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92-92-21 (Comp)
June, 1945

The road back stretched a long way: from Czechoslovakia to Georgia, from the Elbe to the Missouri, from England to the Golden Gate. From the fields and towns and cities of Western Europe, the American soldier was taking his leave. Ports of Embarkation were flooded with eager, impatient GI's, the staging areas were swelling to the bursting point, the Bridge of Ships once more spanned the Atlantic. Home was no longer a word mentioned in hushed, loving and unbelieving tones; it was tangible once more, a fact, a concrete reality.

But for the majority of the men of the 92nd Bombardment Group, home was still only a word. The Group was sidetracked on a branch road that led only to a dead end. The road reached from England to southern France to North Africa and back, but no place else. In June, 1945, the Group was helping fly others home, but not its own men. At month's end, personnel of the Group were stationed in three different countries on two continents, the "Green Project" was officially underway, and large-

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scale separations had depleted the Group's strength by more than 25%. The address still read "92nd Bombardment Group" but it was in name only: the 92nd was now a transport outfit. It's job: to fly ground forces troops from a large staging area near Marseilles to Casablanca on the first leg of an aerial journey home.

Southern France is famed for its natural beauty. The Riviera, onetime playground of the world's international set, lies along the Mediterranean east of Marseilles, and the names of its resorts- Nice, Cannes, Antibes, Monte Carlo- excite thoughts of luxury and romance in American minds. The Alps rise a short distance from the coast, and westward is Arles, whose dazzling colors, rich and warm, inspired much of the painting of Van Gogh and the music of Bizet. Avignon, home of the Popes for more than a hundred years, and the vineyards of Provence are nearby.

Inevitably ignored in descriptions of the splendors of Southern France is an open plain of dust and stone, labelled "La Crau." This wasteland was the 92nd Group's new home. GIs immediately devised another name, more apt and expressive for the region, but less quotable. The field, situated outside of Istres, a town 35 miles northwest of Marseilles, was huge, sprawling westward across the desert indefinitely. Prior to the war, it was the "Randolph Field" of France, and a leading

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air experimental station. Buildings of concrete and stucco, and paved streets lined with trees amply protected the French from the dust storms. Under the occupation, the field became a German battle headquarters for fighter and reconnaissance units in Southern France. Forced out in August, 1944, they mined the field and destroyed the permanent installations. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) The level wasteland, on which the Group was forced to locate, offered no protection against the mistral, a northerly wind that blows on the average of 110 days a year. When the wind blew strongly, the air was saturated with a fine brown dust that penetrated everywhere. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

The mass of detail that precedes a movement had largely been accomplished in May. The transfer of the entire Group to its new quarters could not, however, be speedily effected because of the poor condition of the field at Istres. Also, the low operational committment for the month under the "Green Project" made a rush move unnecessary, although the entire 327th Squadron headed by Lt Col James A. Smyrl, flew to Port Lyautey, French Morocco, on June 1.

Naturally the main activity of the Group centered around Istres. Podington, during the month, served as a supply base for the new field. Aircraft shuttled back and forth loaded to capacity with equipment. Slowly, the English field that had been the home of the 92nd Group for almost 2 years, was stripped of its men and its gear.

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The vehicles of the Group were the first to leave for France. Trucks were packed with crates, and the personal belongings of the drivers were piled high on jeeps and weapons carriers, most of which had trailers attached. Two men were assigned to a vehicle and took turns driving. The convoys embarked at Southampton and crossed the Channel on LCT's. The trip across France began at Le Havre and stretched for 710 road miles to the southern coast. There were 3 separate convoy movements from Podington to Istres, all of which were coordinated with the Transportation Corps. Designated halt points along the road were available for refueling and servicing. The drivers ate C rations, averaged 10 hours of driving each day and slept, in the open, in U.S. Army areas located well off the highways. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

The first convoy, composed of 46 vehicles and trailers, and under the command of 1st Lt Charles H. Nesbit of the 325th Squadron, left Podington on May 29th and arrived at Istres on June 5. The succeeding two convoys were delayed at Southampton by bad weather. The first of these, commanded by Capt Steve J. Mayoros of the 326th Squadron, consisted of 112 vehicles and trailers and arrived in Istres on June 10. The other, the largest convoy dispatched, had 174 vehicles and trailers. Led by Capt Milton A. Armstrong, Group Transportation Officer, it left on June 7 and rolled into the new base on June 17.

