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There was a phrase for the early days of May, 1945. It was, as Thomas Hardy had said of an end to an earlier war, a "time of the breaking of nations." To members of the 92nd Group, as to soldiers everywhere, the actual end of the war in Europe was an anti-climax. It came as one more of a chain of sensational developments, each too large and too complex for full understanding, each difficult for the individual to grasp: the reported death of Hitler, the fall of Berlin, the series of piecemeal surrenders of armies- to Alexander at Caserta, to Montgomery on Luneberg Heath, to Devers at Munich. The first week of May witnessed the complete collapse of the Wehrmacht, and the long road which had its beginning on the plains of Poland in 1939 came to its end in a Reims schoolhouse in the early hours of May 7, 1945.

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The news was officially announced by Col James W. Wilson, Group CO, on the morning of May 8, V-E Day, although some squadron CO's had made an unauthorized disclosure upon awakening the barracks the previous day. Speaking from the boxing ring on the athletic field, (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) Col Wilson also said that the Group was slated to move within a short period of time, but that he could not, at the moment, disclose its destination.

In a minor pattern, the mind of the 92nd Group's average GI mirrored the confusion of the world outside. The war was over, and his senses were assaulted successively by redeployment rumors, point score calculations, personnel processing, "Two Down and One to Go," physical examinations, crating and packing, flying over Germany on tours of the Ruhr, admiring his new OD battle jacket, talking to returned prisoners of war, arguing the merits and demerits of the newly announced point system for discharge.

At the month's beginning, the Group was, to all intents and purposes,

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finished with offensive operations, although this was not official. Actually, one field order was received, and a "Disney" mission was tentatively set up for May 3, but was scrubbed before briefing.

Of outstanding interest to Group members was "Plan Observation," a series of flights over the Ruhr valley which enabled more than 1100 of the personnel to view the devastated areas from altitudes ranging from 1000 to 3000 feet. The flights took place every day during the period between May 7-12. Additionally, a number of aircraft and crews were assigned to Watten during the same week to fly ground crews from that station. On May 13, a "Revival" mission was flown by 20 aircraft, led by Capt Ralph E. Hoffman of the 326th Squadron, which brought back 616 American prisoners of war from Barth airfield.

"Plan Observation" was a great success. The Group S-2 section prepared intelligence notes on the flight, with a list of Ruhr targets which had been attacked by the Group, and the information materially aided the

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understanding of the passengers. (See APPENDIX A). Technicians from the Photo Lab took pictures. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

On May 4, S-1 personnel began processing the records of all officers and enlisted men on the base. A line was set up in the S-2 Briefing Room, and the work was speeded through in 11 days, although 3 weeks had been calculated for the job. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) During the same period, medical personnel began the prior-to-redeployment physical examinations. More than 3100 officers and men were examined.

Tragedy struckthe Group early in the month. On a routine training flight on the morning of May 5, the aircraft piloted by 1st Lt Reginald L. Hammond of the 326th Squadron crashed and burned at Sidow Hill, Wiltshire, killing 6 of the 7 occupants of the ship. T/Sgt Leonard J. Nitti, radio operator, was seriously injured but survived. The aircraft, in 10/10 fog, struck tree-tops at approximately 700 feet altitude, severing

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the wing tips. It travelled upward, bellied over the top of the hill 150 feet higher, crashed and burned. Wreckage was strewn for almost a mile down the far side of the hill. Casualties, in addition to the pilot, were: 1st Lt Robert L. Sprout, co-pilot; 2nd Lt John F. Duffy, navigator; 2nd Lt William J. Dutton, a passenger; T/3gt Jacob Buikema, engineer, and S/Sgt Daniel Minkon.

At the time of the accident, Lt Hammond and his crew had experienced a rather more spectacular career than the average. Beginning their tour on Feb. 3, they had established a speed record in completing 33 missions by April 16. They had been named "Crew of the Week" for their persistence in bombing a target of opportunity on March 28, after flak had severely damaged the aircraft and a turnback would have been unquestioned. On April 11, a blown tire on takeoff resulted in their plane exploding on the runway, with crew members safely away from the scene. On May 18, the DFC was posthumously awarded to Lt Hammond, in recognition of

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"extraordinary achievement" on a series of missions.

Although the European war had ended, its hazards and adventures were vividly recalled by the awards made during the month. For deeds performed as far back as 8 months, the decorations list for May, topped by a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross, included 16 DFC's, 2 Soldier's Medals, 8 Purple Hearts and 4 Bronze Stars. 2 Oak Leaf Clusters to the DFC and 1 to the Purple Heart were also presented. 8 Croix de Guerre avec Etoile d'argent were awarded to Group members at a ceremony at 1st Division Headquarters early in the month, although only 2 were present to receive the decorations.

