

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

WFF/jdk

APO 520, NY, NY
31 March 1945

SUMMARY OF THE SQUADRON HISTORY FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH

During the month of March, the 765th Bombardment Squadron took part in twenty missions against the Nazis, sending one hundred and thirty-four aircraft over objectives in Control Europe to drop a total of two hundred and thirty-eight tons of bombs on these enemy installations. As in the past, the big Liberators were given the role of knocking out Germany's ever dwindling fuel supply and attacking the network of storage depots and rail yards vital in the supplying of Hitler's front line troops. Indicative of the contraction of German-held territory was the location of the targets. On seventeen occasions, the objectives were within the boundaries of Austria; twice it was "the fatherland" itself that was attacked; and once the explosives were released over Czechoslovakian soil. With the arrival of more favorable flying weather and the decreased reliance on pathfinder bombing, a considerable improvement in the results obtained could be noted. Among the installations well hit by squadron bombardiers were the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, the marshalling yard at Wels, Austria, and the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. On March 30th, the squadron participated in what proved to be a most unusual and outstanding mission. One ship was dispatched with instructions to attack a marshalling yard in Vienna, Austria only if an undercast existed there. Discovering that clear sky existed over the objective, the squadron pathfinder turned back along with other ships in the vicinity, and attacked the marshalling yard at Graz, Austria. The amount of damage inflicted on this enemy key point was intense. Throughout the month, a maximum number of training flights were scheduled. New crews were checked out, practice gunnery and bombing missions were flown, and training in formation flying was accomplished. Aircrew officers were sent to the 15th Air Force Headquarters to attend "mickey operators" school and combat school. During the first few days of March, a mobile training unit was parked adjacent to the orderly room building and all navigators, bombardiers and gunners were given armament instruction.

March proved to be a month of both joy and sorrow. The squadron rejoiced over the return of Major Baker with Lt. Woodruff's crew and Lt. McMillen's crew, both MIA over Vienna on the 21st of February. Both had landed crippled aircraft in Hungary behind the Russian lines, although at different fields. On March 26th, Lt. Heinze and his crew failed to return from a mission to the Vienna area. His airplane was last seen over an emergency landing field in Hungary and there seemed to be a good possibility that he reached safety. Grievous news was received that five members of Lt. Simons' crew, on detached service of a secretive nature for many months, had died as a result of wounds received in action.

Three new combat crews made their overseas home with the squadron during March. Other augmentation of aircrew personnel included the assignment of a bombardier, a navigator, two radar observers and two aerial gunners. Seventeen enlisted men and seven officers completed their thirty-fifth mission and returned to the zone of the interior. One other pilot appeared before the Flying Evaluation Board in Bari, and there was grounded and placed on orders to return to

the United States. One aerial gunner applied for infantry OCS training, was accepted, and left the squadron for that branch of the service.

In the ground echelon, the net result of personnel changes was a loss of men. Only two new faces were observed, one in the communications department and one in the engineering section. On the other hand, two enlisted men were transferred to Group Headquarters, one to another squadron, one to the Detachment of Patients, one to a Military Police outfit, one to the infantry upon request, two to the infantry involuntarily, and one man in confinement in the stockade was sent back to the U.S. Capt. Lund's departure for the zone of the interior marked the only change in the roster of ground echelon officers. He had been serving as assistant intelligence officer in the squadron.

With the ground echelon up to Table of Organization strength in almost every case, once again by far the majority of the promotions were of aircrew personnel. Operations officer, Captain Thackston, became Major Thackston; Squadron Bombardier Johnson, Flight Loader Kelleher and Armament Officer Dubal donned "railroad tracks"; ten second lieutenants changed to a silver bar; six flight officers were commissioned; two staff sergeants appeared before the board and added a second "rocker"; fourteen "buck" sergeants made "staff"; twenty-four corporals added a third chevron; four privates first class were jumped to sergeant; and six privates earned a four dollar per month increase in base pay. Three aircrew members were reduced to the rank of private for being AWOL for several days.

Numerous changes in staff personnel again took place. Early in the month, Capt. Gray was appointed operations officer and Lt. Welton became his assistant. When Major Baker returned from his MIA, he resumed command of the organization and Major Thackston assumed his former duties as operations officer. Capt. Gray then became assistant operations officer. Lt. Pearis (?) succeeded Lt. Bobth (?) as squadron bombardier, and Lt. Murrer (?) became squadron navigator in place of Lt. Kassler, who had been hospitalized in February because of wounds received in action.

