and a bail-out order had been given at 1800 feet; all crew members except the pilot survived.

The medical treatment of ears involving the use of radium, first used on the station in November, was continued December 12, when 19 patients were examined, 10 treated by radium by Major Eschenbrenner, MC, of 1st Division.

The trend toward brightening-up the station- begun two months before under the impetus of a change of Commanding Officers- continued, with the 407th Squadron making the most extensive changes. A picket fence enclosed the living quarters of the site, and an identifying sign was erected. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) The 326th Squadron also erected a sign. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) The Motor Pool boasted a newly paved stretch of roadway.

A major improvement was made in the Consolidated Mess, where a warmer color scheme, composed of grass-green, primrose yellow and tangerine, supplanted the old drab walls. The decorations were planned and supervised by Sgt Sebastian T. Puglisi of the 407th Squadron, Teletype section head. Even warmer were the silhouette illustrations of female anatomy, by Sgt B. D. Windsor and Pvt G. P. Cleveland, calculated to increase GI temperatures a few degrees. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Wall decorations also included the names of famous combat aircraft, and amusing color

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cartoons by S/Sgt Rex Brasher.

Captain Alexander L. Brooks, former adjutant of the 326th Squadron, attended a special Information-Education course in London the early part of December, and in the middle of the month presented a short course for the dozen officers and enlisted men who intended to teach in the program scheduled to begin on January 1. At the end of the month, an enrollment of 300 students was reported. Instructors and subjects were: Advertising, Sgt John S. Sloan; Algebra, Cpl Norman S. McAllister; Bookkeeping and Accounting, S/Sgt Sam Butler and 2nd Lt Willis F. Early; Business Law, 1st Lt Solomon Weinstein; Calculus, 2nd Lt Xenophon E. Eugenedes; Electricity, S/Sgt Paul W. Moore, Sgt Lyman P. Sayles and Sgt William E. Young; German, Chaplain Method C. Billy; Grammar and English, 1st Lt William M. Sage; Live Stock Production, T/Sgt Robert E. Colford; Public Speaking, Captain Perry H. Burnham.

On December 13, the long-discontinued Station Bus Service was reinstated, with one bus operating between 0700 and 1700 hours, circling the perimeter track, thence to the messing site and back; two buses traversed the same route during messing hours. The experiment seemed only partially successful; many trips were made with small patronage and the fact seemed to be that most of

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the potential customers still preferred to ride their bicycles.

A Safety Council Board consisting of Lt Col Bert A. Arnold, Major John A. Doughtie, Major James J. Boutty, Major Joseph R. Henry, Major William D. Smith, Captain Edward C. Weizer and 1st Lt Edward P. Munson was set up on December 15, with Major Smith designated as Ground Safety Officer. Later changes in personnel involved the substitution of Capt Stevenson for Col Arnold, and the addition of Captain Kenneth Thompson. Duties of the Board included analysis and study of the shops from the safety point of view, reviewing man-hour losses through accidents, and miscellaneous matters relating to the safety of personnel on and off the base.

A pistol team, organized under the direction of 1st Lt Edward P. Munson, Provost Marshal, was formed early in the month for the purpose of competing in the 40th Combat Wing Pistol Marksmanship Match on December 28; if successful, to further compete in the 1st Division Match in January. The team, composed of Lt Munson, 1st Lt George H. Orloff, 2nd Lts William A. Dalton and Arthur J. Walters and Pfc Charles Land, finished second in the Wing Match with a score of 409 out of a possible 500. Lt Orloff, with 91.3 was high man for the team, 3rd high man in the match.

CWS activities, offensively, showed a marked increase in December over the previous month, with a total of 484 500 lb. M-17 incendiaries expended. Under the direction of Lt Daniel

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D. Miller, work to perfect the loading of the "Fire Bomb" was continued. A new Smoke Trail bomb with a new type of flange was introduced during the month.

The 446th Sub-Depot put in an active month, with the Engine Build-Up section having the busiest month in history. More engines were drawn by Squadrons than in any previous month. The organization was the recipient of a commendation from Col Wilson for the superior quality of maintenance provided the Group.

Several changes in personnel occurred at the Red Cross Aeroclub; early in the month Miss Hannah Cooper, Aeroclub Director since its opening, left to take up new duties in France. Miss Betty Boyd succeeded Miss Cooper. A new manageress, Miss Mabel Pearce, and a new accountant, Miss Margaret Rushton, were added to the staff. Miss Pearce, a pleasant and dynamic Englishwoman, soon made her presence felt; chocolate milk shakes magically appeared one night; on several nights Miss Pearce featured pancakes and maple syrup.