The DSC- fourth such award in Group history- went to the widow of 2nd Lt Conrad B. Richards, 325th Squadron pilot, who sacrificed his life in the English Channel on October 5, 1944, while attempting to save the lives of his crew. Lt Richards' aircraft was almost home, after an arduous return from a successful mission to Cologne. He had fought a wildly wind-

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milling propellor since before the target. Over the Channel, the propellor finally flew off, taking with it about eight feet of wing surface and most of the aileron. Mortally crippled, the aircraft plummetted in a spiral dive toward the water, and centrifugal force prevented the crew from obeying the pilot's previous order to bail out. Lt Richards struggled desperately with the controls. In a dual exhibition of strength and skill, he stemmed the dive sufficiently, although the plane continued to fall, to enable members of his crew to parachute out. Lt Richards had made a choice: his men got out, and he was still in the ship when it crashed and exploded in the cold waters of the Channel.

Only 2 of the crew survived: 1st Lt Wallace L. McClaflin, the co-pilot, and 1st Lt James B. Kane, Jr., the navigator. A few days later, speaking of his pilot, Lt Kane said, "He was the bravest man I have ever known. He went down with the plane to save us."

Receiving the Croix de Guerre for their part in the 8th Air Force's

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successful contribution to the liberation of France, were 8 members of the 92nd Group. Only two- Lt Cols James A. Smyrl and Ernest C. Hardin,Jr., 327th and 326th Squadron CO's, respectively- were still with the Group and present to receive their awards. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) The other 6 -some long since returned to the US- were Lt Col Robert P. Riordan, Lt Col James K. McLaughlin,Jr., Major Charles H. Bronson,Jr., Major Julian K. Thornton,Jr., Capt Erro A. Michelson and Capt Frederick T. Prasse.

4 of the DFC's awarded during the month went to radar navigators, emphasizing again the vitally important nature of their work, which was too often dwarfed by the more spectacular deeds of the pilots. Those honored were 1st Lt Warren T. Doolittle, Group Radar Navigator, 1st Lt John D. Metnight of the 326th Squadron, 1st Lts Robert B. Chesterfield and William H. Raley of the 327th Squadron. The citation accompanying

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the award to the latter was typical of all. Lt Riley's skill and understanding of the most complicated techniques materially aided successful instrument bombing on 4 separate occasions, the last of which was the February 26 mission to Berlin, when Lt Riley flew with Col Anthony W. Mustoe, 40th CBW CO, leading the entire 8th Air Force.

Other DFC's awarded during May were mainly for collective achievement; characteristic was the decoration earned by 1st Lt Robert D. Peterson, 325th Squadron pilot. His tenacity of purpose and aeronautical skill were responsible on 3 different occasions during March for the successful completion of the assigned mission under difficult circumstances. In each case, his aircraft suffered battle damage or engine failure, and in each case, his bombs landed in the target area.

In May, a number of 92nd Group prisoners of war were liberated by the sweep through Germany, and some returned to base on their way home. For the benefit of those coming through Camp Lucky Strike in France, a

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brief resume of the 92nd's history was prepared and mimeographed for distribution. (See APPENDIX B.)

During the early days of May, the air was filled with rumors. The 8th Air Force would go home, then to the Pacific. The 1st Division would stay in Europe. The 1st Division would go home. Certain groups would stay in England; some might go to the Continent. But gradually, out of the fog of rumor, there emerged what seemed to be an authentic note. There was some sub-rosa whispering about the "Green Project." It seemed to be connected with transport, but whether of troops, displaced civilians or freight- the 92nd Group's GIs did not know. There were hints that the plan involved transport to Africa, through the Mediterranean. Others, with a straight-from-the-horses'-mouth air, insisted that the Group would be based in Germany. At any event, a B-17 was taken to the 2nd SAD at Abbots Hipton early in the month, stripped of its turrets, and benches installed in the waist and bomb bay. It seemed

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certain then that transportation was involved, in whatever job the 92nd Group was scheduled for.

Thus it was, that by the time Col Wilson addressed a mass meeting at the Consolidated Mess at noon one day later in the month, he prefaced his disclosure of the Group's destination with the phrase "you men can probably tell me more about where we are going than I can tell you."

The exaggeration was not too great, for Lt Col James A. Smyrl, 327th Squadron CO had already disclosed some details of the impending movement to members of his squadron. The 327th knew that it would be based at Port Lyautey, French Morocco, on the farther end of a transportation hookup.

