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GP-92-Hi(Rome) Hist. HQS

When the news was flashed on August 10, one GI muttered, "I don't believe it, I can't believe it". He looked like a man who had received a stunning blow. His disbelief was rooted in 4 years of army life, 4 years of training, fighting, waiting, hoping, dreaming, praying for this day. It was almost unthinkable that it was here. A dutiful soldier, he had been told by his superiors to expect a long war. A studious soldier, he placed his trust in the reports of military analysts who agreed with his superiors. A human being, he was psychologically readied, consciously and otherwise, for many more months of war. His mind, except, in dreams, was almost closed to the thought of peace. But however difficult to digest, it was nonetheless a fact; the war was over.

The tense, uncertain period of August 10 - 15, restored the American Forces Network newscasts to the position of eminence they enjoyed in the waning days of the European war. Largely ignored for 3 months, they now once again commanded the active and attentive interest of the men. Every hour, on the hour knots of men gathered at radios, hoping to hear word of the final capitulation. There was some excitement, some eagerness, but on the whole, emotions were kept under firm restraint. When the surrender was at last confirmed by President Truman, there was no wild show of jubilation. The men sighed with relief and set their sights on the promised land.

With 3 up and all 3 down, it appeared that the only target left was the U.S. War Department, and upon that office and all abstract army "Wheels", the GI's of the group unleased a continuing and withering verbal barrage. Daily, the men avidly read the Washington redeployment

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bulletins in the Stars and Stripes and regularly exploded with loud and wrathful criticism. No two men had similar programs but all agreed that they could give the War Department sound and sensible advice. Redeployment talk and rumor clouded the air and with almost all the 85 pointers gone, it was the 75-84 point men, hitherto despondent and docile, who clamored for immediate action.

The startling and literally earth shaking news that preceded Japan's surrender plea brought a minor prophet in the Group's ranks to prominence. When the first atomic bomb was followed by Russia's entry into t he war, Sgt. Hartwell W. Speegle predicted that a Jap offer to quit would be received in a few days. Forty-eight hours later, he was proved right. Guessing about the turns of war has always been a favorite game with soldiers but the accepted rule was that no one was ever right. When asked, Sgt. Speegle admitted his crystal ball was a little cloudy on the subject of the Group's future.

The end of the war had its effect on the Green Project. Operational schedules called for progressive increases in the number of men transported to Casablanca and by August 10, the group was sending out 15 planes as compared with the 3 ships that flew the first trip on June 15. When the surrender offer was accepted, however, 30 ATC planes operating between Casablanca and the U.S. were transferred to the Pacific Theatre to aid the evacuation of wounded and released prisoners. ATC was, therefore, unable to meet its Green Project commitments and flights from Istres slumped sharply. For 4 days, the trips were suspended and when operations were resumed on August 22, the quota called for only 5 aircraft per day.

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During August, the 92nd dispatched 250 ships, loaded with 7360 passengers to Casablanca and returned 2354 French refugees to Istres. Since June 15, 17,954 men have been started home and 4646 French civilians repatriated. As in June and July, no accident of any sort marred the month's operations.

The administration of the project by the 40th Bomb Wing and its execution by the two bomb groups elicited a string of commendations from various higher headquarters. The number of passengers carried in July exceeded the quota by 1170 and this fact, coupled with the non-accident record prompted the Commanding General of the North African Division of ATC to send figurative " orchids to Col. Mustoe and his 40th Bomb Wing, whose safe and dependable operation between Marseilles and Casablanca and superior manner of performance made the above record possible. " Major General Westside T. Larson, head of 8th Fighter Command and Major General Howard M. Turner, commander of the 1st Air Division, relayed the commendation to 40th and added their own congratulations. (See Appendix A).Col. Mustoe, in a joint letter to the 2 groups, ascribed the successful operations to " detailed planning, supervised training and active interest and teamwork by all personnel of the Wing Headquarters, of the Bomb Groups and of the Service Groups.