Three dances, sponsored by separate squadrons on each occasion, were held at the Aeroclub during December, with the Snack Bar gaily decorated for each event. Bingo continued to be a popular weekly institution; one square dance held during the month entertained participants and spectators alike.

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The Special Services program for the month was routine. Captain Herb J. Baumsten, Special Services Officer, continued his football lectures; a USO show called "Going to Town" drew an estimated 725 on December 19. The third local-talent GI show "Strictly a Snow Job" amused 750 spectators on December 28. A basketball team, organized early in the month to play in the 1st Division League, got off to a slow start, or to practically no start at all, losing their first 3 games. The victors: Bassingbourne, the 306th Group, the 398th Group. The first two games were played at Northampton, the last at Ware. The losers, coached by 1st Lt William M. Sage, Group Statistical Officer, claimed a legitimate alibi-- weather conditions had interfered with practice, in fact, the team had had no practice at all.

In December the PX cash register rang up a total of 2858 pounds, of which 200 pounds was accounted for by the Coca-Cola fountain. Developing of camera rolls, begun two months before, showed an increase as more and more men became aware of the service. At the end of the year, PX gross sales amounted to 37,340 pounds. Since early July, when the Coca-Cola fountain was installed, a total of 1447 pounds had been paid by thirsty GIs-- an average, amateur statisticians calculated, of 38 glasses per man since installation.

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Christmas was, of course, the focal point of the month from the social point of view. Many organizations had holiday parties; as early as December 16th, the 1205th Quartermaster Company had a party in the Enlisted Men's Bar and Lounge. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Not to be outdone, the 325th Squadron had a party in the Consolidated Mess on the 21st. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Perhaps the most succeseful of the parties was that of the 446th Sub-Depot on December 23rd, also in the Consolidated Mess. The affair- a combined Anniversary and Christmas party- was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. Camouflage netting was laid across the rafters of the ceiling, holly wreaths adorned the walls and some chaff was obtained to decorate the blackout curtains. Chrysanthemums were given the girls.

The PX, the MPs and the Red Cross Aeroclub had Christmas trees, gaily decorated and lighted. On the Saturday before Christmas, the Aeroclub was the scene of a party for over a hundred children from neighboring villages; several days later another party, this time for the crippled children from a nearby home, was given. Gifts presented to the children on each occasion consisted largely of candy donations from the men during the month, and assembled by Chaplain Ware and Chaplain Billy. The Red Cross girls and a volunteer staff of GIs provided

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Christmas wrappings for the gifts.

Religious services were held on Christmas Eve; Col Wilson and Major Cox participated in the reading of the Scriptures. Of interest was the fact that Major Cox had returned only a few hours before from leading what was the Group's most trying mission of the month. Chaplain Billy held a Midnight Mass at the Aeroclub later in the evening.

On Christmas Eve, when aircraft of the Group had been diverted to other fields because of weather conditions, two swans elected to be diverted to the base. At about 2130 hours, MPs on duty at the main gate were startled by an unfamiliar and sustained noise, followed by a slight jolt against the side of the MP hut. Investigation produced a slightly-dazed, icy-winged swan, which, apparently attracted by light, had flown against the side of the hut. Minutes later another swan came down, this time a few yards away. Mystified but not intimidated by this unusual circumstance, the MPs solved the dilemma in a traditional MP way, and the visitors were escorted to the guardhouse. In the morning they were released.

On Christmas Day, Col Wilson issued a greeting:

> "The Commanding Officer and Staff of this Station desire to extend the season's greetings to all members of this Command.
> The past year has been one of glorious achievements by

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the fine teamwork of all. The courage and fortitude displayed by the combat crew members in the numerous and sustained encounters with the enemy has established a tradition of conduct in battle which is an example and inspiration to all. The untiring efforts of the ground personnel in maintaining the tools of war has made possible our outstanding successes.

I am fully confident that a continuation of your superb efforts during the coming year will bring us all closer to complete victory and opportunity to return to our beloved ones."

Christmas carols were played over the Tannoy system during Christmas Day; an icy sleet made a delicate crystal tracery in the trees, making the day a little more familiar and homelike than in other years. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) GIs enjoyed a Christmas dinner which ranked among the best in memory; noted with interest that Col Wilson forsook the Officer's Mess to eat his main meal at the Consolidated Mess; went about their usual work, holiday or not. There was still a war on, there was still work to be done. Some may have reflected on the ironic circumstance that the national imagination which had produced Santa Claus had also produced V-2.

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