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RETURN TO
ARMY AIR FORCES
HISTORICAL DIVISION
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Hi 926 Bombardment Group
Jul 1945

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GP-12-41(Rome)
— JULY, 1945

The reaction of a group of people to a given situation is rarely uniform; some will respond in one way, others in another. Certain individuals will express several conflicting emotions. In July, this basic psychological pattern could be witnessed at Istres. Some men were irritated, some were stolid and resigned; others joked about it and a few were pleased. But although there was an open season for griping, most men could still laugh at themselves. A new theme song with appropriate lyrics was composed and made an instant hit with the group. It was called "The Dust Bowl Blues" and when the band spent an evening in a jam session near the beer tent, the light-hearted, the dispirited would all join in singing lustily the endless stanzas of the topical ditty.

"Got sand in my shoes a-rubbin' in my feet, but the
only time I mind is when I go to eat
Got the hey- rey ra-dee da da,
I got the dust bowl blues, I got the dust bowl blues."

It was not an unpleasant month. There was dust, of course, but that could not be avoided. But the long hours of work and the nervous excitement of combat were past. No one had to work too hard and the men could relax in the warmth

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of the Midi sun. There was swimming in the Mediterranean and passes to three capital cities; there was beer, movies, baseball, and entertainment. If the men of the group weren't content, there was little pain in the process of adjustment to the new environment.

On ~~July~~ June 2, the 326th Squadron flew down to Istres and was followed a week later, by the 407th Squadron. The arrival of the two squadrons brought the new base to full strength.

With the departure of the 407th Squadron for Istres, only fifty men and six officers of the group, headed by Maj. William D. Smith, remained at Podington. The task of this detachment was to properly dispose of the excess equipment left behind on the field and to ready the base for its return to the British. It was expected that they would be all summer at the job. When flying control left Podington on July 12, the field was closed to all aircraft. Any of our planes that had occasion to return to the field thereafter used the Thurleigh airstrip. Lt. Col. Albert L. Cox, Jr. left with the last group on July 12 to assume his duties as Deputy Group Commander at Istres.

The Green Project flights for the month were all completed without a mishap of any sort. Two hundred and eighty-two ships were dispatched during July, starting 8,605 U.S. servicemen on their way home and 2,011 French civilians were repatriated. Green Project missions were flown every day of the month with nine aircraft dispatched daily. To date, 10,634 men have been flown to Casablanca and 2,322 civilians returned by our planes. The French passengers often include

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babies only a few months old, some of whom take the air trip in stride; those who don't add nursemaid chores to the usual duties of the radio operator and flight-engineer. After landing, the French are taken to Marseilles, where French authorities continue with the process of repatriation. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT.)

Most passengers have never flown before and a few are somewhat perturbed at the prospect of traveling by plane. As a result, all crew members have been cautioned not to joke about the mock dangers of flying or twit anyone, however good naturedly, about his fear of planes. Capt. William A. Stroud, Assistant Group Operations Officer, emphasized this point. "Most of our boys like to kid around, but a crack about 'beatup old engines' could be overheard and misinterpreted by passengers. Naturally, they're not accustomed to flying and those that are nervous might become jittery. The crew members have to reassure passengers, not frighten them." No man has balked at entering a plane and with the knowledge that the U.S. is only a matter of hours distant, it is unlikely that anyone ever will.

The 92nd version of "Short Snorters" are issued to all servicemen transported to Africa. (see Appendix A) On the Short Snorter, the group paid its respects to the passengers and gently reminded them that it was the "oldest bomber group in the ETO" that was helping them home.

Aircraft maintenance problems were, of course, aggravated by the dust and rocky terrain. Although the days when the ships were battle scarred are long past. the engineering department are being kept busy devising new methods of counteracting the dust and doing the necessary work.

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Major difficulties for the month were:

1) dust contamination of engines.

2) difficulty of cylinder changes because of dust.

3) tire changes due to rocky ground.

Dust covers are used at all times when aircraft is on ground, but while this is of some help, it cannot keep all the dust out. There have been numerous other minor changes in maintenance methods to meet the peculiar operating conditions, but Capt. Karl A. Posch, Group Engineering Officer, states that only an effective dust control program will solve the problem. "If oil were spread every five or six days," he says, "we'd have most of our difficulties licked. However, we can't get enough oil and we can't get any oil dispensing units." Towards the end of the month, the number of engine changes made necessary by the dust began to climb and it was expected that this would soon become the leading problem.