Aug. 1 was Air Force Day and the event was marked by ceremonies on the field and in Marseilles. (See Photo Supplement) French civilians were invited to the field to view a pictorial display of the combat achievements of the 92nd and 384th Groups. Two B-17's, one equipped for Green Project flights and the other for air-sea rescue work were inspected

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by the visitors. In Marseilles, memorial services were held at the monument honoring the French dead of previous wars. Col. Mustoe placed a wreath on the monument while a combat formation of 12 B-17's from the 2 groups flew low overhead. Col. Mustoe was accompanied by Col. Wilson, CO of the 92nd and Lt. Col. Fish, CO of the 384th, as well as French officials of nearby towns. A contingent of Wacs and an air force band also participated in the ceremony. The French dignitaries and the American officers proceeded to the airfield in the afternoon, inspected the exhibit and welcomed the French refugees returning from Africa. The day's events were well publicized in French newspapers and the 40th Bomb Wing, charged with the preparations for the day was commended by 1st Division headquarters for the program. In turn, the 92nd was commended by Col. Mustoe for its part in the day's activities.

On Aug. 4, Col. Wilson was ordered to Headquarters, USSTAF, for temporary duty for a period of approximately 60 days. His orders stated his new duties were "to coordinate and supervise activities of air corps units being redeployed." During his absence, Lt. Col. Albert L. Cox, Jr., Deputy Group CO, commanded the Group.

If the news of the war's end created comparatively little stir among the men in the group, the announcement on Aug. 8, that virtually all 85 pointers, officers and enlisted men, would shortly be transferred to units slated for the states was received with some show of enthusiasm by the high pointers. An exchange of personnel was effected with the units of the 67th Fighter Wing, scheduled for early shipment to the Zone of the Interior. Men eligible for discharge were to be sent to the fighter groups and the low pointers were to be screened out of the home bound outfits and sent

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to the 92nd.

Scarcely had the news been received when the men were alerted for the mass movement. S-1, given short notice, labored the better part of several nights to accomplish the necessary paper work. The fact that many of the personnel clerks were themselves on the shipping list made these nightly sessions almost a labor of love. The eligible GI's from the 327th were flown in from Port Lyautey and on Aug. 12, the first group of planes took off for England loaded with ETO weary men.(See Photo Supplement) For the next two days, our planes shuttled between the UK and Istres, leaving with men whose army careers were in their twilight phase and returning with lowpointers, some of whom were only shy one point of the magic 85 mark. In all, 374 men, of whom only 18 were officers, left the group and 438 arrived. The 90 highpointers who remained after the transfers were completed were told that they would leave shortly.

Included among the departing officers were Capts. Henry G. Callahan, 327th Executive and a favorite of GI's, Rupert E. Lawrence, 407 Engineering Officer, Edwin D. Lundell, 327th Armament Officer, James V. Moriarty, Group S-2 Officer and John A. Noel, 407th Executive.

The exchange stripped the 92nd almost bare of men who shipped overseas with the outfit in August of 1942. Only 7 officers and 22 enlisted men were left of the original. Maj. Raphael F.Kernan, Capts. Alexander C. Brooks, Caeser W. DeCuir, Daniel M. Fadenrecht, Leslie G. Gerdts, Karl A. Posch and CWO Norton G. Stapleton began their 4th year in the ETO. Two other veterans, Capts. Leonard G. Johnson and Robert P. Norton were still with the group but on orders to leave. The last of the EM's would leave before long; the officers were either essential or had volunteered to remain in the ETO.