After almost thirteen months at Torretta Field, improvements in the squadron area were still progressing at a rapid pace. The PX and mailroom moved into its new offices that gave these departments a needed increase in space. In the old PX, a barbershop was made and the tonsorial artists moved into these new quarters just before the month came to an end. The exterior of all buildings in the area received a whitewashing in March, thereby giving the area a very neat and clean appearance. Construction work was commenced on the squadron theater to be located in the former enlisted men's mess hall.

There was a notable increase in the number of inspections during March. General McNarney visited the 461st Bombardment Group but did not tour the squadron. General Lee inspected the office and area on one occasion, and frequently during the month group staff officers conducted a thorough inspection of the squadron.

The orderly room accepted applications for infantry OCS and nine men requested this opportunity to train for a commission. Of these, only one man was able to meet the physical and availability requirements.

The supply room collected blouses from the enlisted men and issued to them the new battle jackets.

The rest camp program was augmented by the resumption of tours to Rome. In addition, the public relations office kept an almost continuous flow of men traveling to the Eternal City to make radio transcriptions to be broadcast over one of their home radio stations. Sixteen officers and nineteen enlisted men, mostly all air crew members, relaxed war-weary minds and bodies on the Isle of Capri during March. Twelve ground echelon enlisted men spent a week at the San Spirito Rest Camp. Three flying officers were sent for five days to the new 15th Air Force rest camp at Cannes on the Riviera in Southern France.

Seven officers and nine enlisted men became hospital patients during the thirty-one day period. The only serious case was that of an aerial gunner who accidentally shot himself in the leg while cleaning his pistol. Two new cases of gonorrhea developed among the men during March.

There was no change in the entertainment provided the men. Movies continued to be shown four nights out of the week with the bar open on the other three evenings.

Eyes were glued to the intelligence battlefront map with even more anticipation as March drew to a close. General Eisenhower's smashing offensive into the very heart of the Reich led to optimistic views that victory was just around the corner. As the Russians advanced closer and closer to Vienna, no one seemed too annoyed at the expected loss of this area as target material. As Germany was encircled by an ever-tightening vise, more and more attention was being paid to the situation in the Pacific theater of operations. Everyone commenced wondering just what would be the fate of the men of the 765th Bombardment Squadron following VE-day.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE SQUADRON HISTORY FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH

March 1. Eight squadron aircraft flew to the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery and there encountered very adverse weather. Consequently, the bombs were returned to base. Enemy fighters were observed, but they did not attack the formation. All ships returned safely. The promotion list was posted on the bulletin board. Thirteen sergeants became “first three graders”, eighteen corporals added a third stripe and six privates earned their first chevron. Pay formation was held for those absent on the previous day. A mobile training unit arrived in the squadron area and parked near the orderly room. Armament instruction for navigators, bombardiers and gunners was commenced. At 1830, the orderly room personnel accepted money to be sent home through the finance office.

March 2. The Linz North Marshalling Yard was the target for this date. An undercast covered the objective and bombing was by PFF. The airmen encountered heavy, intense and accurate flak over Linz. All ships returned safely, though. Two new aircrews were scheduled to join the squadron, but Lt. Caran’s nine-men crew was the only one to arrive. Sgt. Hicks departed for a course of instruction at Cooke and Baker School.

March 3. Winter came back to Torretta Field and with it came the rain. The scheduled mission was cancelled. Four officers and eleven enlisted men departed for three days in Rome. The temporary duty of the squadron members of the group band was extended until March 25th. F/O McGillen was commissioned a second lieutenant.

March 4. Seven squadron aircraft flew to Graz, Austria, to attack the marshalling yard there. Their 500-pound bombs fell upon the objective in a good pattern and extensive damage to the enemy installation resulted. No opposition was encountered and all ships returned undamaged. Lt. Rosdal was sent to “mickey operators” school at 15th Air Force Headquarters in Bari. Pvt. Ferraro, member of the kitchen staff of the organization for seventeen months, was transferred to a military police outfit.

March 5. Despite sunny sky over Torretta Field, a stand down occurred on this date. Four flying officers and six aerial gunners departed for a week on the Isle of Capri, and three ground echelon enlisted men filled the San Spirito quota for the week. News reached the squadron of the death in action of two officers and two enlisted men of Lt. Simons’ crew. This crew had been on DS with the 685th Bomb Squadron for many months. The nature of their duty with that organization has been secret. No details of the disaster were available.