There seemed to be no way to overcome the tire changing difficulty. There were simply too many rocks. Since operations began, there have been an average of 40 tire changes weekly. The rubber tracks on the cletracs were subject to frequent change as well. Steel tracks were used for a short while but were found unsatisfactory. Because the rocky ground restricted movement of regulation engine hoists, a boom was mounted on a truck and used to swing engines onto aircraft.

Because of the dust, the engine build-up shop was located in Port de Bouc, about eight miles from the field.

Rapid strides were made toward improving living and working conditions on the field. The prefabricated buildings that had been promised were being constructed

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quickly and all the departments of the group were housed in prefabs by the month's end. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) More than half the total of 115 buildings allotted to the group were up. The engineering units assigned to the field were shorthanded and the men of the different squadrons began building their own barracks. It was a fairly simple task to assemble the houses and a good proportion of the personnel were settled in their new quarters by July 31. A prefab is built of plywood and measures 48 feet by 20 feet at its base. Twenty-four double-screened windows provide light and venilation. Although by no means dust-proof, it offers more protection against dust storms than a tent.

The opening of two shower rooms early in the month considerably improved the spirit of the men. It had been a source of irritation not to have adequate bathing facilities on the dusty field. Swimming was refreshing but not cleansing and the psychological lift provided by the showers was immediately noticeable. One shower room is behind the 326th living site, convenient for 407th personnel, and the other in the 325th site, available for members of the service group. The showers are open from 3 P.M. to 10 P.M. and are crowded at all hours. Both officers and men use the same showers, a situationthat has given rise to embarrassing moments for GI's who voice their views loudly before nude, unrecognized and high ranking officers.

Twice during the month, on July 13 and July 30, Col. Wilson addressed mass meetings of the group. On both occasions, after he had made his remarks, he invited the men to fire questions at him. In his first address, he welcomed all newcomers to the field and informed the men of the group's progress with the Green Project. He advised them of plans for improving the base, stating the

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desire to do everything possible to make their stay, if not pleasant at least tolerable. For the impatient 85 pointers, he could only report the results of his talk with the chief of staff for the 1st Air Division-- they would all be home by Christmas. There was a lively exchange of questions and answers before the meeting disbanded.

On July 30 Col. Wilson congratulated the members of the group for the 92nd's achievement with the Green Project. He disclosed that the group might, in the future, fly men to the Azores, but this remained only a possibility. He reassured the high point men that none of them would loose the chance to return to the states by being classed essential. He made reference to the rising Venereal rate and concluded by asking them to avoid Martigues because of the ill feeling there between civilians and Americans.

The liberty run trips to Paris, London and Rome were generally considered the most attractive feature of the welfare program. Undoubtedly, there was no other unit in the ETO that had comparable pass privileges. Two planes fly daily to England and one each to Paris and Rome; 35 men are carried per plane. The planes leave Istres at 9 A.M. and the men must be back at the plane 48 hours after the aircraft has set down at its destination.

Originally the planes to England were scheduled to land at Bovingdon, site of the 92nd's first base in England, and only 28 miles outside of London. This plan fell through and Thurleigh is used instead. The Rome trip, featuring real American beer, numerous GI nightclubs and restaurants providing food and liquor

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at reasonable prices, and Latin beauties, outranks the Paris run in popularity. There seems to be little language difficulty in Rome, most of the natives understand English well enough to grasp the GI's thought. Paris, on the other hand, remains as unconquerably Gallic under American occupation as it did under the German rule. An air force rest home in Rome provides excellent quarters for the two nights while numerous hotels have been requisitioned by the Red Cross in Paris. It was announced, late in the month, that starting in August, an Athens run would be made once a week.

In addition to regular passes, it was announced thatall personnel that could be spared from their duties without hindering Green Project operations, could have Sunday and Wednesday afternoon off.

The swimming run to the Etang de Berre was abandoned because of the schools of jelly fish that are often in the water off the beach. Our trucks now go to Kramer Beach, which is directly on the Mediterranean. This beach, used by all the soldiers in the Arles staging area, looks like a small segment of Coney Island on a hot afternoon, but hot dogs and coca-cola stands help compensate for the loss of privacy.And, of course, there are no jelly fish.