The French airdrome at Istres, on the Rhone delta northwest of Marseilles, would be the 92nd Group's new home, Col. Wilson said. Both the 92nd and the 384th Groups would be connected with the "Green Project," transporting troops from Europe to Africa on the initial leg of their

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aerial journey home. The Colonel added that while he had not as yet inspected the location at Istres, he had been informed by the 384th Group CO that it was reminiscent of the section "three miles outside of Phoenix, Arizona."

The Group's average GI digested this information with his dinner. The average reaction seemed to depend upon the number of points the average reactee had. High-point men, as a rule, wanted to go home, or to await discharge in England, where almost 3 years of living had resulted in attachments- emotional or sentimental. Many a hitherto violent Anglophobe changed his point of view abruptly. Low-point men, as well as newcomers to the Group, viewed the prospect with more enthusiasm. French phrase-books began to be thumbed, and a variety of pseudo-French was heard. In the meantime, packing and crating and all the preliminaries necessary to movement went steadily on. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

It was past the middle of the month when the first detachment of

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75 officers and men - as distinguished from the inspecting parties- left Podington for Istres. The men, drawn from the 325th, 326th and 407th Squadrons, were under the command of Major John W. Herin, 325th Ground Executive, and 1st Lt Robert N. Naifeh, 326th Squadron S-2 Officer. Their function was to guard the 200 German prisoners who cleared the road sites of rocks. The men were billeted in the demolished area where the French and later the Germans had lived— now a pile of shattered walls and rubble. The 837th Engineering Battalion provided food for the men; the ATC provided quarters in Istres for the officers.

Lt Naifeh, acting as Provost Marshal, superintended the actual work of laying out the streets, and briefed the guards on the correct treatment of the prisoners. In a few days, the Regimental Street and its intersecting roads were recognizable.

Officer promotions during the month- although "frozen" as of May

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16- totalled 74: 1 to Major, 11 to Captain, 62 to 1st Lieutenant. (See APPENDIX C.) Attaining the majority was Capt Herb J. Baumsten, onetime Special Services Officer, later 407th Squadron Ground Executive and, at month's end, Group Ground Executive, succeeding Major Mellor W. Stevenson, transferred.

With the close of the war in Europe, the 92nd Group's personnel began to undergo considerable change. Transfers and changes of duty assignment were the most numerous in history, and many officers and enlisted men who had performed notable service over long periods of time went home or were transferred to other theaters. Changes were made from top to bottom, as the Group was streamlined for the new job just ahead. Among the well-known figures leaving the Group were Lt Col William H. Nelson, Air Executive; Lt Col John R. McKee, Operations Officer; Major Mellor W. Stevenson, Ground Executive; Major Philip L. Capdeveille, Communications Officer; Major James J. Boutty, Engineering Officer; Major John C. Prosch, Training

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Officer; Major Robert E. Tauscher, Group S-2 Officer; Major William V. Croak, Group Adjutant; Major John M. Herin, 325th Ground Executive, and others.

The general re-shuffle to fill in the vacancies, resulted, at the end of May, in the following new major assignments: Lt Col Albert L. Cox, Jr., Deputy Group CO; Lt Col Ernest C. Hardin,Jr., Deputy for Operations; Major Ygnacio J. Bideganeta, 325th Squadron CO; Major Victor A. Cherbak,Jr., 326th Squadron CO; Capt Karl A. Posch, Group Engineering Officer; Capt Martin R. Hertz, Group Air Inspector; Capt Leslie G. Gerdts, Group Communications Officer; Capt James V. Moriarty, Group S-2 Officer; Capt Edward C. Meizer, ~~Assistant~~ Deputy for Administration; Capt William A. Stroud, Plans and Training Officer. New Ground Executives in the individual squadrons were: Capt Daniel A. Fadenrecht, 325th; Capt Leonard G. Johnson, 326th; Capt Henry G. Callahan,Jr., 327th and Capt John A. Noel, 407th. Additionally, on May 18, Capt Hugh J. Gallagher succeeded Capt Method C. Billy as Roman Catholic

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Chaplain.

Recreational activities at Podington continued throughout the month in traditional fashion. The Red Cross Aeroclub, although uncertain as to how long it would remain in operation, did not alter its schedule of events. Highlighting the month's program was an imported stage show from London, and the performance was a feature of one of the two regular dances. The "V-E" dance, held on the Saturday following that memorable day, featured a novel wall motif originated by Doris Mann, the Club program director. The design was made from a number of copies of the "Stars and Stripes" of May 8, and the huge, fan-shaped decoration repeated "GERMANY QUITS" in 6-inch block letters.