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On June 3, meanwhile, an advance party of 70 men headed by Major Ygnacio J. Bideganeta, 325th Squadron CO, with Major Donald E. Smith as his assistant, flew to Istres to ready the field for the arrival of the Group, and to make necessary preparations for the inauguration of the "Green Project." An engineering unit was already at work, drilling for water, building latrines, grading the streets and beginning tent construction. Stones were cleared from the areas designated as living and working sites, mess tents set up, power and telephone lines were strung. Daily, the equipment flown in from Podington was unloaded. Major Bideganeta and his officers supervised the organization of the administrative sections, unravelled the knotty problems of supply, co-ordinated all activities with 40th Bomb Wing and ATC headquarters, and did their share of the manual labor. When the mistral blew for 4 days running, the men donned dust respirators and continued working. Major Bideganeta, who in the course of his army career had seen service on dusty Texas and Arizona fields, said: "I've never seen anything to match this field. I hope I never do!"

M/Sgt Melvin S. Johnson of the 325th Squadron served as a "one man line" until he was joined several days later by two other mechanics. An average of 20 aircraft were arriving each day, and 5 flat tires was the customary daily quota. Sgt Johnson recruited what help he could, and

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almost everyone, including Majors Bideganeta and Smith, took their turn at tire-changing. Col James W. Wilson, Group CO, was pleased enough by the work accomplished to issue letters of commendation to Major Bideganeta, Major Smith, 1st Lt Joseph S. Stinson, acting Quartermaster Officer, and Sgt Johnson.

At the new field, the difficulties were threefold. With the mines already removed by the engineers, the major problems were sanitation, dust and living quarters. The Germans, with characteristic Teutonic thoroughness, had not only destroyed the buildings but had poured concrete down the sewage drains. The living and working sites of the Group, therefore, had to be situated on the field proper, several miles from the quarters used by the French and Germans. This section of the field had not been previously used and was dotted with stones. Sanitation facilities were non-existent. Engineering units were drilling for water; at the month's beginning, water had to be trucked in from town, purified, then used for drinking and cooking. Until the first showers were constructed in the 364th Group site, which adjoined the 92nd, men were taken to the ATC showers several miles distant on the other side of the field. By the end of June, the well was completed and enough water could be obtained from it to temporarily satisfy the needs of both Groups. Unexpected difficulty was encountered in digging latrines when it was discovered that an almost solid bed of rock was 18 inches underground.

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Dynamite had to be employed to blast the rock before the latrines could be completed.

The dust was the major source of discomfort in the early days and continued to be the main irritant to all personnel. Clouds of dust followed in the wake of jeeps and trucks, racing aircraft engines and taxi-ing planes created dust fogs, winds whipped the dust all over the area. The men washed dust from their bodies, swept it off their cots, shook it out of their clothes and bedding, ate it with their food. Wryly, they christened one mess tent "Dust Bowl Cafeteria." (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

The dust was omnipresent. There was no completely effective remedy, but calm weather and oil provided some respite. Oil was spread over the Regimental Street and the taxi strip, but it was not available in sufficient quanity to be used everywhere it was needed. Tractors were used to haul the aircraft from their parking stands to the taxi strip, and back again, as another means of combatting the dust. These measures, plus calm days, alleviated the situation somewhat. It seemed, however, that the dust would be a constant problem.

The ground was hardly suitable for tent construction. There was a multitude of stones, and tent stakes could not be firmly driven into

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the powdery earth. When, during the second week of the month, the mistral swept the field for four days, 35% of the tents already built were blown down. Although quickly replaced, the men thereafter slept fitfully when the wind blew and the dust flew. The difficulty, however, promised to be quickly overcome. By the end of the month, various sections were set up in tents, with board floors, and the construction of prefabricated wooden buildings was begun. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

On June 12, the 325th Squadron arrived by plane from England and 3 days later the "Green Project" was under way. On the morning of June 15, at 0700 hours, 3 aircraft of the 325th Squadron carrying 92 infantrymen as passengers took off for Casablanca, 850 miles distant. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) 5 hours and 20 minutes later, the aircraft touched down at their destination long enough to discharge the men bound for the US, then flew to Port Lyautey. The next day, with displaced French civilians for passengers, the aircraft returned to Istres. 3 aircraft were dispatched daily for the first week of operations, and 6 daily the second week. In the two weeks of operations during June, 68 aircraft carried 2,029 US Army personnel to Africa, and returned 311 civilians to France. All operations were carried out by the 325th Squadron, the only squadron functioning at Istres in June. All flights were completed on schedule and without incident.

