

765TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H)
461ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
Office of the Combat Intelligence Officer

WFF/jdk

APO 520, NY, NY
30 April 1945

SUMMARY OF THE SQUADRON HISTORY FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL

During April, the 765th Bombardment Squadron took advantage of spring in Italy to fly twenty-two combat missions against rapidly collapsing Germany. One hundred and forty-eight aircraft flew over enemy territory to drop a total of three hundred and twenty-six tons of explosives on Nazi installations. On three days, adverse weather made it necessary for the airmen to return their bombs to base. The location of the targets once again was indicative of the advance of Allied ground troops. On sixteen occasions, the Liberators took to the sky to attack objectives in Northern Italy. The other six targets were attacked in Austria. The outstanding aerial activity of the month was that in coordination with ground activity on the Italian front. On two consecutive days, fragmentation bombs were dropped on German troop concentrations north of the Senio River in Italy to assist the British Eighth Army in their drive on that sector of the front. Three times the Fifth Army offensive near Bologna was given aerial support, out on one of these occasions unfavorable weather made it necessary that the bombs be returned to base. On April 15th, the squadron reached a new high by sending fifteen aircraft on two separate missions to northern Italy. Bombing results during April were, in most cases, highly commendable. Partly responsible for this was the absence of enemy opposition on a majority of the missions, permitting several passes at the objective to be made when necessary to pick up the point of impact accurately. The crews used the new type escape kits throughout the month, the ones that contained chits in lieu of money. The proper procedure for handing these chits was explained to the men. A maximum number of training flights were scheduled throughout April, especially on the eight stand down days.

Tragedy hit the squadron twice during the thirty-day period. On April 11th, it was proven once again that there is no such thing as a guaranteed "milk run". There was not a great deal of flak over the target, the marshalling yard at Bronsolo, Italy, but the few guns defending that area were fired with accuracy. Lt. Caran's airplane received a direct hit in the bomb bay, went into a flat spin and plunged groundward in flames. In addition to the regular crew, Lt. Hearn, squadron gunnery officer, was aboard the stricken bomber. On April 16th, a freak occurrence took the life of an aerial gunner. While assembling over the local area in adverse weather, two airplanes suddenly went into spins. Both pilots leveled off their bomber after a considerable loss of altitude; but, before this occurred, a total of seven airmen had parachuted from the two aircraft. One gunner was killed when he bailed out at such a low altitude that his parachute had no time to open. Expert judgment and superb flying skill prevented what could have been another calamitous event. Arriving back over Torretta Field with one wheel shot completely off of his aircraft, Lt. Demmond bailed out seven of his crew and then brought his bomber in for a brilliant landing with only the nose wheel upon which to roll along the runway. The last day of the month saw the return of Lt. Heinze's crew to the squadron. MIA over Vienna, Austria, on March 28th, they had landed on an emergency landing field behind Russian lines.

Five new combat crews made their home with the squadron during April. Of these, four joined the organization from the 47th Bomb Wing, and these crew members had from seven to twenty-seven missions to their credit. On the other hand, Lt. Braning's crew was transferred to the 96th Bomb Group. Seven flying officers and fifteen aircrew enlisted men, having completed their missions, were returned to the United States. Other air echelon personnel changes included the assignment of Capt. McDonnell, a pilot; the transfer of two bombardiers to other bomb groups; the loss of two hospitalized aerial gunners to the Detachment of Patients; the assignment of a radar monitor, a radar observer, and a gunnery officer; and the transfer of a bombardier and a radar observer to another squadron in the group.

In the ground echelon, Intelligence Officer, Capt. Platt, left the squadron to undergo training for military occupation work, and Capt. Russell joined the organization to take over the S-2 section. Seven radar men were assigned to the squadron during April. Two enlisted men left the squadron during the month. Staff Sergeant Underwood, a veteran of thirty-three months in the ETO, returned to the zone of the interior; and Private Stinson moved to group headquarters to work in the newly constructed hospital there.

With the one exception of eight ground echelon men who earned their first chevron, it was aircrew personnel that received all of the promotions during April. Two flight leaders donned "railroad tracks"; eighteen lieutenants changed the color of their collar insignia from gold to silver; five staff sergeants and two corporals made "tech"; fourteen sergeants became "first three graders"; and a similar number of corporals added a third stripe. One enlisted man was court martialed and reduced to the grade of private for the unauthorized use of a squadron vehicle.