The Enlisted men's Rest Home at Sausset was officially opened July 5. (see [illegible] SUPPLEMENT) The club, comprising 3 homes on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean, will accommodate 30 men overnight. The men will be permitted to spend a day at the rest home in addition to their regular passes and those who wish, may spend their passes at Sausset. The club, situated 20 miles from the field, is primarily intended as a place for rest and relaxation. The GI may spend his time swimming, deep sea fishing, participating in lawn sports, or using

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the reading and writing room. Food rations are obtained from the field and breakfast may be eaten as late as 9 A.M. The small dining room has matched chairs and tables and the men are waited upon by the cooks. Sitting on the porch of the rest home, the men may watch with mixed feelings, the stream of ships headed for the Suez Canal and the few destined for the United States. The cool sea breezes, the pleasant forms of recreation and the total lack of military atmosphere have made Sausset a popular spot for the 92nd GI. The staff consists of 2 cooks, 2 cook's helpers and 2 clean up men, all group members. S/Sgt. Charles T. Sikorsky of the 407th Squadron is in charge of the club and the Enlisted Men's Council is responsible for its operation.

T/Sgt. Van Kelly, Officer's Club Steward for the past 2 years, supervised the setting up of the Rest Home. He located the three houses, arranged for their lease and directed the furnishing of the club. Sgt. Kelly obtained the furnishings from various sources, including on old U.S. airbase in Northern Ireland. When he had the club ready for operation, he turned it over to the Enlisted Men's Council and started to organize the Officers' clubon the base.

A new feature of the welfare activities was rest leaves on the Riviera. Each week, 3 officers and 3 enlisted men spend a week in the once exclusive resorts of Cannes and Nice. The finest hotels in the two towns have been taken over by the Army with Cannes reserved for Officers and Nice for enlisted men. Termed a "soldier's paradise", the men who have returned from their stay issued glowing reports of the attractions of the "millionair's playground". Major Donald Smith, Group Welfare Officer, is hopeful that our quota of men will soon be raised.

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On opening night, June 25th, officers of the group strolled into their newly built prefab Officers' Club to find a startling assortment of drinks awaiting them. Tom Collins, Rum Collins, Planters' Punch, stingers, sidecars, martinis, all could be ordered over the sleek metal counter of the club's horseshoe bar. At the evening's end, most of the officers were convinced that the dust problem was finally solved. Several captains, known as teetotalers in Podington, admitted to few, if any, conscience qualms as they sipped the cooling drinks. For publication, they would only say, "Hot, isn't it."

The club, which is twice the length of a standard prefab, is partioned into 2 sections, the bar and the lounge. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) The lounge, furnished with easy chairs, is where the officers sit after they've bought their drinks. When the drinks are finished, they walk to the bar, buy some more, and return to the lounge. This serves 2 purposes; congestion at the bar is confined to a minimum and the constant movement keeps the air circulating.

The design and decoration of the club was conceived and executed by S/Sgt. Sebastian Puglisi, of the 407th Squadron. Sgt. Puglisi, who is disinclined to call a spade a spade and would rather be redundant than vague, stated, "The club decoration has a summer motif-cool colors to contrast with the heat. Our hues are light, aquamarine green and peacock blue for the walls." The ceiling he admitted after a moment's hesitation, was simply white. The desired effect was indeed achieved and Sgt. Puglisi has received numerous compliments for his work.

Work on the Red Cross Club for enlisted men is progressing. Miss Betty Boyd, Red Cross Worker, is hopeful that the club will open early in August.

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Special Service's main project for the month was the building of a large stage for the use of many U.S.O. troupes expected at the field in the next few months. The stage was designed and the construction supervised by S/Sgt. Clinton A. Jarvis of the 409th Service Group. With his staff of welders, he worked well into the early morning hours several days to complete the work quickly. In a short time, the steel rigging for the stage roof and the stage itself were completed, the electrical fixtures installed, and although the planking for the roof was not yet in place, the stage was ready for the traveling companies. Triangularly shaped, it measures 34 feet at its base and at its deepest point is 36 feet wide, more than adequate for any overseas production. A new bulletin board kept the men well informed of all activities. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT)

The Skyliners were busy all month playing for numerous dances in the surrounding towns. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) Istres, Salon, Cavillion, Martigues(before the disturbances flared up) Eguyeres and Marseilles heard American music, 92nd style. Squadron dances are held every Thursday in Cavillion and officers-nurses dances in the 235th General Hospital in Marseilles area regular feature for Friday nights.

There were three visiting shows during the month. An all-girl band on July 15th, a French revue entitled "Pour Papa" on the 25th and "Mood Indigo" featuring four French performers, on July 30th. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT).