The organization of the 92nd's part of the "Green Project" was

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largely the work of Lt Col Ernest C. Hardin,Jr., Group Operations Officer. While still at Podington, he introduced a program for the retraining of pilots, navigators and radio operators to meet the needs of transport flying. On June 3, he issued an operations memorandum concerning procedures. (See APPENDIX B.) In Istres, he was responsible for the new operations, briefing and maintenance methods; the efficiency which characterized all flights was a tribute to his planning.

Col Wilson took over personal command of the new base in the middle of the month, and Lt Col Albert L. Cox,Jr., Deputy Group CO, was the top ranking officer at Podington. Col Wilson made a tour of inspection of Port Lyautey, and flew to Podington several times. On one occasion he addressed a meeting of all personnel, advising them of the progress being made at Istres. The Headquarters Squadron flew to the new base on June 26, and the following day the French field officially became the home of the 92nd Group. The mailing address, including the APO, remained unchanged, but on all letterheads Station #1 replaced Station #109.

If the new base had its difficulties, there were also compensations. It was hot, but after two to three years in damp England, the Group's average GI welcomed the cloudless skies and the blazing sun. Possibly he would sing a different tune later, but at the moment, watching the

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color of his skin change from pink to glistening bronze- or an approximation thereof- was novel and pleasant. Every evening, those who wished could go swimming in the Etang de Berre, a large salt water lake only 20 minutes truck ride from the base. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Three villas in the seaside village of Sausset were leased by the Group, and were being converted into a Rest Home for enlisted men only. And, finally, liberty runs were daily flown to Rome, Paris and England, enabling the 92nd's men to spend their two-day passes in three different countries. The GI's were particularly enthusiastic about the pass plan; London and other English cities were popular with those who had more firmly dug their roots in English soil, and few thought that their overseas experience would be complete without gaping at the sights of Paris and Rome.

This emphasis on recreation and relaxation stemmed directly from Col Wilson's interest in his men. Although he had never been a GI, it was one of his chief characteristics that he could understand and grasp the enlisted man's attitudes, problems, desires. He knew that the years of overseas service had pinched the morale of his men, and that the prospect of continued service abroad could only worsen it. For purposes of military efficiency (a happy soldier is a good soldier) and because he felt the men deserved a break, the Group's CO made their welfare his

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especial concern. This was, of course, the duty of the Commanding Officer, but the extent of the program exceeded conventional limits. He appointed Major Donald F. Smith, Group Bombardier, as his Deputy for Welfare, a new position that embraced all activities likely to come under the rather general "welfare" heading: Special Services, pass privileges, Suggestion Box, all aspects of rest and relaxation for officers and men, PX, health and sanitation regulations. The measure of Major Smith's success could only be guaged by the morale readings of the Group; he was off to a good start.

On June 1, the total assigned strength, including the 409th Air Service Group, was 2876 officers and enlisted men. On June 30, there were approximately 2200 left. The majority of the men who left the Group were excess personnel: bombardiers, gunners, armorers, ordinance and turret men. There was, of course, no need for their skills in the "Green Project." These men were transferred to other groups that were, presumably, headed homeward. A good number of the ground personnel had been with the Group since training days in Florida, but if there was any grief at the parting, it was well concealed.

A small sprinkling of men left for home and discharge under the point plan. Depending upon their natures, GI's interpreted this variously; the optimists regarded this small beginning as a happy augury for the future, the pessimists saw in it an ominous sign of how the point system would

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continue to function.

