

323^d EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE¹

323^d Bombardment Group (Medium) established, 19 Jun 1942

Activated, 4 Aug 1942

Redesignated 323^d Bombardment Group, Medium, 5 Aug 1944

Inactivated, 12 Dec 1945

Redesignated 323rd Bombardment Group, Light, and allotted to the Reserve, 13 Aug 1947

Activated, 9 Sep 1947

Ordered to active duty, 10 Mar 1951

Inactivated, 17 Mar 1951

Redesignated 323^d Fighter-Bomber Group, 9 May 1955

Activated, 8 Aug 1955

¹ Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, Alabama; The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

Inactivated, 1 Sep 1957
Redesignated 323^d Tactical Fighter Group, 31 Jul 1985
Redesignated 323^d Operations Group, 9 Dec 1991
Activated, 15 Dec 1991
Inactivated, 31 May 1993
Redesignated 323^d Expeditionary Operations Group, and converted to provisional status, 25 Mar 2003

STATIONS

Columbia AAB, South Carolina, 4 Aug 1942
MacDill Field, Florida, 21 Aug 1942
Myrtle Beach Bombing Range, South Carolina, 2 Nov 1942-25 Apr 1943
Horham, England, 12 May 1943
Earls Colne, England, 14 Jun 1943
Beaulieu, England, 21 Jul 1944
Lessay, France, 26 Aug 1944
Chartres, France, 21 Sep 1944
Laon/Athies, France, 13 Oct 1944
Denain/Prouvy, France, 9 Feb 1945
Gablingen, Germany, 15 May 1945
Landsberg, Germany, 16 Jul 1945
Clastres, France, Oct-Dec 1945
Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts, 11-12 Dec 1945
Tinker Field (later, Tinker AFB), Oklahoma, 9 Sep 1947-17 Mar 1951
Bunker Hill AFB, Indiana, 8 Aug 1955-1 Sep 1957
Mather AFB, California, 15 Dec 1991-31 May 1993

ASSIGNMENTS

III Bomber Command, 4 Aug 1942
VIII Bomber Command, 11 May 1943
VIII Air Support Command, 15 Jun 1943
IX Bomber Command, 18 Feb 1944
IX Air Force Service Command, 15 Jun 1945
United States Air Forces in Europe, 25 Nov-12 Dec 1945
310th Bombardment Wing (later, 310th Air Division), 9 Sep 1947
323^d Bombardment Wing, 27 Jun 1949-17 Mar 1951
323^d Fighter-Bomber Wing, 8 Aug 1955-1 Sep 1957
323^d Flying Training Wing, 15 Dec 1991-31 May 1993
United States Air Forces in Europe to activate or inactivate at any time on or after 25 Mar 2003

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-26, 1942-1945
F-86, 1955-1956
F-100, 1956-1957

T-37, 1991-1993

T-43, 1991-1993

COMMANDERS

Col Herbert B. Thatcher, Sep 1942

Col Wilson R. Wood, 13 Nov 1943

Col Rollin M. Winningham, 14 Feb 1945

Lt Col George O. Commenator, Aug 1945-unkn

Col John C. Haygood, 8 Aug 1955

Col Billy Cornett, 12 Aug 1957-unkn

Col William L. Reynolds, 15 Dec 1991-31 May 1993

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation

Belgium and Germany, 24-27 Dec 1944

EMBLEM

Per bend between a mailed Dexter gauntlet grasping a dagger and the winged hat of Mercury argent. (Approved, 16 Feb 1943. This insigne was replaced, 21 Jun 1957)

MOTTO

VINCAMUS SINE TIMORIS--Without Fear We Conquer

White Tails

OPERATIONS

The history of the "White Tailed" B-26 Marauder Group began at MacDill Field, Florida, when on September 11, 1942, the parent group, the 21st Bomb Group, gave birth to its offspring; the 323rd Bomb Group (M) AAF. The personnel originally assigned to the Group were at varied lot: flying personnel from all three flying Training Commands, ground personnel from various

reception centers, from air bases at Jackson, Mississippi, and Columbia, South Carolina, and many ground Officers direct from various Officer Candidate Schools. Despite the inexperience of personnel and the definite lack of equipment, tools, and training facilities, the Group under the leadership of Lt. Col. Herbert E. Thatcher, plunged immediately into, the task of preparing for combat in the short space of three months.