March 6. A combat mission was scheduled for this date, but a stand down was called before the crews went “into the blue”. Flight leader Lightbody handed out the customary cigars in token of his promotion to the rank of captain. Five second lieutenants were promoted to the rank of first lieutenant. Lt. Ferris (?), a bombardier, and Lt. Murrer (?), a navigator, joined the squadron from

the 767th and 766th Bomb Squadrons respectively. One enlisted man was transferred to Group Headquarters. One grounded aerial gunner was placed on DS with the 767th Bomb Squadron. All grounded and unclassified gunners were pooled in that squadron to determine in what capacity their services could best be utilized in the Group.

March 7. For the third consecutive day, no action against the enemy was accomplished. A new crew piloted by Lt. Bruning, was assigned to the organization. Lt. Wiseavage (?), a radar observer, joined the squadron from the 49th Bomb Wing.

March 8. The marshalling yard at Hegyeshalom, Austria, was the target on this date. Nine squadron airplanes dropped tons of 500-pound bombs on the objective with reported good results. No opposition was encountered and all ships returned safely. Four flying officers and eight aircrew enlisted men, having completed their tour of duty in this theater, departed for the U.S. and home. A communications man and three aerial gunners were transferred into the squadron.

March 9. Mission #190 was scheduled to be flown to the marshalling yard at Bruck, Austria, but the rail center at Graz, the fourth alternate target, was bombed instead. Nine squadron ships participated in the attack. Bombing was by PFF and the results were unobserved. All ships returned without difficulty. A pilot and a co-pilot were promoted to the rank of first lieutenant. Two aerial gunners who had returned from Yugoslavia were sent back to the United States. An electrician departed for schooling at Air Force Headquarters in Bari.

March 10. The scheduled combat mission for this date was cancelled before take off. The squadron rejoiced over unexpected return of Lt. McMillen's crew, MIA over Vienna on February 21st. They had landed their badly crippled ship in Russian territory in Hungary. There, they patched up a 451st Bomb Group plane and flew it back to the squadron. The orderly room accepted applications of men desiring to train at the recently established infantry OCS. Approximately ten men submitted papers reporting this opportunity to earn a commission. A fifth member of Lt. ~~XXXXX~~' crew ~~xxxxxxxx~~ because of injuries received in action.

March 11. No combat mission was flown on this date. Numerous training missions were accomplished with the emphasis on bombing and gunnery. General Lee made a tour of inspection of the squadron area accompanied by Colonel Lawhon and other staff officers. S/Sgt. Lenjer was assigned to duty with Group Headquarters to assist in the establishment of a hospital there. Pvt. Cagne (?) was released from confinement in the 15th Air Force stockade and assigned to replacement depot ~~xx~~. He awaits shipment back to the United States.

March 12. A maximum effort of nine squadron aircraft made a return visit to the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna, Austria. Bombing was by PFF and results were undetermined. Heavy resistance was amazingly inaccurate and the flak from Vienna's enormous highly feared heavy guns burst in advance and to the rear of the formation with the result that no airplanes were damaged. Sgt. Darron (?) of the engineering section was transferred to the Detachment of Patients. Four officers and nine enlisted men departed for rest camp.

March 13. A normal effort of seven squadron aircraft on this date attacked the main marshalling yard at Regensburg, Germany. Bombing was by PFF and black smoke observed through the

cloud coverage indicated good results. All aircraft returned safely. Capt. Thackston announced the following changes in staff personnel: Capt. Gray took over the position of Operations Officer and Lt. Welton became his assistant; Lt. Murrer (?) became squadron navigator; and Lt. Pearis (?) was selected to be squadron bombardier. Sgt. Gates departed for an eleven-day course at Cooks and Bakers school.

March 14. Although squadron airmen were briefed to attack the marshalling yard at Bruck, Austria, it was the rail center at Wiener Neustadt that felt the tonnage of the 500-pound bombs. The reason for this revision of plans was the existence of a complete cloud coverage over the primary objective. Bombing was by PFF and results could not be determined. All airplanes returned without difficulty. The supply room collected blouses from the enlisted men and issued to them the new battle jackets. Three members of the squadron appeared before the OCS board. S/Sgt. Shay, an aerial gunner, was transferred to Group Headquarters.

March 15. A maximum effort of nine squadron aircraft took off to bomb the Schwechat Oil refinery at Vienna, Austria. However, adverse weather altered the plans and for the second consecutive day the marshalling yard at Wiener Neustadt took a pounding. Returning airmen claimed to have observed large explosions beneath them. Only slight resistance was encountered. Plane #33, piloted by Capt. Chalmers, had to land at Vis to refuel and in doing so crashed when its nose wheel collapsed. At first it was thought that no man of the crew was injured but later reports disproved this statement. All other ships returned safely. Two staff sergeants were promoted to "tech"; one sergeant earned a "rocker"; and six corporals and four privates first class made sergeant. All these promotions were of air echelon men. Three aircrew members were dropped on the morning report as AWOL.