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Despite the large and rapid turnover, the work of the group proceeded with almost surprising efficiency. The difficulties in administration, maintenance and operation that might reasonably be expected to follow in the wake of the transfers were conspicuous only by their absence. The entire movement was executed so smoothly as to appear almost a routine chore. There were trained men in the group equipped to assume new jobs and responsibilities and the replacements, with the exception of mechanics, filled the vacancies capably. The TO's were wide open and the long promotion lists recalled the early days of training for those who were still present to remember them. New first sergeants, new line chiefs, flight chiefs, crew chiefs, new section heads sprouted overnight. One GI, returning from furlough on Aug. 16, voiced his confusion. " I don't know the guys sleeping next to me, I hardly recognize anyone in the messhall and I get to work to find I'm a crew chief. If it weren't for the dust, I'd feel lost here. "

He spoke for many of the men whose friends were headed for home. Several years of association had resulted not only in friendship, but in some sense of security, a feeling of " belonging " and in the welding of those ties that are partially responsible for that vague term, " esprit de corps ". If some of the men felt a little at sea, their feeling was understandable. The were still in the 92nd, but in a way, the 92nd was no longer the 92nd.

Uneventful and routine flights have marked the group's operations in France but on Aug. 13, 2 of our aircraft ran into bad weather over the Mediterranean that made their trips anything but SOP. The 2 planes departed Port Lyautey separately, each carrying 8 highpointers of the 327th Sq.

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to Istres as part of the transfer movement. One of the ships, piloted by 1st Lt. Ray E. Hill of the 327th, ran into a front that reached to 16,000 feet. Lt. Hill decided to fly through it only to encounter strong winds and hailstones the size of baseballs. The hailstones pounded the ship with such force that they tore a gaping hole in the plexiglass nose and badly dented the leading edges of the wings, elevators and rudder.(See Photo Supplement) The winds reached a high velocity, buffeting the plane badly but lt. Hill finally rode out the storm and landed safely at Istres.

The other plane, piloted by 1st Lt. John W. Cooper of the 325th Sq., hit the same front 31/2 hours after takeoff, but rather than fly a direct course, Lt. Cooper decided to circumnavigate it. After flying about 150 miles east over the sea, he discovered he could not get around it and so he steered west, meanwhile losing altitude in an attempt to get under the bad weather. The clouds were banked solid to sea level until Lt. Cooper returned to the Spanish coast, where there were some breaks. The coast was followed north until the weather began to close in again. Rather than chance the remainder of the trip, Lt. Cooper made an emergency landing at a field in French territory, 115 miles west , southwest of the base. The ship was airborne 6 1/2 hours, almost 2 hours longer than the usual time for the journey.

Aug. 17 was declared a holiday by USFET to celebrate the defeat of Japan and with the usual exception of skeleton crews required to keep departments operating, all men had the day off. A meeting of all personnel in the morning was addressed by Lt. Cols. Cox and Hardin. (See Photo Supplement)

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Col. Hardin welcomed the new men to the group and summarized the achievements of the 92nd during the 3 years of its existence. Col. Cox pointed out the contribution air forces had made to victory and emphasized its role in the days of peace. Turning to the subject in which the men were vitally interested, he said he could not give any definite assurance when they could expect to get home but the War Department would treat soldiers as individuals, not as automotons or rows of figures. Although the war was over, he reminded the group that the 92nd still had a job to do and this factor might possibly delay the return of certain essential men. The speech marked Col. Cox's first appearance before the group since assuming temporary command of the station and his studious, sober and considerate tone created a favorable impression.

The remainder of the day was devoted to relaxation. Beer and cokes were on sale all day, the swimming run to Kramer Beach took off at 1PM and the ball diamond and the beds had their quota of devotees.

The 92nd received its biggest publicity splash when the Southern France edition of the Stars and Stripes, on Aug. 6, printed a page of stories and pictures of the Green Project that featured the group's contribution. (See Appendix B) The smiling face of Col. Wilson, the Skyliners, a 92nd crew and Short Snorter were pictured and all stories were datelined " With the 92nd Bombardment Group ". The men were surprised and pleased with the spread and 2,000 additional copies of the paper were distributed for souvenir purposes.