MacDill Field in the summer and fall of 1942 was one of the busiest, if not the busiest, airfield in the whole United States. It was an old well established Air Field and had trained B-17 crews prior to the coining of the B-26s. Due to the lack of experienced instructors and many other factors in learning to fly new combat airplanes, the crash rate was alarmingly high at that time and occasioned many skeptical comments as to the worth of the B-26 as a combat airplane. It is to the credit of those first grim and determined pilots that pioneered in the operations of the "Wingless Wonder" that the first skeptical criticisms were later proved unfounded when the 323rd and its fellow B-26 groups made their outstanding combat records.

As the pilots became more proficient in flying the plane and more of them were checked-out as first pilots the formation of combat crews was begun. Then those crews started their training as members of combat teams. Bombing practice was obtained at them bombing ranges along the Gulf Coast a few miles west of Tampa. Mullet Key was the most widely used. On October 25, 1942 the 323rd was told it was now on its own and would be moving in a few days to another base to continue its combat training. The new base was to be Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The move was completed on the 2nd of November 1942. The Group was now on its own, no one to watch over it.

If any man has served at Myrtle Beach he does not need a description of the base or its surrounding territory. The field was situated about two miles south of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, a thriving resort town in the summer but a quiet village in the winter. Most men in the Group state that the winter of 1942-43 was the coldest, dampest, most miserable winter they ever spent in their lives.

Though the weather was never favorable for flying, the training continued throughout the rain and cold. The combat crews were going to ground school while not engaged in flying. There were some fatal accidents at Myrtle Beach but the losses were extremely small considering the number of hours flown and the handicaps that had to be overcome in the flying program.

After a period of several weeks of "sweating out" the train movement to the Staging Area, the Group realized that, as sometimes happens in the Air force, the move was to be delayed for an indefinite period. There were two main reasons why the move overseas was delayed. One was because the 323rd was an experimental group, the first to test the practicability of using single control B-26's. A slow-up of production due to modifications on the plane was the other factor. After numerous rumors the overseas movement was definitely begun. The first part of March 1943, the 453rd Flight Echelon entrained for Ft. Wayne, Indiana, for a short stay to nick up the new airplanes of the Squadron and to start on the long journey overseas. The other squadrons left for Ft. Wayne at intervals of one week, and by April 7th all of them were on their way. The

Ground Echelon regained at Myrtle Beach until Easter Sunday, April 25, 1943 when two troop trains left for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and eventually overseas.

The trip across, for the Ground Echelon, was a ride on the "Queen Elizabeth". The trip was the first ocean voyage for practically all the personnel, and consequently, extremely interesting. However, the enjoyment of the trip was marred by the fact that the normal passenger load of the ship had been multiplied many times and everyone had to line up for any and all functions of the day. Chow was served twice a day because of the enormous numbers of men aboard and then it was necessary to stand in line, sometimes for hours, to get into the mess hall. All sleeping quarters were crowded and it was necessary for enlisted men to use the regular bunks in shifts. Each man would be allowed use of a bunk for 24 hours, then would have to relinquish it to another man and go up to sleep on the-floor of the enclosed deck. After 24 hours on the deck, a man would then be entitled to go below and occupy a bunk for 24 hours. One advantage of being on a big ship was that fewer men were seasick than would have been the case otherwise.

Except for the first day out of New York and the last day in the Western Approaches to the United Kingdom, when aircraft flew overhead, the "Queen Elizabeth" went unescorted across the great Atlantic. Submarine detection devices and the sharp altering of the course every few minutes made the vessel safe from submarine attack. The "Queen" docked at the small fishing village of Goureck in Scotland. Then came the long train ride to the Groups first home in England, the village of Horham in Sussex. The field was an old R.A.F. base located a short distance from the village. The first of the Air Echelon arrived at Horham a short time after the Ground Echelon arrived. The Air Echelon of the 453rd; 454th, and the 455th Squadrons flew the Southern route across the Atlantic. The Air Echelon of the 456th flew the Northern route across. Immediately after the Air Echelon landed in Horham the 323rd moved to Earls Colne, another small village in England.