March 16. The combat endeavors of the squadron were directed once again against the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery northwest of Vienna, Austria. The airmen did a highly commendable job of precision bombing and aerial photographs showed the objective covered by an excellent pattern of bomb hits. Flak was both intense and accurate. Nevertheless, all the ships returned to the base safely. Lt. Frattone donned shining new 1st lieutenant's bars. Lt. Mueller of Lt. Simons' crew received a similar promotion. The three aerial gunners who had been dropped as AWOL returned to the squadron.

March 17. The first stand down in a week occurred as adverse weather prevented squadron airmen from taking off to attack the enemy. Numerous training flights were flown. Col. Grogan, accompanied by squadron staff officers, conducted an inspection of the area. Lt. Boyman (?), a radar observer, was transferred to the squadron from the 767th Bomb Squadron. Pvts Geneva (?) and Bobfield (?) were transferred to the 49th Bomb Wing.

March 18. Once again scheduled combat operations were cancelled just before take-off. The reason, as usual, was the weather. Lt. Goldberg and Lt. ~~XXXXXX~~ departed for training at the 15th Air Force Combat School.

March 19. Combat activity was resumed with an attack against the marshalling yard at Muhldorf, Germany by nine squadron aircraft. Men participating in this mission claimed a widespread and thorough destruction of the target. Aerial photographs substantiated these statements. No enemy opposition was encountered and all ships returned to the field with the

formation. Three officers and four enlisted men departed for a week at rest camp. Preparations were started for the anticipated visit of General McNarney, Deputy Commander of the 15th.

March 20. Crews were awakened at early reveille and told to stand by for a combat mission. After a short period of time during which no one quite knew what was “cooking”, revised combat orders came through and a maximum effort of nine squadron aircraft took to the sky to attack the marshalling yard at Wels, Austria. Opposition over the target was nil, and an excellent bomb pattern was claimed by the men returning from the mission. All aircraft made it back to the base without trouble. A physical training program was in full swing in the squadron. Exercise in the form of calisthenics and organized games commenced at 0615 each morning. Each man was required to attend at least three classes each week. The mail orderly and the PX were in operation in their new building adjacent to the dispensary. The increase in space for each of these departments constituted a major improvement.

March 21. The marshalling yard at Graz, Austria, took a pounding from squadron Liberators on this date. The target was to have been the rail yards at Bruck, Austria but adverse weather made the selection of an alternate necessary. Rather poor results were obtained. Enemy resistance was slight and inaccurate and all aircraft returned safely. General McNarney visited the 461st Bomb Group but did not inspect the 765th Bomb Squadron.

March 22. Seven aircraft took off for the “blue” with every intention of bombing the Kagran Oil Refinery in Vienna, Austria. However, bad weather over this primary target caused original plans to be discarded, and the formation blasted the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in that same city with as beautiful a pattern of bomb hits as has been seen during the combat career of the squadron. Flak, as usual at Vienna, was both intense and accurate, but all ships made it back to the base. Lt. Flatone landed his ship with but three engines and no hydraulic system, utilizing parachutes tied to the waist guns in lieu of brakes. Squadron members of the group band returned to duty after over a month of accompanying the “Panama Battle” show. Captain Chalmers departed for Bari to appear before the Flying Evaluation Board.

March 23. A return visit was made to the Vienna area with the Kagran Oil Refinery as the objective. The normal intense enemy resistance was encountered, and aerial photographs showed that only a few bombs hit the target. All ships returned safely to base. Everyone heralded the return of Major Baker and Lt. Woodruff’s crew to the squadron. They had landed their crippled ship behind Russian lines in Hungary on February 21st after flak over Vienna had seriously damaged their airplane. The men had been taken to Bucharest and from there were flown to Bari. None of the men had been injured and looked none the worse for their experience. Major Baker resumed command of the squadron. Sgt. Ruby (?) of Lt. Stegeman’s crew picked up his belongings and left for the Infantry OCS in this theater. Of the nine men who originally applied for this opportunity to earn a commission, he was the only one who met all qualifications. Lt. XXXXXXXX’s crew became members of the squadron. Three flying officers and seven aerial gunners, having finished their tour of duty in this theater, left on the first leg of their journey to the U.S. Capt. XXXXXXXX, on DS with the 15th AF, was transferred to Group Headquarters.