The 92nd Skyliners, in addition to its regular quota of dances, appeared almost daily in the Consolidated Mess. Additionally, the band played for five weekly "jam sessions" in the Aeroclub which were well-patronized. The movie schedule at the newly decorated Post Theatre continued without inter-

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uption through the month, as did the softball league. The nightly liberty runs to Northampton assumed a new attractiveness as the month neared its end-- many Group members were uncertain if they would ever see England again; the 327th Squadron was alerted to leave for Port Lyautey on June 1, and two convoys from the Group were on their way to Istres as the month closed.

The "Suggestion Box" system functioned until the end of the month, with personnel continuing to set down complaints and ideas. (See APPENDIX D.) Several suggestions were received that the plan be continued at the new base; these were accepted favorably, and theboxes, it was made known, would be in operation at Istres.

So May came to its end— a month devoted mainly to preparations for the movement. Its final week was marked by the departure of two convoys for the new base in France; by the 327th's preparations for departure to Africa. The month-old plans for movement were on the verge of realization.

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The history of an organization is largely the chronicle of individuals acting collectively-- occasionally, it is the record of isolated action. On the individual level, during the final days of the month, were two noteworthy happenings, unrelated except in time. On May 25, T/Sgt Harry J. Richard, mess sergeant of the Consolidated Mess, was married in the Catholic Church of Our Lady and St. Lawrence in Olney to Miss Phyllis Pepper of Wembley. (See PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.) A rough check-up indicated that Sgt Richard's marriage- perhaps the last one for the Group in England- brought the total marriages of Group members to slightly more than 200, since the Group's arrival in the late summer of 1942.

There was to be no movement for Sgt James A. Douglas, MP of the 409th Air Service Group. A period of brooding over the state of his health resulted finally in a fateful decision, and in the early hours of the morning of May 31, he shot himself through the head.

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Preparations for Movemen

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Preparations for Movement

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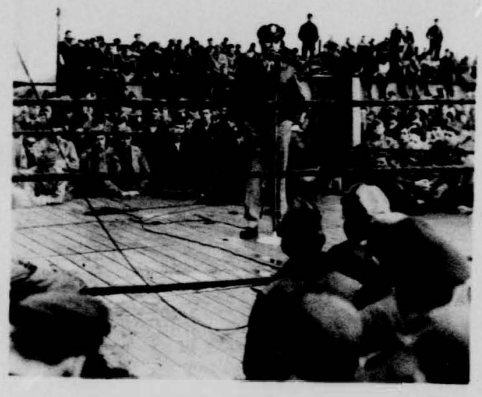


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V-E Day Address by Col Wilson

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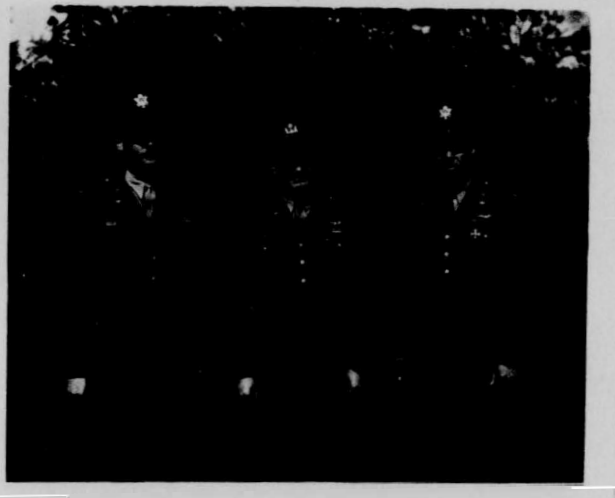
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WIN CROIX DE GUERRE
Lt Col James A. Smyrl, Col Anthony Q. Marteo,
Lt Col Ernest C. Hardin, Jr.

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GI Wedding at Olney, May 25

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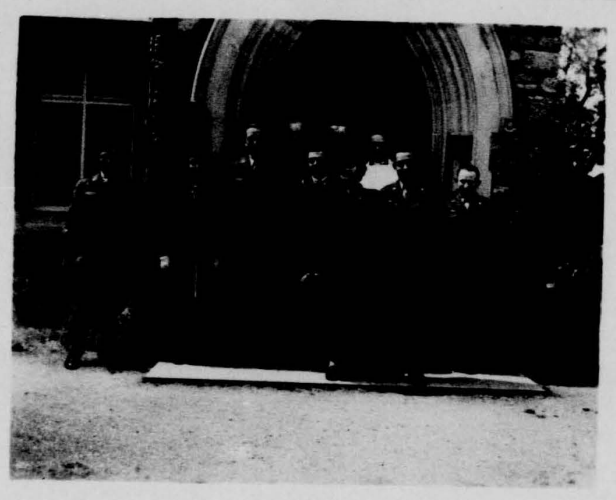
Preparations for Movement

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Wedding at Olney, May 25

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