

Feb. 2000

The visuals from the B-26 waist gun position left me with so many memories. By far the most important and impressive to me was March 24th. As a late comer I missed June 6th but the March 24th air drop (Operation VARSITY) had to be number 2.

As I remember our bomb load was 260 lb frags targetting the forrest areas surrounding the glider landing zones. Our approach was from the north after flying up through Holland. On arrival for the bomb run many gliders were landing and crashing amidst German shell bursts. The sky was filled with C-47s pulling two gliders. The parachute troops were more north west of our position. The flak ignored the 397th. Ive edited from Ken Rust's **book describing the** 9th AF bomb groups participation in VARSITY.

Dixon Deemer 397th BG-599th Sq.

Operation VARSITY—the airborne assault of the British 6th and U. S. 17th Airborne Divisions across the Rhine north and northwest of Wesel at 1000 hours of 24 March 1945. The airborne units were flown to, and dropped on, their targets by 2029 IX TCC aircraft and gliders and 832 RAF aircraft and gliders. After observing the airborne operations from a point on the west bank of the Rhine, two miles northwest of Wesel, General Brereton, CG of the First Allied Airborne Army, reported:

“The first air columns over the river were approximately five minutes early. The formation was excellent, all units in good order, and the first parachute drops could be observed through glasses. Intense flak was encountered and I saw during the first 25 minutes at least nine flamers and six crashes. I saw no aircraft, however, shot down prior to the delivery of its troops. Farther to the north Horsa glider landings could be observed through the haze. The air cover afforded by Second TAF and XXIX TAC was excellent, and after the first 30 minutes a marked decrease in the antiaircraft fire could be observed even from my observation post Not a single plane was attacked by the Luftwaffe. Of the 46 aircraft lost by (IX) Troop Carrier Command, 39 were lost to flak, and one by accident; the cause of the other six losses is unknown. RAF losses were

seven aircraft, all to flak The impact of the vertical envelopment was a stunning blow to the enemy. In the first day the airborne troops took over 3,500 prisoners, destroyed or reduced all the artillery positions, and tore a great gap in the enemy's Rhine defense. The way was opened to Berlin."

It could be added that of the some 7000 Allied air sorties of 24 March, 688 were made by 9th Bomb Division medium and light bombers and 2039 by units of the three TAC's. XXIX TAC provided anti-flak patrols and cooperated with forces participating in Operation VARSITY, and IX TAC patrolled the southern flank of the battle area and gave escort. So began the final phase of operations to take the remainder of Germany and bring an end to the war.

In the two weeks from 11 March through 24 March the TAC's had achieved unbelievable success in support of the campaign to reach and then cross the Rhine. DURING those fourteen days fighter-bombers had destroyed or damaged 896 tanks and armored vehicles, 969 locomotives, 19,019 rail cars, 10,220 motor transport and countless other items of enemy equipment. To fully appreciate the achievements of the fighter-bombers a complete daily listing in specific categories by TAC's for the two week period appears on the opposite page.

Greatest period in the history of the medium and light bombers of the 9th Air Force was that from 23 February through 31 March 1945. During those 37 days, 9th BD operated on 34 days (missing only 7, 27 and 29 March due to weather) and dispatched 17,847 bombers of which 15,889 attacked and dropped over 24,000 tons of bombs. From all operations 58 bombers were lost, and claims of 9- 6-10 enemy fighters were made. The effort was the largest, most continuous and most coordinated the bombers had ever engaged in, and it was the most effective employment of medium altitude bombardment in the war. Operations reached their zenith in the five days from 21 to 25 March.

On the 21st, 637 bombers were dispatched and 582 attacked six communications centers, one marshalling yard and dropped leaflets. One bomber was damaged beyond repair and 89 damaged to a lesser degree. The 22nd saw 848 bombers dispatched and 798 attack communications centers. Three were lost, one damaged beyond repair and 126 damaged less severely. On the 23rd, 842 bombers were dispatched and 804 attacked communications centers. Two were lost, two damaged beyond repair and 88 damaged. The 24th saw 770 dispatched and 688 attack in 22 group missions - 3 against communications centers, 7 bombing rail bridges and 12 attacking flak positions in support of **VAR-SITY**. Three aircraft were lost (from attacks on rail bridges) and 114 damaged. On the 25th of March, 701 bombers were dispatched and 641 attacked in 19 group-strength missions - 12 against three marshalling yards and 7 against four communications centers. One bomber was lost, three damaged beyond repair and 125 suffered lesser damage.