March 24. A maximum effort of squadron heavy bombers attacked the marshalling yard at Budejovice, Czechoslovakia on this date. Enemy resistance was nil and a good pattern of bombs

fell on the objective. Aerial photographs showed that the explosives cut the railroad track at two distinct places. All aircraft returned safely to base. While present at a group critique, Capt. Thackston learned of his promotion to the rank of major from Col. Lawhon. Bombardier Johnson appeared in the area sporting a shining new pair of captain's bars. Sgt. Kramer and his force of Italian workers commenced whitewashing the outsides of all buildings in the area.

March 25. The marshalling yard at Prague, Czechoslovakia, was the briefed target on this date. However, this objective was smoked in, and the aircraft held their bombs and returned to drop them on the airdrome at Wels, Austria. Poor results were reported, but aerial photographs showed that this target had been well hit. Two ships returned early, one salvoing its explosives in the vicinity of Linz, Austria, and one dropping them in the Adriatic. Lt. Brady was forced to abort near Prague and the bombs of his ship were released over Libin, a target of opportunity in Austria. All aircraft returned to base. The squadron sent its first quota of three officers to the new rest camp at Cannes, France, on the Riviera. M/Sgt. Fitzgerald and Sgt. Calvin Myers left for Rome to make a PRO radio transcription.

March 26. It was the Straszhof west marshalling yard, just north of Vienna, Austria, that felt the impact of squadron bombs on this date. Aerial photographs showed that the airmen did an excellent job and covered this installation with a good pattern of explosives. Lt. Louches, flying #27, was forced to land at Hare, Yugoslavia, when two engines gave out on him. There he found an aircraft in flyable condition and flew it back to his base, leaving #27 over there. Lt. Heinze and his crew failed to return from this mission, but it was hoped and felt that they were safe somewhere behind Russian lines in Hungary. Lead pilot Kelleher was promoted to the rank of captain. The three aircrew member who were AWOL for several days during the middle of the month faced a summary courts martial and were reduced to the rank of private. Four officers and nine enlisted men departed for rest camps.

March 27. The first stand down in a week occurred on this date. Numerous training flights were flown. Work was commenced on the construction of a squadron theater in the former enlisted men's mess hall. Plans called for a stage and dressing room as well as for a larger motion picture screen. Five flight officers replaced their blue enamel bars with the gold ones of second lieutenants. Capt. Lund departed from the squadron en route to the United States.

March 28. The crews had been briefed and were ready to take off when a stand down order was issued. Squadron airmen were disappointed rather than overjoyed as the mission promised to be an easy one. Men of Jewish faith from the entire Group commemorated their Passover with a Sedor dinner in the enlisted men's mess hall. An aerial gunner accidentally shot himself in the leg while cleaning his pistol. The bullet shattered the bone and he was rushed to the hospital in serious condition. Squadron barbers moved from the EM Club to new quarters in the old PX building. Sgt. White departed for a course of instruction at Cooks and Bakers School. Cpl. Ender was transferred to the 767th Bomb Squadron.

March 29. Adverse flying weather caused the third stand down in a row to take place. Practice flights were scheduled with the emphasis placed on formation flying and gunnery. Pvt. Connelly was transferred from the squadron to the 1st Replacement Depot. There he will receive, as requested, infantry training.

March 30. The story of the squadron's single ship mission on this date made one of the most interesting and outstanding narratives of combat that has come out of this organization. Lt. Louches and crew took off early in a pathfinder aircraft with instructions to attack a marshalling yard at Vienna, Austria only if an undercast existed over the objective. Nearing the target, it became apparent that the sky over Vienna was clear. Consequently, four aircraft from the Group assembled into a formation and were joined by several airplanes from other groups. This flight then attacked the second alternate target, the marshalling yard at Graz, Austria. There, a devastatingly accurate bomb run was initiated and a great deal of damage was inflicted on this objective. Lt. Louches and crew returned without any trouble, having enjoyed this unusual mission. During the day, "unite" training flights took place with the emphasis placed on formation bombing. Pvt. Padula (?) and Pvt. Durden (?) were transferred to the 1st Replacement Depot, at which location they will receive infantry training. These men were the first from the squadron to be transferred to the infantry involuntarily. Capt. Chalmers, who had appeared before the Flying Evaluation Board in Bari, was transferred to Replacement Depot #7 and from there will return to the United States. S/Sgt. Barkdull, an aircraft mechanic, was assigned to the squadron.

March 31. A normal effort of seven squadron aircraft bombed the Linz benzol plant in Austria. The objective was almost completely obscured by an undercast and pathfinder bombing was employed. Results were unobserved. All airplanes returned to base. In true last day of the month fashion, the eagle spread its wings and paid off its fighting men. Chances on a war bond raffle once again were sold at the end of the pay line. The public relations office sent four more enlisted men to Rome to make radio transcriptions.