While the stage was under construction, the screen was set up in the PX area and the movies exhibited there.

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Sporting a fancy name and fourteen teams, the 92nd Bomb Group Invitation Soft Ball league got under way July 16. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) In addition to the 92nd, there were entries from the 384th Bomb Group, ATC, and 829th Engineers. The athletic section of the group's Special Service department was responsible for the league's organization and intricate schedule. Games are played every evening on the ball diamond behind the 407th site. S/Sgt. William F. Kennedy of the 835th Air Engineering Squadron, was the outstanding player of the month, pitching his team to the league's lead with 2 no-hit no-run games.

On July 29th, an all-star team, the 92nd "Skyrockets" made their debut and defeated the 6th Port Battalion, semi-finalists in the Southern France Softball Tournament, 5-3. Col. Wilson played left field for the "Skyrockets" and scored the first run of the game.

A free-for-all between soldiers and French civilians in the town of Martigues brought the question of Franco-American relations to the fore. Several Americans were hurt, and although no members of the group were involved, this evidence of friction prompted Col. Wilson to request that all men avoid Martigues in the future.

A number of GI's, given to loud and bigoted utterances, have maintained that the French in the vicinity preferred the Germans tothe Americans. If the average member of the group does not incline to this extreme view, his feelings toward the natives, nevertheless, are not warm. The evening liberty runs to town, so popular in England, attract almost no one here. Undoubtedly, the language barrier is the chief difficulty. Few soldiers can speak French and the excessive gesturing that attends any attempt at conversation does not make for easy social intercourse.

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Possibly, too, the GI, upon whom the affectionate hospitality of the English was bestowed for almost 3 years, feels the French are unkind not to unbend in similar fashion. Superficially, this would seem to be a reversal of the generally accepted modes of behavior for the two peoples-- the English known for their habitual reserve and the French for their Latin temperament.

Although the Germans appear to have been almost scrupulously correct in their actions in this region, it would be silly to assert that they were welcome by the civilians. Such outlandish statements are only the product of wounded childish vanities. What is accepted as coolness and aloofness on the part of the French is probably only a desire to lead their own lives in their accustomed way despite the numbers of Americans thrust in their midst. There has been no single instance of a hostile act by any Frenchman toward a member of this group. They are polite, and with those who can speak French, friendly. The language difficulty is as much an obstacle to the French as it is to the GI.

The long (over an hour) truck ride to Cavillion, the liberty run town, and the difficulty of keeping clothes presentable are, possibly, additional contributing factors to the liberty run's lack of popularity. The net result is that most men prefer to stay in evenings and drink beer rather than go to town.

In an effort to promote more cordial relations, the Skyliners have been used as an instrument of good will. The band not only has played for numerous dances in the town, but has also given informal "concerts" of American jazz exclusively for the French. The dances, well-publicized and with the custom of mother chaperoning daughter respected, are gaining favor. On Bastille Day, the band entertained the

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spectators at the bicycle races in Cavillion. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) The French appreciate these efforts and probably enjoy the music too, which should foster friendlier feelings.

There was cause for concern in the sharp rise of the Venereal rate at the station. Only 17.5 per 1000 per annum in June, the figure to 75.9 for July. Capt. George D. Beamer, new group surgeon ascribed the increase to negligence on the part of the men involved and urged adherence to all preventative measures prescribed by the medical department.

Station sick quarters, housed in tents without ward facilities until July 13, moved into two prefabs and received its first ward patient on July 15. Samples of drinking water used on the field and at the Rest Home are sent to the water analysis laboratory at a nearby General Hospital.

There were only seven officer promotions during the month, two to captain and five to 1st. Lieutenant. Capt George D. Beamer succeeded Maj. Joseph R. Henry, transferred as group surgeon and Maj. Vincent P. Purcell replaced Capt. James R. Burkholder as club officer. Capt. Clovis G. Childers, chaplin joined the group on July 11. Capt. Theodore Stepman was appointed sanitation officer and Capt. Delbert R. Belcher relieved 1st Lieutenant Walter T. Truex as station finance officer.

PX sales totaled 809,376 francs for July or $16, 187. Beer accounted for $3,636, cokes for $1,150 and rations and additional items at the PX brought in $11,400. French perfumes and American magazines were popular with the men.

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The group was officially awarded battle participation credit for "The Rhineland", "The Ardennes" and "Central Europe". Members of the group were now permitted to wear one white star and one bronze star on their ETO ribbon and the 30 additional points are a long stride in the direction of home.