The training program both ground and air, was carried on relentlessly from the moment the move was made to Earls Colne. The all-important practice of medium level operations was carried on without delay. Though it was new to the crews and difficult to learn on such short notice, they soon became proficient at the new type of work. It became increasingly evident that the 323rd would become the first "Marauder Group" to go into action at medium altitude. For its work in pioneering the B-26 medium altitude operation and showing the world that the B-26 was an efficient and formidable foe for the enemy, the 323rd took justifiable pride.

The question among all of the personnel on the base during the latter part of June was when the "Big Day" was to be, for which the Group had trained so long and so hard. Finally, on the 4th of July a foretaste of actual operations was given to the Group when it was sent on a diversionary raid over the English Channel. On the 16th of July, after only 2 ½ months practice on the new bombing technique, the 323rd made the first medium altitude attack against an enemy target. The enemy installation singled out for this first blow was the important marshalling yards at Abbeville, France. Two missions were briefed and scrubbed before the

group went on, its second mission on the 25th of July; a highly successful one to the Coke Ovens at Ghent.

Numerous raids were made during the remaining days of July, most of them against enemy airdromes in France in an endeavor to hinder and cripple the work of the German Air Force. Among the airfields attacked were St. Omer, Ft. Rouge, Tricqueville, Woensdrecht, Marville, and Poix. A total of 21 missions were briefed and set in August but only eight of them were flown. Again, the targets were airfields and marshalling yards and targets of the special construction sites. Little was known about the special construction sites that were bombed but every crew member has his own idea about what they there. It was believed that they were built in connection with the German secret Weapon. It was not known for several months that they were actually the sites being set up by the Germans from which to launch their first terror weapon, the V-1 Bomb or robot plane.

September was a comparatively big month for operations at that time, as 15 missions were successfully flown during that third month of operations. The planes continued to encounter both flak and fighters - 64 planes were damaged and two were lost in combat. By October the foggy, rainy and cloudy English weather had begun to hamper seriously the work of the Group. During the last three months of 1943 only 22 missions were successfully flown against the enemy. Thirteen of these targets were airfields and the nine were against the Special Construction Targets.

On the 13th of November 1943, the Group C.O. left to assume command of the 99th Combat Wing. Lt. Col. Wilson R. Wood, formerly C.O. of the 45th became the new Group Commander.

There were numerous enemy air raids during the first few months at Earls Colne. Many times the German Bombers could be heard overhead and the flak fire against them could be both seen and heard. It was not until the night of December 10, 1943 that the field was hit by the enemy. One string of bombs was dropped and the damage was slight.

That first Christmas overseas was a normal working day, though special Church services were held and the customary turkey and dressing was served. The six months of operation in this first year of combat were highly successful, as the statistics will show. The Group ran sixty nine missions and two thousand and eleven sorties. In January 1944 the bad weather limited the Group to eight missions, all of them against the Special Construction Targets. On one of these missions the Group met 50 FW-190's and ME-109's. During the encounter four enemy planes were destroyed and one damaged.

One event of February 1944 which was of special interest to combat crews was that some of them completed their fiftieth mission; the first man to reach his mark was Lt. Red Phillips, a navigator in the 455th Squadron. This was a particularly busy month for enemy air raids. The siren screamed fourteen times during the cold winter months of the month. Operations for the month consisted of eighteen raids. The weather continued to be bad but missions were run

everyday that planes could venture off the ground. The Group lost three airplanes and crews in combat this month, but destroyed seven enemy planes in the air.

During March 1944 the Group took advantage of the improved weather sent many missions against enemy targets in Western Europe. After the month of March, the objectives of the Group changed radically. The campaign against the marshalling yards was started off on the 8th of April by a thirty-nine ship attack on the Hasselt marshalling yard. For one week during April the Group was taken off combat operations and given a week to devote to refresher training in formation flying. May could be classified as the "bridge bombing month"; since it was during this month that the "White Tailed Marauders" concentrated their powerful blows against those important pre-invasion targets. A total of eight bridges were blasted in an endeavor to seal off Western France from the rest of Europe. How well this purpose was accomplished could be seen later in the confused efforts of the enemy to send supplies and reinforcements to his forces in France when practically all the bridges on the lower Seine were knocked down.

