

table with this background, together with his actual combat operational experience while the Deputy Commander.

Lt. Col. Witty's assumption of Command elevated Lt. Col. Guy Anderson, Group Operations Officer to the Deputy Commander post, and Major Emmanuel Schifani, Operations Officer of the 495th Bombardment Squadron to the Group Operations positions.

Despite adverse weather that intermittently disrupted operational plans during December 1944, the Group flew more missions than during November. The majority of these were led by Pathfinder planes, the target areas having been overcast by 10/10 clouds.

Though results were generally unobserved by our formations, navigators, operating "Gee" equipment reported that the axis of attacks and the time of release of the bombs would indicate they found their marks, or would have bracketed the areas sufficiently to have caused considerable damage and further havoc to the enemy. These observations were corroborated by operators of the Oboe equipment in the PFF aircraft.

The missions flown in December were more in the nature of close support to ground forces rather than direct tactical support. Our attacks were directed against such objectives as enemy defended towns, supply depots, and barracks. The Group also struck at railroad bridges to cripple routes of communications supplying the enemy front line forces, which had broken through our lines on December 17 at Ardennes Forest in a supreme effort to surround and defeat our 1st Army troops.

Our targets for the month took the Group to Ens Dorf, Dec. 1 and 2, defended town; Saarlautern, Dec. 5, defended area; Munstereifel, Dec. 6, defended area; Baumholder, Dec. 9, supply depot and barracks; Birkesop, Dec. 10, defended area; Hellenthal, Dec. 12, defended area; Gangfurth, Dec. 13, defended area; Herhahn, Dec. 18, defended town; Euskirchen, Dec. 23, railway bridge; Konz-Karthaus, Dec. 24 and 25, railway bridge; and in the afternoon of December 25 to Keuchingen to strike a bridge and to the railway bridge at Ahrweiler.

Casualties and battle damage for the month were comparatively slight. Three crewmen wounded due to enemy flak action and 22 aircraft struck by flak. One plane crashed near the base on return from the Ahrweiler mission December 27. The weather that day closed in so thickly at our station that most of the aircraft after circling were diverted to emergency fields, nine planes only being able to put down at the field. A plane piloted by Lt. L. Fleming, 495th Bomb Squadron, was rapidly running out of gas and not being able to

land due to visibility, proceeded toward an emergency field. Unfortunately, and before he could reach a landing point, his gasoline was practically exhausted. One motor stopped and the plane began to lose altitude and when the plane was approximately 300 feet above the ground, the other stopped. All of the crew bailed out at this low altitude, excepting Lt. Fleming who remained at the controls, hoping to crash land the plane successfully and probably could have, had the plane cleared a slight hill in its path. He was killed.

Two crewmen only were successful in the parachute at that extremely low altitude: T/Sgt. J. Chevalier, engineer; and S/Sgt. R. E. Farley, gunner, who both stated their chutes opened practically as their feet struck the ground. The others, 1st Lt. C. A. Gouge, Co-Pilot; 1st Lt. N. D. Carlson, Bombardier, and T/Sgt. E.J. McNulty, plummeted to the ground before their parachutes were able to open and check their descent.

Another plane was completely destroyed December 15. The plane piloted by Captain Curtis I. Seebaldt, Group Control Officer, and the lead craft of an operational mission, had just become airborne, and the landing gear just swinging into the up position, when the right engine cut out completely and caused the plane to settle to the runway. Immediately the plane came to rest, the entire crew all of whom, fortunately, had but minor injuries, rapidly abandoned the craft and sought a safe distance to avoid the possible explosion of the 16 X 250-pound bombs it carried. It was well that their presence of mind led them to whatever shelter they could find, as four minutes after the plane came to rest, the bombs exploded, completely demolishing the aircraft. The blast from this concentrated number of bombs was terrific, smashing windows as far distant as the town of Corneilles-en-Vexin bordering the field but some two miles from the scene of the crash. Besides Captain Seebaldt, the other occupants of the plane were Lt. Col. Gove C. Celio of the 99th Bombardment Wing who was riding the plane as Co-Pilot, to observe the mission; 1st Lt. Michael Sapranyi, navigator; 1st Lt. E.E. Harrison, Bombardier; S/Sgt. J. R. Fischer, engineer; M/Sgt. M. B. Falk, radio Gunner; Pvt. George L. Boynoff, gunner.

The group closed the year with a total of 183 missions completed.

Winter began to get into full swing the latter part of December and by the early part of January the countryside in the vicinity of our base was a vast white carpet of snow. Sudden snow flurries added to the depth of that already on the ground and hampered operations for flying.