Suggestion boxes were installed at key points over the field, continuing the system inaugurated at Podington. (see PHOTO SUPPLEMENT) They attracted the usual number of complaints in addition to constructive ideas; the number of suggestions made, was termed "gratifying" by Cpl. Albert A. Strich, originator of the program and its guiding spirit. (see appendix B) The art work of Cpl. Henri Rosenkrantz elicited favorable comments from the more aesthetically-minded.

An open letter from Col. Wilson was published on July 29. (see appendix C) A suggestion that "intimated that the 92nd Bombardment Group is stationed at Istres because one man thought it would be a 'good deal' ", plus the possibility that such a view was widespread, motivated the writing of the letter. The note, which impressed the members of the group not only with its logic but with its tone, pointed out how unfounded and unreasonablethe charge was.

It was an uneventful month; Green Project operations were S.O.P., the heat and the dust were no longer novel. The men did their jobs and because they were well-trained and experienced, they did them well. But the average GI of the 92nd was simple biding time. As the highest point men left for home, those next in line waited hopefully and expectantly.

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For those who had become complacent on the score of dust storms, and possibly to give others a legitimate reason for griping, the mistral swept down from the north on July 31. It was the strongest gale yet to hit the field and unlike the average mistral, did not sink with the sun. As the act of July was drawn to its close by the curtain of dust, the GI's sought shelter within shuttered prefabs and secured tents. There was a consolation; it was a cold wind— the heat wave was broken.

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WAR DEPARTMENT

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

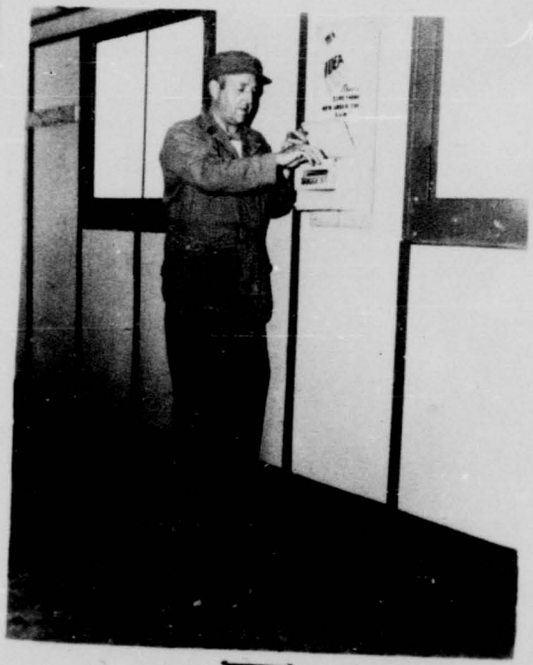
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, $300

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Collection of suggestions

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Activity Bulletin Board

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"Merci beaucoup, mossieu" -
French returnees

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Bicycle race at Cavaillon

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Lounge of Officers' Club
Istres

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Outdoor Concert
All girl orchestra

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"Batter up" - ball game at Istres diamond

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Sideline supporters

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"salle a manger"
Sunset Rest Home

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"Your Pappa" - and the boys. USO show.

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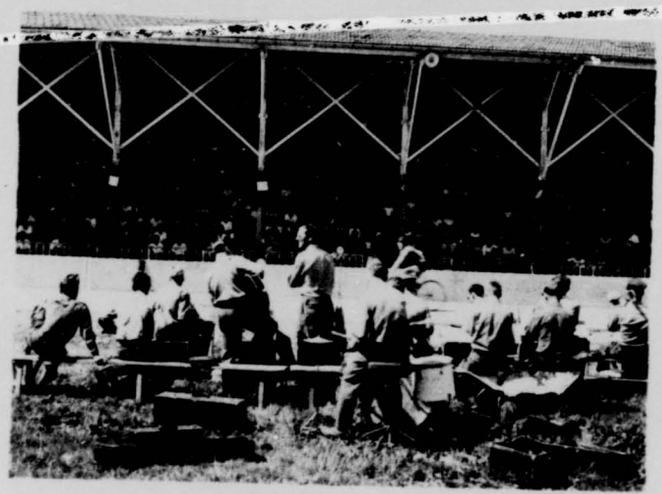


Street concert at Cavaillon

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Bicycle race at
Cavaillon

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Sleeping quarters
MH Rest Home at Sausset

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Sleeping quarters
EM Rest Home at Sausset

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Suggestion box

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Officers' Bar

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