June brought some of the most momentous days of the 323rd, as it was during this time that the Allies' grand assault on Hitler's vaunted Western Europe was staged. This long awaited event not only brought a new sense of determination and a great upswing in morale for the Group, but it also brought new problems and increased responsibilities.

The bombing of the pre-invasion targets of bridges and coastal installations continued for the first few days of June, and during all this time the men knew that "the day" was not far away. The Group hummed with activity as all personnel were in the throes of hurried planning and preparations for the big day. With the necessity for added secrecy during pre-briefing, of lead crews and preparation for the regular briefing, the Intelligence section maintained an Officer guard on duty twenty-four hours a day, to doubly insure that no unauthorized persons gained access to the top secret information. Engineering was busy with the rush job of painting the Zebra like stripes on all the planes. The other sections of the group were likewise busy with their last minute preparations for D-Day.

The excited babbling of the crewmen betrayed their eagerness for the start of the all important invasion mission, when they gathered in the crew room for the 0200 briefing on the morning of June 6, 1944.

The Group, using fifty-four planes, rather than the usual thirty-six, took off at 0415 and assembled in the early morning darkness. After the long trip over the ship infested Channel to the Cherbourg Peninsula the three boxes of the Group blasted their separate targets. The bombs were away at 0617, just a few short minutes before the first wave of assault troops dashed onto the enemy shore. No planes were lost and only slight enemy opposition, in the form of light to heavy flak was encountered. The results of the bombing were classed as fair to good.

For the next few days after D-Day the raids of the Group were concentrated against road junctions, bridges and marshalling yards in an effort to separate still further the immediate

battle area from the rest of France. The threat of the German secret weapon, the pilot-less aircraft or flying bomb, became a reality when the night of June 16-17 1944 the air raid signal was given numerous times. Many alerts were sounded during the remainder of the month as the enemy intensified his attacks with the new weapon.

During the last days of June the attack against the enemy consisted of more attacks against the launching sites of the flying bomb. Also during this time a new type bombing was practiced. This was night bombing accomplished by bombing in trail, visual, on flares dropped by PFF (Pathfinder) aircraft. This new program was designed to make the Group a potent bombing force after dark and thus enable the Bomber Command to do 'round the clock bombing.

After the particularly busy and exciting days of June, July was more or less a let-down to the Group as no missions were flown during the first seventeen days of the month. This lapse in activity was due to the continuing bad weather, which the English described as the worst in fifty years.

After more than thirteen months at Earls Colne the Group moved to a new location, Beaulieu Aerodrome in the county of Hampshire in Southern England. This was the first move in the Group's jaunt from England to the Continent. This move was made on July the 18-21 by rail, air and motor transport. Life at Beaulieu was not much different from that at the old base, though the base and its surrounding territory was different. The terrain for miles around was very flat and there were very few trees on the base. The weather continued so bad for the first part of July that a mission could not be flown until the 18th of the month. On that day the Group took its part in the 9th Bomber Command attack on the Demouville Defended area, just east of Caen.

Attacks were carried out against other bridges and fuel dumps but the most important attack for the month was the mission to the St. Lo Defended Area. The importance of this attack was seen later when the St. Lo breakthrough was recognized as the turning point of the Normandy campaign. August was a month long to be remembered in the history of the Group. It was during this month that the long expected and long awaited move to France was made. During the first week of the month a message was received warning the Group to prepare for an overseas movement. From that time on the base was alive with rumors and suppositions as to the destination of the outfit. It was not until the 15th that the final order was received.

The new home was to be Number A-20, an air strip two miles NE of the little French Village of Lessay. The advanced Echelon left for France on August the 18th. The Group was entirely moved by the 31st of August. The move was made by train and boat with the exception of the planes which were flown to the new home. The outstanding combat news for the month of August was the fact that the Group exhibited its all-around bombing excellence. On the night of the 6th and 7th it successfully completed its first night mission. On this and several succeeding nights the technique of bombing in trail on target indicator flares was used in blasting different enemy installations.