C redit for the display belonged to 1st Lt. John Finley, Public Relations Officer and Sgt. John Sloan, Group Historian, both of whom have since

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been transferred to the fighter units bound for home. They invited the Stars and Stripes reporter to the base, guided him about the field, to the staging area, briefing and takeoff, meanwhile stuffing him with facts about " Fame's Favored Few ". Their trip home was not a reward; both have more than 85 points.

It was a peak month for Special Services. Eight USO shows, including 3 major units, played at the base during August. The Copacabana Revue, Betty Hutton and Block and Sully headlined the attractions and entertainment-hungry GI's made for enthusiastic audience reaction. The open air stage was completed and decorated but seats were limited. Early arrivals took their places long before " curtain time " while latecomers climbed revetment walls, the stage roof and cranes, stood on jeeps and trucks and discarded planking to view the performances. (See Photo Supplement) Capacity is unlimited since the stage opens on a field several miles in depth but unofficial estimates of crowds ranged from 2 to 3 thousand. Members of the 384th Group were invited to all shows.

The Copacabana Revue appeared on the field the night of a stinging mistral, Aug. 1, but no one paid any attention to the dust while the 16 beauties " straight from Broadway " cavorted for the boys. That the men were awed by this lavish display of cover girl loveliness may be noted by the fact that the usual cries of " take it off " were missing. Before the performance, small groups of girls ate supper in the squadron messhalls. The girls were charming, the GI's tried to be gallant.

Betty Hutton made her first ETO appearance on the stage of the 92nd, after having been flown down from Paris in one of our planes. She toured

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the field, ate in the messhalls, chatted with soldiers and delivered an explosive performance in the evening. (See Photo Supplement) She MC'd her show, which was highlighted by her thumping interpretations of novelty songs.

Block and Sully, once famed radio comedy team, headed another excellent offering. Their " single entendre " routine was featured in a lively variety show.

All 8 of the troupes were at least good, all were well received and attended. The men look forward to seeing the USO companies; the entertainment undoubtedly helped the morale of the group.

The soft ball league entered its closing stages. The 6 leading teams were engaged in eliminations to determine the winner. The All Star " Sky Rockets " won 2 of 3 games, reversing their one loss in a return match. The Skyliners lost half its complement and the call went out for replacements. While awaiting new musicians, its activities were limited to jam sessions on the field.

The Red Cross Club opened on Aug. 11 and quickly became a favorite haunt of the GI's. The club, consisting of 2 large sized prefabs, is situated between the 2 groups and is used by both. One building serves as a snack bar, the other is partitioned into reading, writing and games rooms. Betty Boyd, formerly at Podington, is Club Director and Doris Mann, Mary Rugg and Veronica Short are her Staff Assistants. Miss Mann was with the 92nd during its last days at Podington and Miss Short worked on the Clubmobile that visited the old base regularly. Miss Rugg is, therefore, the only one unknown to to the group, and she spent her time in England at a Liverpool club. (See Photo Supplement)

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The hungry soldiers eat 6,000 donuts and drink 150 gallons of coffee daily. The snack bar is swamped with men nightly and additional tables have been set up directly outside the club, in the manner of the French cafe. The girls also distribute donuts and coffee each morning to the Green Project passengers. To do this, they take turns getting up at 4:30 A.M.

Henry Abplanalp, Red Cross Field Director, is on the field 3 days a week to listen to personal problems. Unlike Podington, where there were few requests for aid, the men here queue up outside his office, waiting their turn to see him.

On Aug. 8, the PX moved into its new quarters, a prefab attractively decorated in bright colors and featuring a circular counter. (See Photo Supp) The sales reached astronomical figures in terms of francs, totalling 1,021,542. Translated into dollars, the receipts read $20, 430, the largest sum in PX history. The coca-cola and ice cream room occupies the middle section of the building and the barber shop the last third. Ice cream was sold several days during the month and the sales of cokes seemed to last longer, perhaps because the temperature was usually below the blistering July marks. The men continued to buy all the French perfumes on hand and scarves and pipes added to the impressive sales total. The discontinuance of the luxury tax by the French on souvenir items sold in PX's cut prices some 20%.