Again numerous changes in staff personnel occurred. Major Thackston was appointed Deputy Squadron Commander, and Capt. Gray assumed duty as Operations Officer. Later in the month, Major Thackston went on DS with group headquarters and Capt. McDonnell became deputy commander of the organization. Lt. Kassler once again became squadron Navigator as Lt. Murrer finished his tour of duty; and Lt. Burleson resumed as Squadron Bombardier in place of Lt. Fearin, transferred to the 767th Bomb Squadron. Lt. Brady was selected to be assistant operations officer.

The affairs, records and clothing and equipment of the members of the organization came under close scrutiny during April. First of all, each man was called into the orderly room to check his adjusted service rating. Points for length of service, overseas time, awards and decorations and the number of children had been compiled and each individual audited this calculation to make sure he had been given full credit. Next came a show-down inspection of clothing and equipment, with its purpose to determine shortages of these items. Later in the month, a personal affairs questionnaire on each enlisted man was filled out. As April came to a close, both officers and enlisted men were having their records checked by a group screening team.

Fourteen squadron airmen were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in April "for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight." Other decorations earned by members of the squadron included one Soldiers Medal, two Bronze Stars, one cluster to the Bronze Star, one Purple Heart, and numerous Air Medals and clusters thereto. Good Conduct Medals were distributed to men authorized to wear this ribbon.

Ground training for the men continued. One electrical specialist was sent to Flux Gate Compass School. Each man passed through the gas chamber to check the function of his mask. A venereal disease training film was presented before one of the featured movies. A news summary was presented each morning at 1100 in the squadron briefing room. A ground-training program for aerial gunners continued to be emphasized.

The rest camp program during April was augmented by the receipt of quotas for several new recreation centers. Ten officers and eight enlisted men were sent to the Santa Caesera rest camp in Southern Italy. One enlisted man had the opportunity to spend five days at Nice on the Riviera in Southern France, and the squadron's second group of three officers vacationed at Cannes in the same locality. Twelve officers and twenty-one enlisted men spent a week on the Isle of Capri, and thirteen other enlisted men rested for a similar period at San Spirito. The Public Relations Office sent fourteen men to Rome to make radio transcriptions. Train excursions to the Eternal City were commenced.

Three officers and eight enlisted men became hospital patients during the month. Only one new case of venereal disease developed.

As April drew to a close, the atmosphere in the squadron was one of expectancy. Victory in Europe seemed not too far in the future. As Germany drew ever closer to total collapse, speculation as to the fate of the organization became the foremost topic of conversation. Once again, the squadron was engulfed with that great Army evil, a series of inconsistent, contradictory rumors. As usual in such a situation, the net result was that everyone expected some big development to occur, but no one knew exactly what it would be. The big question on the lips of squadron members as May 1945 approached was whether or not the 765th Bombardment Squadron would return to the United States when the time came to depart from Torretta Field.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE SQUADRON HISTORY FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL

April 1. It was Easter Sunday in Italy and squadron airmen were all set to deliver one-quarter ton eggs to the marshalling yard at Bruck, Austria. However, adverse weather forced the crews to bring the explosives back to the base. No credit for the mission was given. Crews were now using the new type escape kits – those without any money in them. The new system of using chits in payment for services rendered by civilians behind enemy lines was explained to the crews. Two officers and three of the air echelon bade farewell to friends as they climbed aboard a 2½-ton truck to depart for the U.S.A and home. Communications men rewired the office area as a second putt-putt was obtained to absorb one-half of the electricity load. The result was a brightening of lights throughout the “business district” of the organization. The monthly promotion list was posted on the bulletin board, listing fourteen new staff sergeants, fourteen new sergeants, and eight new privates first class. The men who had been “awaiting out” their departure to Rome since Thursday, March 29th, finally took off for three days in that city. Flight leader Summers learned of his promotion to the rank of captain.