The now home in France was a landing strip and was only partially completed. It had steel mat runways and hardstands. The field was situated in the midst of the area over which the Americans and Germans had fought so hard before the breakthrough to the west coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula. Though the field had been de-mined as thoroughly as possible, there were still some mines at various places and a few accidents resulted, one of them fatal. The disadvantage of living under field conditions had been discussed for months, but even the gloomiest predictions had not taken into account the scourge of bees and flies that made it practically impossible to eat a meal.

Giving further proof of its efficiency and ability the Group flew a mission off its steel mat runway less than 24 hours after the planes arrived at the new base. It was a part of the first American Bomber effort from French soil. The strong points and forts at Brest occupied the attention of the Group for a period of eight days. These raids were made in conjunction with other B-26 groups and heavy bomb groups. With the American onslaught breaking so fast through France and Belgium it became necessary to shift the emphasis of the groups bombing support of our ground forces to the bombing of objectives along and behind the Siegfried Line in Germany. With the targets along the Siegfried Line getting further out of range each day, it became necessary to move to a closer base. The Group moved between the 14th and 21st of September to a large Airfield, once the pride of the French civil airlines, located at Chartres. At this home the successful raids of Allied Bombers had left a dismal picture of destruction.

Booby traps and mines were plentiful, and the "grave-yards" of wrecked aircraft was a constant peril to curiosity seekers. The bad weather continued with scarcely a let-up during the Groups sojourn at Chartres. Because of this only six of the twenty-six briefed targets could be flown. During these missions the stiffening of German resistance was evident from the increasing intensity and accuracy of the flak encountered. As the relentless drive of the American and Allied Ground Forces swept forward it was necessary for the Group to move again in order to be within range of its targets. This time the move was made to Northern France. The move began on the 13th of October and ended on the 15th.

Shortly after arrival at Laon a system of passes to Paris was started. Combat crews were allowed 3 day passes and ground crews 18 hour passes. This afforded the men some respite from the work and dreariness and enabled them to see more of France. Liberty runs were made to Reims. The winter at Laon was a tough and dreary one, to be always remembered for its snow, rain, mud and cold North Winds. These, combined with growing homesickness after many months in the E.T.O., poor housing and inadequate rations at times, caused morale of the men to reach a new all-time low. With such severe winter weather it became necessary to maintain alert crews at all times to insure that the runways and taxiways were kept free of snow, sleet and ice so that the planes could take off and land. For the rest of the month of October there were only two missions run. Excellent results were obtained.

The weather continued to be bad during November, but the Group was able to run five very successful visual missions and some PFF missions. Thanksgiving passed unnoticed except for the usual turkey and trimmings at the evening meal. December at Laon was a very interesting

month, to say the least. For a month usually characterized by Christmas festivities and gaiety, this one was quite different. It was composed mostly of hard work due to the great German counter attack which was such a rude blow to the complacency built up in the American army after the great successes of the previous summer and fall. The month's aerial activities were primarily in support of ground action. Those were mainly the 8th Army Group's offensive in the Saar region and the attempts of the 21st and 12th Army groups to stem the German drive in the Ardennes salient. While not in close support of our troops, the mission served to knockout bridges and defended villages vital to the enemy's plan of battle. Some successful missions were run during the first part of the month but extensive activities were prevented by the seemingly permanent bad weather.

When Christmas was just around the corner, the great offensive of the Germans came in all its fury. Enemy air activity became prevalent and local danger became probable. Nearby airfields were strafed and paratroopers and enemy agents were dropped in many near by places. Acts of sabotage and violence against American troops on the roads were reported daily. Double airplane guard, area guards, and armed messengers were employed.

The news blackout imposed by the Army commanders prevented the rank and file from keeping up with the latest development in the Battle of the Bulge, but it was realized throughout the whole base that the situation was critical. The Group was alerted for many possible eventuality, and everyone was warned to be ready to move on six hours notice. This would have necessitated burning much of the supplies and equipment.