The first newspaper published by the group " hit the stands " on Aug. 29. Col Cox stated that " if this newspaper can help us know our organization and fellow soldiers better, can bring us a clearer understanding of our successes and failures alike, then it will have served a valuable purpose. " Nameless as yet, Vol. 1, No. 1 was a 2 page, 4 sided mimeographed edition.

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Edited by PFC John Adams and issued weekly, the publication was the responsibility of the S-2 section with the various departments submitting contributions. (See Appendix C)

On Aug. 2, at 2:45 A.M., a fire broke out in a newly built officers barrack in the 407th site. By the time the fire apparatus appeared on the scene, the roof and the walls had already fallen in. Although the mistral was blowing that night, the fire was brought under control before extensive damage was done. The one barrack was destroyed and another, on which construction had begun the previous day, was burned as well. Two officers were living in the prefab and they lost all their belongings. Rigid fire controls have been instituted on the base to prevent a repetition of the incident.

A minor crisis in engineering maintenance was threatened when the balance of serviceable engines on hand dropped to 2 early in the month. The situation was relieved with the expedited delivery of additional engines. The large number of engine changes, occasioned by the dust conditions, caused the acute shortage. With one difficulty overcome, another loomed; the shortage of parts might ground some aircraft in the near future. Capt. Karl Posch, Group Engineering Officer, estimated that replacements from fighter groups would need 6 to 8 weeks training to be dependable. In an effort to teach the new men more quickly, training programs were begun by the squadron engineering sections.

Although there were a number of new duty assignments as a result of the transfers, most we re not yet officially recorded in special orders. In the one major change, Capt. Daniel M. Fadenrecht became Group Adjutant, replacing Capt. Edward C. Weizer, transferred to 8th Fighter Command. An Officers

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Roster was issued Aug. 31. (See Appendix D) Major Baine E. Stringham, CO of the 409th Service Group, was promoted to Lt. Col. and Capt. William A. Stroud Jr., Ass't Group Operations Officer and Capt. Frank B. Roberts, 326th Operations Officer received their majorities. 1st Lt. Richard C. Darling, Group Photo Officer, made captain. Twelve 2nd Lt's were promoted to 1st. (See Appendix E)

The suggestion boxes produced 3 outstanding contributions in as many weeks by T/Sgt Charles Reinfurt of the 407 Sq. (See Appendix F and Photo Supplement) Sgt. Reinfurt, a mechanic, proposed 3 devices of his own invention, all of which were considerable aids to maintenance. His 3 gadgets are 1) a short circuit detector that spots the exact location of a short in a few moments. 2) a trouble finder for electronic turbo supercharger that reveals the location of electrical faults. 3) a generator relay switch adjuster that does just that without the necessity of running up aircraft engines. For his ingenuity, Sgt. Reinfurt has been recommended for the Bronze Star.

There's nothing quite like the end of a war and the prospect of an early discharge to boost morale but Maj. Donald E. Smith's varied welfare program contributed its share to keep the men's spirits high. Although the group's quota for the Riviera rest leaves remained at 6 per week, Maj. Smith contrived to send an average of 45 officers and EM to the international resort weekly. He was able to do this by obtaining unused commitments of other units in the area. Furlough trips to Switzerland were a new feature of the program and a popular one. There were several trips to Athens and one to Palestine during the month but these have been discontinued upon orders from higher headquarters restricting the group from entering other theatres. Special

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permission for the Rome run was obtained. It is likely that Brussels will shortly be added to the list of liberty run cities and Belfast and the Isle of Capri are additional possibilities. With opportunities to spend passes in a number of European capitals, the average member of the 92nd ought return home a polished sophisticate, broadened and enlightened by his travels. It is however faintly possible that travel will not undermine the provincial spirit characteristic of Americans abroad at the moment.