A handful of men left the Group, slated for discharge under the new War Department policy of releasing men over 40. This announcement, coming soon after the age limit had been set at 42, began a wave of speculation among the older men on the field. Hopeful that it was indicative of a policy of arithmetical progression in reverse, men between 35 and 39 waited impatiently for a new statement. It came soon enough; no men under 40 would be released. The older men stopped scanning the "Stars and Stripes" with their former eagerness; apparently it would be points, not years, that would determine their discharge.

The flying visit of 1st Lt Thomas D. Creevy to Podington June 9 ended fatally for him when his P-51 crashed directly behind the 327th Squadron site. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Lt Creevy, who completed a tour of duty with the 92nd Group in March, had been assigned to a fighter outfit at his own request. He had returned to Podington for a short visit with friends. After takeoff, he flew low over the field, his engine sputtered and the aircraft cracked up: Lt Creevy was killed instantly.

The Awards and Decorations section continued to function and during the month, 3 Silver Stars, 7 DFC's, 3 Purple Hearts and 1 Bronze Star were awarded. F/O Anthony L. Marozas, 327th Squadron pilot, was added to the small group of men who received the Silver Star for a series of missions. 2nd Lt George W. Bailey of the 407th Squadron was awarded

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Silver Star for his actions while serving as Navigator on the March 7 mission to Fulda. Although severely wounded by flak on the first bomb run, he refused aid and continued at his post until bombs were finally dropped on a target of opportunity. He accepted aid after bombs away but declined morphine and aided in successfully guiding the plane home.

On March 18, with Berlin as the target, Sgt Robert H. Kuhnhausen, a nose gunner on 2nd Lt Henry M. Crossen's crew, had part of his right forearm torn away by a flak hit on the bomb run. Blood streamed from the wound, soaked through his flying clothes and pooled in his glove. He pressed his good hand against the gaping wound and, standing upright, waited for the "bombs away" signal. At the proper moment, he released his bombs, closed the bomb bay doors and then crumpled to the floor, unconscious. For his gallantry, Sgt Kuhnhausen, a member of the 407th Squadron, became the recipient of the month's third Silver Star.

Lt Col John H. McKee, former Group Operations Officer, and Capt Andrew S. Downs of the 327th Squadron were included among those who won DFC's. Capt Downs, who had 46 actual missions to his credit, said a little wistfully, "Naturally I'm glad the war's over, but I wish I could have flown 4 more missions. I really wanted to hit 50."

After the sweeping changes in duty assignments in May, June was stable and tranquil. 1st Lt James L. Weber, S-2 officer, was transferred

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to the 409th Service Group. 2nd Lt Theodore Green became Group Statistical Officer. Capt Walter W. Crawford was appointed Flight Surgeon of the 325th Squadron, and Capt Ray P. Stewart succeeded Capt Bernard B. Brodien, transferred, as Group S-1 Officer. Officer promotions during the month were at a new low: 5 to Captain, 3 to 1st Lieutenant. (See APPENDIX A.)

The Red Cross Aeroclub closed officially on June 5, with all refreshments free that evening. Miss Betty Boyd and Miss Doris Mann were scheduled to follow the Group to Istres and to organize a new club there. The men of the 92nd Group were keenly appreciative of the contribution made to their comfort during their stay in England by the club's volunteer workers. Several times a week, these women from the nearby villages had spent their evenings at the Aeroclub, making toast and sandwiches, dispensing tea and coffee and the English version of coca-cola, washing dishes and doing odd sewing jobs. Without their assistance, the Club could not have operated; with them, it was a more pleasant and home-like place.

Special Services functioned on both fields during the month; setting up facilities at Istres, tearing down its quarters in Podington. Movies continued to be exhibited at Station 109 throughout June, although the theatre was stripped of its seats and benches used in their stead. "Cagney's Cellar" closed on June 22, a bitter blow to the lovers of bitter. In Istres, the movie program was begun on June 21 under a Big Top tent. A

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week later, a stiff wind toppled the tent and thereafter, movies were shown in a revetment, after dark. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) A new service, a library of 4000 volumes, was opened the latter part of the month. Major credit for the library's organization went to Cpl John F. Gonoud of the 325th Squadron, assigned to Special Services. The collection, started at Podington on May 21, was well-indexed and, for the first time, the Group had a legitimate library.