Christmas passed almost unnoticed except for the huge meals of turkey and accompanying edibles. Here and there a brightly lighted tree reflected the creative initiative of a soldier who refused to let the Holy Holiday pass unsung. On the 23rd of December, in an attempt to deny to the enemy the use of supplies moving up by rail, the railroad bridge at Eller was bombed. Nearly every Group lost some planes and one of the groups, the 397th, lost 10 planes. The 323rd lost two planes to the extremely accurate and intense flak.

For its outstanding bombing on December 24 to 27 of the supply and transportation facilities used in reinforcing the great German counter-offensive the Group was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. Starting on Christmas Eve with a full scale attack against a railroad bridge at Trier, Germany, the 323rd bombed enemy installations six times in four days. All of these missions were accomplished with excellent and superior results despite the seemingly insurmountable odds of adverse weather conditions and the intense enemy anti-aircraft fire. It was necessary for ground crewmen to go without sleep for many, many hours in order to load and service the planes for their vital work. Without a doubt the work of the 323rd played a vital part in breaking the back of the Great German Counter-offensive since it contributed so effectively during Christmas week to disrupting the enemy's transportation and supply facilities.

The New Year of 1945 was literally brought in with a bang. The usual annual midnight festivities had scarcely died away when an FW-190 came screaming across the field with his guns blazing. Anti-aircraft batteries opened up on the nuisance raider and were given credit for having

destroyed him when he crashed a few miles west of the base. No casualties were caused - the worst damage was that some caught cold while crouching in their icy slit trenches.

Two blizzards during the month left little doubt that it was really winter. Snow drifted high up the sides of the tents and bitter cold penetrated the canvas day and night. Squads of men were kept busy clearing the runway and taxi strips so the Group could maintain the constant alert for take off. The existence of the threatening enemy bulge on the Ardennes front continued to influence the type of targets. The Germans had established the city of St. Vith as the hub of the recaptured area. Because of this it was the target on the first day of the year, when 31 planes loaded with 1000 pound bombs braved the intense flak fire to blast the city again. On one mission during the month one plane was lost and twenty-five ships had category A flak damage and three men were wounded.

Late in the month of January the 323rd moved again. This time to strip A-83, located about four kilometers south of the city of Valenciennes. The 455th and 456th Squadrons were located in the Eastern outskirts of the village of Herin, to the northwest of the main highway from Valenciennes to Douai. This area was about a mile from the main field and was formerly a prison camp. The 453rd and 454th squadrons were not so fortunate, but their tent areas were soon made comfortable. During this move the Group Commander, Col. Wood returned to the United States and Lt. Col. Rollin Winningham from the 397th Group took command.

The handicaps of changing the base of operations and the usual adverse February weather proved to be surmountable ones. The 19 missions that were run carried the "White Tailed Marauders" over enemy strongholds to disrupt transportation, paralyze aircraft production and shatter bulging marshalling yards. The enemy in his last gasp for survival took a heavier toll in aircraft lost and damaged and in wounded personnel than in previous months. Eight planes were lost in combat, with 33 men being carried as missing in action, and 11 others wounded. Since most of the missions for the month were Pathfinder missions it was impossible to assess the amount of damage done on the various raids.

Shortly after the sun set on the 21st of February, it was evident that operation Clarion was scheduled to be run the following day. Hours of hectic briefing activity followed to make ready for the biggest and most vital air operation since D-Day. "Clarion" was to be a coordinated aerial offensive of all flyable aircraft in the ETO against hundreds of junctions, bridges, and marshalling yards. The targets for the 323rd were all in the area east of Ham and affected railroads feeding that important marshalling center.

March, 1945, saw the weather lift and as if to say, "That's all we've been waiting for", the 323rd proceeded to run 43 successful missions during the month, by far the Greatest amount of bombing done in any one month of the Group's history. The Great air offensive continued through April with the whole effort concentrated at blasting a path before the slugging ground forces. The raids for this last month of operations consisted of raids on marshalling yards, oil storage dumps, an airfield and ordnance depots.

Again the range of the B-26 was strained to the breaking point by the great distance it was necessary to fly into Germany in order to reach the targets. The rapid advance of our armored forces and infantry had by the end of April overrun such a great portion of Germany that very few targets were left. As the German lines fell back and the battle became further and further away it became evident that the struggle could not continue for long. Not only were all targets out of range, but with the Allied troops making such rapid advances it became dangerous to bomb anywhere for fear of hitting them.