Of 232 attacks from 23 February, 160 were made wholly or partially blind, usually on OBOE but occasionally on GEE, SCR-584 or dead reckoning. The availability of an effective blind bombing technique made it possible to schedule most activities on the basis of alternative blind or visual plans. It also made it possible to set up operating procedures under which PFF aircraft could be provided for all formations attacking under weather conditions which might prohibit visual attack, yet left to the formation leader's discretion the decision to make visual attack if conditions at the target warranted. Generally, pinpoint targets such as rail bridges were not scheduled for blind attack because with existing PFF equipment blind attacks had to be made in boxes, and such formations did not afford the most appropriate bomb pattern or the highest probability of hits in the case of such targets.

The month of April 1945 saw the Allied armies make vast gains across the face of Germany and to the borders of Austria and Czechoslovakia. By the end of the month the complete collapse and unconditional surrender of Germany were at hand. At the beginning of April, FUSA and TUSA forces concentrated on the reduction of the Ruhr Pocket that had been formed on the 2nd. For nearly two weeks the Pocket was constricted until on the 14th it was split into two parts. The eastern part was overrun on the 16th and the western part surrendered on the 18th. Twenty-one German divisions had been eliminated and some 325,000 German troops captured.

Behind the Rhine River and in the line of eastward Allied advances lay the Weser River. NUSA forces established a bridgehead over it on 6 April while FUSA units crossed it on 7 and 8 April. On the 11th FUSA units moved east from this point, and NUSA reached the Elbe River south of Magdeburg, establishing a bridgehead over that river on the 13th. In the TUSA area, Erfurt, bypassed on the 11th, was cleared on 12 April while other Third Army units drove east, reaching the Chemnitz area, 75 miles east of Erfurt, on 13 April. Still other TUSA forces hurried south toward Czechoslovakia and Austria, reaching the Hof area on 14 April. The same day FUSA's 3rd Armored Division reached Dessau.

During the four days from 16 thru 19 April, medium and light bombers of the 9th BD flew 2086 effective sorties against seven marshalling yards, four ordnance depots, two M/T depots; two rail junctions, one oil storage depot, one communication center defended town. From these missions 9 aircraft lost, two damaged beyond repair, 9 moderately damaged and 50 slightly damaged. On 20 April, 564 effective sorties were flown by the bombers against three marshalling yards, an ordnance depot and two fuel storage depots. Five bombers were lost, one damaged beyond repair, 26 moderately damaged and 49 slightly damaged.

Not only had the- bombers of the 9th Air Force now passed the climax of their operations, but three of their groups had (although it was not realized at the time) flown their last mission of the war. The 387th Bomb Group flew its final mission on 19 April, though it would be dispatched on 26 April only to be recalled due to weather before it was really on its way. On 20 April, the 394th flew its final mission (number 271 - six B-26s on a leaflet drop) and the 397th flew its last mission (number 239). Also 20 April marked the last aircraft loss by the 9th Bomb Division.

just as with ground action, air action was hot and heavy during April and saw many new records set by aircraft of the 9th Air Force before missions began to fall off due to lack of targets late in the month. Air operations, however, were held down by weather during the first seven days of the month. The bombers did not operate on the 1st, 2nd and 5th and flew at reduced strength on the other four days. Fighterbombers flew under 500 sorties on the 2nd, 3rd and 6th and over 1000 sorties only on the 7th.

The 37-day medium campaign had three separate aspects: 1) Interdiction of the Ruhr - sustained attacks on bridges and marshalling yards to prevent the movement of supplies into the vital Ruhr defense area, and also to prevent the movement of Ruhr products, such as coal, into the rest of Germany. 2) Destruction of supplies - attacks on ordnance and motor transport depots, ammunition filling plants and active marshalling yards to prevent the movement of military supplies to the areas where they were sorely needed for the defense of the Rhine.,3) **Close cooperation with ground forces - attacks on communications centers, military concentrations and barracks areas to soften the enemy defenses** prior to Allied ground advances, and to prevent effective enemy withdrawals from positions rendered untenable by ground force advances.

9th AIR FORCE -BOMBER GROUP BASE CHANGES, 1945

97th COMBAT BOMB WING

409th BC Laon/Couvron, Fr., A-70 15 February

410th BC juvincourt. Fr.. A-68 14 February

416th BC Laon/Athies. Fr., A-69 15 February

98th COMBAT BOMB WING

323rd BG Denain/Prouvy, Fr., A-83 9 February

387th BG Beek. Holland, 29 April

394th BG Venlo. Holland, Y-55 2 May

397th BG Venlo. Holland, Y-55 25 April

99th COMBAT BOMB WING

322nd BG Le Culout, Bel.. A-89 31 March

344th BG Florennes/Juzaine, Bel.. A-78 5 April

386th BG St. Trund, Bel.. A-92 9April

391st BG Asche. Bel.. Y-29 16 April