Sgt Robert E. Hutchinson, PX manager, organized the PX setup at Istres within a few days after his arrival on the new base. Iced bottles of Coca-Cola were available on June 8, cold beer a few days later, and the sale of rations begun June 13. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) Sgt Hutchinson's efficiency earned him a commendation from Col Wilson.

The beer, American style and somewhat stronger than the British bitter served in Podington, came from a Marseilles brewery where it was made with American hops and following an American formula. 6000 bottles of Coca-Cola and 4400 litres (4800) quarts) of beer were the Group's liquid rations each week. Ice was a major problem in the early days at Istres because of the irregularity of quartermaster deliveries; the nearby towns were canvassed for ice plants and one was found, in Cavaillon, that could supply all the ice required by the PX. Sgt Hutchinson, with the large Marseilles depot to draw from, predicted that the PX would be stocked with a greater variety of merchandise than ever available at Podington. Total sales for June were

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354,733 francs, or approximately $7,100. At Station #109, the PX reopened the second week of the month and sold basic rations only for the balance of the month.

Not since the summer of 1942, when it was headed for overseas duty, had the 92nd Group been so dispersed. The 327th Squadron was in French Morocco, the 325th and Headquarters Squadrons were in France, and, except for advance parties, the 326th and 407th Squadrons were still in England. Another month was over; another job begun. The men in Poddington were making their last compromises with the vagaries of the English climate, the men in Istres struggled with a new field and a new language, the men in Port Lyautey stared at a land that was truly foreign. Despite the miles that separted them, almost all had one thing in common other than an address and a uniform— a yearning for a long-lost land. The English poet, William Blake, once wrote of a youth, a maid, a flower that were

"seeking after the sweet golden clime
where the traveler's journey is done."

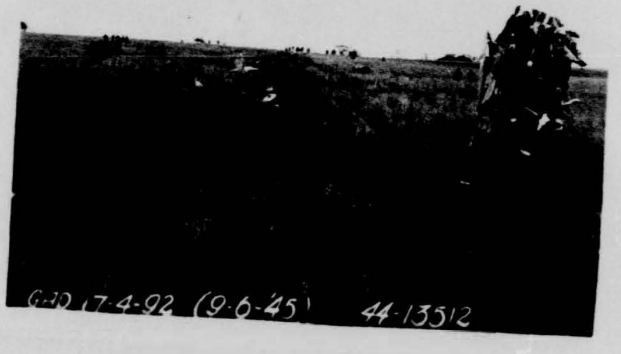
Blake's trio sought Paradise; in a way, so did the men of the 92nd. That "sweet golden clime" could be no place other than the USA.

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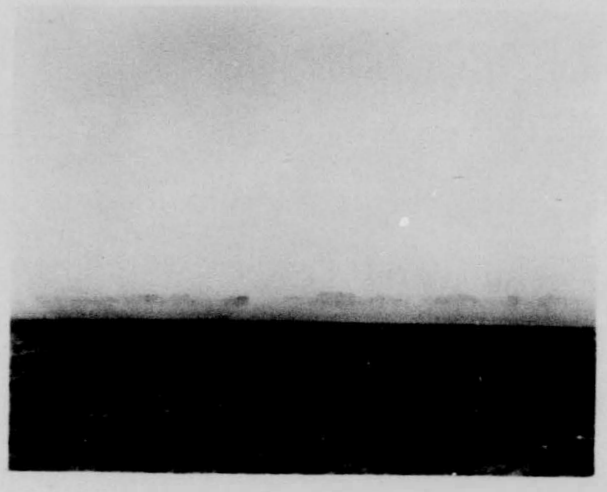
P-51 Crash, Podington, June 9,1945

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Destroyed by Germans, August, 1944.

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REVETMENT MOVIE, LSTRES

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CONVOY IN FRANCE.
...rest stop...

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CONVOY
aboard the LCT...

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FIRST FLIGHT- "GREEN PROJECT"
June 15, 1945

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PREFAB CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

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FIRST FLIGHT- "GREEN PROJECT"
June 15, 1945

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"Dust Bowl Cafeteria"

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Swimming Hole, Etang de Berre

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