April 2. Squadron fliers dropped their explosives on the marshalling yard at St. Polten, Austria, on this date. No enemy resistance was encountered and all ships returned without trouble. Men participating in the attack claimed that the marshalling yard had been knocked out prior to their arrival over it. Squadron bombs landed in the target area, adding to the intense destruction already inflicted on this enemy installation. This date marked the squadron’s first anniversary as a combat unit. Since 2 April 1944, the organization had participated in 20% missions against the Nazis. Four officers and nine enlisted men departed for rest camps. Men of the ground echelon went through the gas chamber to test the functioning of their masks. At 0200 in the morning, watches were advanced to 0300 as double summer time came into affect at Torretta Field.

April 3. Early reveille begins long after regular reveille on this date, being scheduled for 0720. However, before that hour came around, a stand down had been called. Numerous training flights took place. A lengthy training film on venereal disease was shown.

April 4. For the second consecutive day, a stand down was called before the crews were briefed on the scheduled mission. Both Col. Lawhon and Col. Rogers made a thorough inspection of the squadron area. The enlisted men’s club tried out a new policy of opening its bar from 1600 to 1730 to enable the men to have a “quick one” before chow. Lt. Cunningham’s crew arrived to augment the squadron’s list of aerial teams. Two enlisted men departed for Rome to make PRO radio transcriptions.

April 5. The second completed combat mission of the month was carried out on this date. The target was the marshalling yard at Brescia, Italy, and bombing was by boxes. The squadron flight did not release its bombs on the first pass and made a 360-degree turn to make a second

run. On this second attempt, the 500-pounders were dropped on the yard with devastatingly accurate results. An explosion occurred that was felt in the airplanes and black-brown smoke rose up many thousand feet. No enemy resistance was met and all aircraft had no difficulty in returning to base. Two new Liberators made their home on squadron hardstands, bringing the total of combat ships up to fourteen. Two officers were promoted to first lieutenant.

April 6. It was the same town but a different installation there that was bombed on this date. This time it was the small arms plant at Brescia, Italy, that received a “plastering”. Once again, squadron bombardiers did themselves proud and achieved an excellent pattern of hits on the objective. Enemy opposition was nil and none of the aircraft had any trouble returning to base. An enlisted man departed to attend for seven days the Flux Gate Compass School in Bari.

April 7. The squadron planned to continue its onslaught against the Nazi supply and transportation system in northern Italy, but the weather interfered and covered the target, the Vipiteno Railroad Bridge, with clouds. The airmen brought the explosives back to the base and were not given credit for a mission. Four flying officers and seven air echelon enlisted men, all having completed thirty-five missions in the theater, left the squadron area en route to the U.S.A.

April 8. The Bronzolo marshalling yard in northern Italy was scheduled to be the target on this date. However adverse weather precluded a successful bomb run there, and the aircraft attacked the marshalling yard at Gorizia, Italy. This objective met the same fate as the installations at Brescia had several days prior; and, when the big Liberators headed for home, there was not much left of this railroad depot. It was another “milk run” for the lads and no flak was present to menace them. Aerial photographs confirmed the reports of extensive damage inflicted on this target. Major Baker spoke to a gathering of the enlisted men for the first time since his resumption of duty as commanding officer. Among other topics of discussion, he commended the men on cooperating in making the area so neat appearing that the organization took first place in the monthly inspection contest between 461st Bomb Group squadrons. A quota was received for the Santa Caesera rest camp in Southern Italy, and the squadron’s first list of men to go there departed on this date. Four officer and four enlisted men were selected to vacation there. Three enlisted men left for Rome to make a PRO radio transcription. Capt. McDonald was assigned to the squadron. His principal duty is that of pilot.

April 9. A maximum effort of ten squadron aircraft took off on a mission that was so secret that the target could not be revealed even after all the crews had safely landed. When the security ban on this activity was lifted, it was revealed that the airmen had supported the British 8th Army as they forced their way across the Senio River. Fragmentation bombs had been released over German troops defending that area. Aerial photographs showed that a good pattern of hits was achieved on the designated target area. Four officers and ten enlisted men departed for rest camps. Lt. Kessler took over duty as squadron navigator in place of Lt. Murrer, who had completed his 35th mission and was awaiting shipment back to the U.S.A.