The entire Group had known for days that the long awaited V-E Day was not far off. With the leak in security that allowed the advanced notice, the Actual V-E Day came more or less as an anti-climax to that first announcement. The joy in every GI's heart was not betrayed so emotionally as was the joy of the French. Thus ends the combat history of the 323rd, whose accomplishments in blasting the enemy extended from the rockbound coast of the Brest peninsula to the snow covered Alps, and from the Pas de Calais rocket bomb region to the Rhineland industrial area and Northern Holland. The outstanding combat record, which required countless acts of supreme courage and sacrifice and long dreary hours of back breaking labor, will stand for all time as a tribute to the working and fighting ability of the many men who served in the 323rd.

The first of May brought the 453rd Squadron news that rather stunned the whole Squadron. The Squadron was to be attached to the Ninth Air Service Command and was being sent to Germany to disarm German Air Force Installations. The Squadron, since its activation had been a combat outfit and the ground men had always been very proud of the flying man and their planes. During the next few days more information was received on the type of work to be done. The men began to realize the importance of the job to be done and they were all eager to get started.

Late in the month of May the 453rd moved to an airfield four miles north of Augsburg Germany, and on the 25th of the month completed disarming their first target. It was a balloon factory at Augsburg. The continued disarmament of German Air Force installations was the main official subject during the month of June but the chief concern of the men seemed to be whether they had 85 points. On the 11th of June all of the combat men of the 453rd were transferred and now the squadron was strictly a ground outfit.

The month of July was a period of continued activities on the Disarmament of German Air Force Installations. The 453rd continued its disarmament program during the month of August in the Munich area. V-J Day was met with a feeling of quiet joy. There was very little celebrating, but all personnel rejoiced. The next feeling was "when do we go home"?

On the 11th of September the advance echelon of the 56th Air Disarmament Squadron arrived to take over the area, and the physical plant of the 453rd. This transfer was completed on the morning of the 12th and all the personnel remaining was transferred to group headquarters. On the 13th of September the unit was reduced in strength to one officer and one enlisted man. Thus ends the history of the 453rd Bomb Squadron in Europe.

After V-E Day in Europe there is no official or unofficial history available about the 454th Bomb Squadron. It is assumed that their duties from V-E Day until the deactivation of the Squadron closely paralleled the 453rd Bomb Squadron. The 455th Bomb Squadron became a ground outfit early in May of 1945 and soon moved to Germany where its assignment paralleled to the 453rd, the disarming of the German Air Force. This program of disarmament continued on through the summer until early fall when the squadron was inactivated.

Flew 318 Missions or 11,424 Individual Sorties

Dropped 15,067 Tons of Bombs

1st Mission: July 16th, 1943 - The Abbeville Marshaling Yards, France.

Last mission: April 25th, 1945 - The Erding Airdrome, German airport & Me262 German jet fighters

Conducted aerial combat training, 1955-1957.

The group was later redesignated the 323rd Fighter Bomber Group and, in August of 1955. was assigned to Tactical Air Command at Bunker Hill AFB, Indiana, equipped with the F-86F. It retained the Sabre until transitioning to the F-100A and F-100D in late 1956. The 323rd Fighter Bomber Group and the 386th Fighter Bomber Group were both based at Bunker Hill, Indiana, and were under the control of the 323rd Fighter Bomber Wing. The 323rd Fighter Group was to operate the F-100D for only a year.



Col Billy Cornett, Bunker Hill, @1957²

² Unit yearbook. *Bunker Hill AFB, IN, 323 Fighter-Bomber Wing, 1957*. Army and Navy Publishing Co. Inc., Baton Rouge, LA. 1957.

Conducted Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training (SUNT), 1991-1993.

Mather, long the home of navigator training, was another base scheduled for closure on 30 September 1993. As more and more of the navigator training mission transferred to the 12th Flying Training Wing at Randolph, ATC began to inactivate some of the main units. Effective 31 May 1993, the command inactivated the 323d Operations Group; the 452d, 453d, 454th, and 455th Flying Training Squadrons; the 323d Operations Support Squadron; and the 323d Support Group.