By the end of the month, the camp had begun to assume the aspect of a semi-permanent installation. All prefabs were up, a huge " Headquarters " sign was erected and a geometric rock pattern designed about the base of the flagpole. (See Photo Supplement) Double decker beds replaced cots, more shower rooms and latrines were built. Men returning from nearby towns late at nightin a condition euphemistically known as " under the weather " were able to wander into their own barrack at first try, an almost certain sign that sections of the field had achieved distinctive features.

A rainstorm the last day of the month disclosed defects in prefab construction; they all leaked. German prisoners had helped build them and Anglicized GI's sneered " Jerrybuilt ". Men were awakened in the dead of night by water dripping on their bedding. It was slightly uncomfortable but a few raindrops made little difference at this stage of the game; after all, the war was over.

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WAR DEPARTMENT

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, $300

PHOTO SUPPLEMENT

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leaving the 92nd, bound for home, via England

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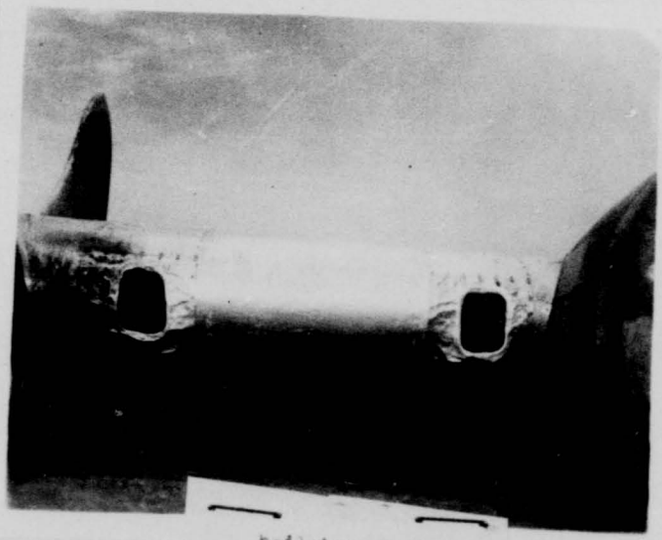


Betty Hutton doing
something for the boys

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hailstone damage

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Miss Hutton arrives at Ivtres

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Red Cross Girls

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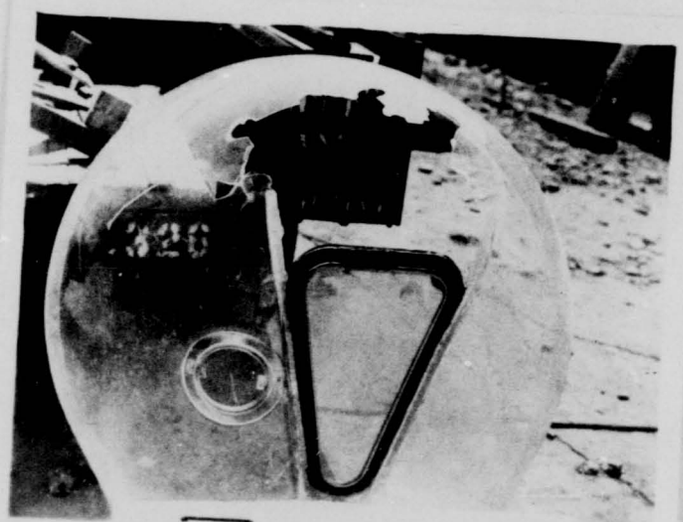


Miss Hutton eats
with the boys

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plexiglass shattered by hail

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Sgt. Reinfurt and his trouble-shooting devices

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The Misses Boyd, Short, Rugg and Mann

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Potential sale at PX

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The new PX

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Lt. Col. Cox addressing
Victory Day meeting

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Lt. Col. Hardin addressing
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crowds at USC show

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headquarters area

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