April 10. The mission for this date was a follow up to that of the preceding day. Because of their noteworthy success and familiarity with the terrain from the mission of the previous day, the same crews were selected to fly. The results, although good, were not up to the day before. All crews returned safely to base. Good news was received by the orderly room in the form of

word that Lt. Heinze and his crew, MIA over Vienna on March 26th, was safe in Allied hands. No further details were received.

April 11. On this date, the squadron learned through sad experience that there was no such thing as a cinch “milk run”. Seven aircraft took off on an attack to bomb the marshalling yard at Bronsolo, Italy. Little enemy resistance was anticipated. However, the comparatively few guns located at the target were fired with accuracy and Lt. Caran’s airplane received a direct hit in the bomb bay. His airplane went into a flat spin and plunged groundward in flames. In addition to the regular crew, Lt. Hearn, squadron gunnery officer, was flying on that ship. Opinions on the success of the mission were varied. S/Sgt. Knapp of the communications department became the first enlisted man of the squadron to visit the new rest camp located at Nice in France. The supplementary payroll was paid at 1300.

April 12. It was the St. Veit railroad bridge in Austria just north of the Yugoslavian border that served as the target for squadron bombs on this date. Good results were reported by those who participated in the attack. No enemy opposition was encountered and all ships safely returned to base. Major Thackston was designated Deputy Commander and Capt. Gray resumed duty as Operations Officer.

April 13. The combat mission scheduled for this date was cancelled before the crews were briefed. Bombers of the squadron awoke to be stunned by the news of the death of their Commander-in-chief, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Everyone kept on hoping that it was a false rumor until confirmation came in from numerous news agencies. Grieved over this tragic loss, the men were more than ever determined to defeat our enemies and establish the principles of freedom for which President Roosevelt dedicated his life. Aircrew members turned in their weapons to the ordnance department, an activity that augmented the abundance of rumors already besieging the area. The enlisted men of Lt. Caran’s crew, missing in action over Bronzolo, Italy, were automatically promoted to the rank of sergeant. One officer and two enlisted men departed from the area en route to the U.S. They had completed their tour of duty in this theater. More excitement and rumors began circulating as all men in the organization were called into the orderly room to verify their points for demobilization after the fall of Germany. Most of the men did not have sufficient overseas time to get very optimistic about their prospects.

April 14. A normal effort of seven squadron aircraft attacked the Malcontenta Ammunition Factory near Venice, Italy. No opposition was encountered, but over the target the other squadron flights failed to follow the 765th squadron lead. The result was that 765th bombardiers were the only ones who released their explosives over the objective and only a small number of these hit in the target area. All ships returned to base. Twelve enlisted men left for rest camp in Rome. Four officers flew to the Eternal City to vacation there for a similar period. Lt. Bruning and his entire crew were transferred to the 98th Bomb Group. F/O Sparber was relieved of duty in the squadron and sent to the 576th Bomb Group. Enlisted men of the ground echelon turned in their weapons and ammunition to the ordnance department.

April 15. Fifteen airplanes from the squadron took to the sky to drop explosives on Axis installations. This attacking force was divided into two units and each attacked a separate target. The smaller force went to knock out the Nervessa Railroad Bridge in Northern Italy, while the

other group of ships participated in a secret mission. A tragic and unusual series of aerial mishaps occurred as the later attack force was assembling over the area. The weather was very adverse and both Lt. Staples' and Lt. Brewster's airplanes suddenly went into spins and headed groundward. Both pilots were able to level off their ships after a loss of altitude; but, before this occurred, a total of seven airmen had parachuted from the two ships. Exceptionally grievous because it was so unnecessary was the death of Cpl. Schultze of Lt. Brewster's crew who perished when he jumped from his airplane at such a low altitude that his parachute had no time to open. Sgt. Manolakelli of that crew suffered an ankle injury. Lt. Bell, bombardier of Lt. Staples' crew, suffered a slight skull fracture. The other four men were not injured. Members of the organization fell out at 1600 in Class "A" uniform and were transported to the Group Headquarters area where they participated in a memorial service in honor of President Roosevelt. Five staff sergeants, having appeared before the promotions board, earned their second "rocker".

April 16. The mission on this date was a return visit to the target of the day before. A security silence was once again placed on the name of the objective. Adverse weather prevented the airmen from dropping their bombs and the explosives were returned to base. Neither credit nor whiskey was given for the mission. A showdown inspection took place in the ground echelon enlisted men's area. The purpose of the check was to determine shortages of clothing and equipment. Those items were displayed in front of the tents on shelter halves. "Mickey Operator", Lt. Roy Williams came out on orders for the Distinguished Flying Cross. Lt. Rentz and Lt. Keatley received promotion to the rank of first lieutenant.

April 17. For the third consecutive day, a maximum effort of squadron airplanes participated in a secret mission. This time the explosives were dropped and inflicted a large amount of damage on the target. Upon the return of the crews, the security silence on the name of the objective was suspended and it was learned that squadron airmen had flown to the Bologna area for the past three days to lend support to advancing Allied ground troops. Four new crews joined the squadron. They were transferred from the 47th Bomb Wing. Members of these combat teams had from 7 to 27 missions to their credit. They had been selected to finish their tour of duty in this theater rather than to return to the U.S. with their units. Col. Craven C. Rogers assumed command of the 461st Bomb Group (H). He succeeded Col. Brooks A. Lawhon, who was transferred to the 49th Bomb Wing.

April 18. Once again a maximum effort of ten squadron aircraft were scheduled to take to the sky on a combat mission. However, a stand down was called before briefing occurred. Members of the squadron were called into the orderly room to be interviewed for the purpose of filling out a personal affairs questionnaire. Good conduct medals were distributed to men already awarded this ribbon. Major Thackston was placed on DS with Group Headquarters.

April 19. Once again the squadron sent every available ship into the sky, and on this date it was the Avisio Railroad Viaduct and Bridge in Northern Italy that was attacked. It was claimed that the bombs hit in the area of the bridge, but the exact amount of damage inflicted could not be determined. Moderate but inaccurate flak was encountered; and, although some of the ships had close calls, all returned to base. A mechanical malfunction caused an engine of Lt. Frattone's plane to fail and he was forced to drop behind the formation on the return flight. He was escorted to friendly territory by two P-38's. Three officers departed for five days at rest camp on the Riviera in Southern France. Lts. Brady, Pischol, Lee and Anderson sported shining new first

lieutenant's bars. Lt. Pearis was transferred to the 767th Bomb Squadron. Lt. Burleson took over the duties of squadron bombardier.

April 20. The crews again took to the sky to cooperate with our ground troops fighting in Northern Italy. One thousand pound bombs were released over the Lusia Road Bridge; and, when the airplanes returned homeward, the bridge had been completely knocked out. No opposition was encountered and all aircraft returned safely. Intelligence Officer, Capt. Willie Platt, was transferred from the squadron. No S-2 officer had as yet been assigned to take his place. Lt. Steinhauer and S/Sgt. Yarbrough were awarded the DFC. S/Sgt. Yarbrough, injured when his airplane crash landed on February 13th, was transferred to the Detachment of Patients.

April 21. Squadron airmen were scheduled to attack a rail center in Northern Italy, but a last minute change in orders sent them to the Attnang/Puchiem marshalling yard in Austria. Excellent results were again obtained by squadron bombardiers. No opposition of any nature was encountered. The organization's first fire in many months occurred when one of the tents in the officer's area caught fire from its stove. Capt. Wilbur H. Russell joined the organization to assume duty as squadron S-2 officer. Four flying officers and three aircrew enlisted men bade last farewells before departing for the U.S.A. on a permanent change of station. Nine men departed for Rome to make radio transcriptions. The usual weekly inspection of the squadron area occurred. Lt. Norton was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant.

April 22. Combat plans were cancelled during the night and aerial activity on this date was limited to training flights. Lt. Kimbell was transferred to the 450th Bomb Group. Lt. Haberman and Lt. Franks, members of one of the crews transferred to the squadron from the 47th Bomb Wing, were promoted to first lieutenants.

April 23. A force of ten squadron aircraft attacked the Badia Road Bridge over the Adige River, which runs across Italy north of the Po River. Excellent results were obtained; bomb strike photos showed a large mass of hits solidly on the bridge. The mission was another "milk run" for the airmen. Four officers and ten enlisted men departed for rest camps. Promotion policy was explained to aircrew enlisted men at a meeting in the theater at 1930.

April 24. Squadron aircraft on this date flew to Rovereto, Italy, to attack the marshalling yard there. It was not until the third run on the target that the bombs were released. The explosives fell on the objective with commendable accuracy. Slight and inaccurate flak was encountered over the target. All ships returned safely. The group anniversary newspaper was distributed to the men. Each person received three copies of this newspaper commemorating the first year of combat of the 461st Bomb Group. Sgt. Mueller, a radio monitor, was assigned to the squadron. The enlisted men's war bond raffle was held in the theater before the showing of the feature picture.

April 25. A normal effort of seven squadron aircraft took off to attack the north main marshalling yard at Linz, Austria. Despite intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire encountered over the objective, good results were obtained. While preparing to land back at the base, Lt. Dormond's airplane lost a main wheel. Damage from flak caused it to drop off when released to the down position. Lt. Dormond bailed out seven men from his crew and then brought his plane in for a brilliant landing with only the nose wheel on which to roll along the runway. Lieutenant

Ricland flew back with a feathered engine and was forced to land at the 454th Bomb Group field when both Torretta Field runways became blocked by crashed aircraft. The area seethed with excitement as numerous parachutes were observed in the sky above. No one realized that the men were members of the organization. All landed within a radius of a few miles of the area and were quickly picked up. Of the seven, only one, Lt. Norton, was injured to the extent that hospital treatment was required. He broke a bone at the base of his spine. Two other men suffered sprained ankles. Cpl. Wolsonovich was transferred to the Detachment of Patients. Lt. Whalen and T/Sgt. Christie were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

April 26. It was the Lions marshalling yard in Austria that was bombed by squadron Liberators on this date. Very commendable results were obtained. No opposition was encountered and all ships returned to base without difficulty. Lt. Traetta and Lt. Rentz were awarded the DFC for leading the Wing on the mission of April 9th to attack enemy troop concentrations north of the Eight Army line in Italy. Pvt. Stinson departed from the squadron to assume duty at the newly-constructed group hospital. Sgt. McCarney, an airplane mechanic, was transferred to the 49th Bomb Wing. The two crew men, transferred to the organization from the 47th Bomb Wing, were jumped to the rank of technical sergeant.

April 27. No combat mission was flown on this date. Lt. Crockett, a radar observer, was assigned to the organization. Lt. Traetta was promoted to the rank of captain. Seven second lieutenants donned bright, new first lieutenant bars.

April 28. For the second consecutive day, a stand down occurred. The group screening team set up offices in the squadron theater, and aircrew members brought their records to each officer and enlisted man of the team in turn for examination. All deficiencies and errors were corrected at once. The weekly inspection of squadron area was held. Eight enlisted men departed by train for three days in Rome.

April 29. For the third consecutive day, the squadron engaged in no action against the enemy. Training flights were flown. Seven enlisted men, all radar specialists, were assigned to the squadron. S/Sgt. Underwood, veteran of thirty-three months in the ETO, became the second ground echelon man to be rotated to the zone of the interior on a permanent change of station. Lt. Stiffmiller, a gunnery officer, was assigned to the organization. Lt. Wiscavage, a radar observer, was transferred from the squadron to the 767th Bomb Squadron. One private first class was given a summary court martial and reduced to the grade of private for the unauthorized use of a squadron vehicle.

April 30. Once again it was a stand down, and Liberators took to the sky only on training hops. Ground echelon men commenced their screening procedure. Service records, Form 20's, pay books, dog tags, and immunization papers were checked. Wages for the month of April were paid at 1300. As usual, chances on a war bond raffle were sold at the end of the pay line. Everyone was pleased to note the return of Lt. Heinze's crew to the squadron. MIA over Vienna on March 26th, they were reported safe in Allied hands on April 10th. The crew had landed on an emergency landing field behind Russian lines. Six officers and four enlisted men departed for five days at the Santa Caesera rest camp in Southern Italy. Capt. McDonnell became Deputy Squadron Commander in place of Major Thackston, on DS with Group Headquarters. Lt. Brady once again was selected to be Assistant Operations Officer.