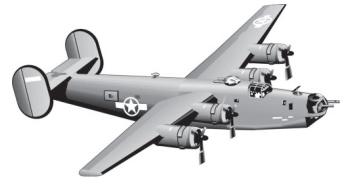




Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

December 2023

Arrival of V-Grand and Myrtle's puppies

Squadron sets records in Summer '44

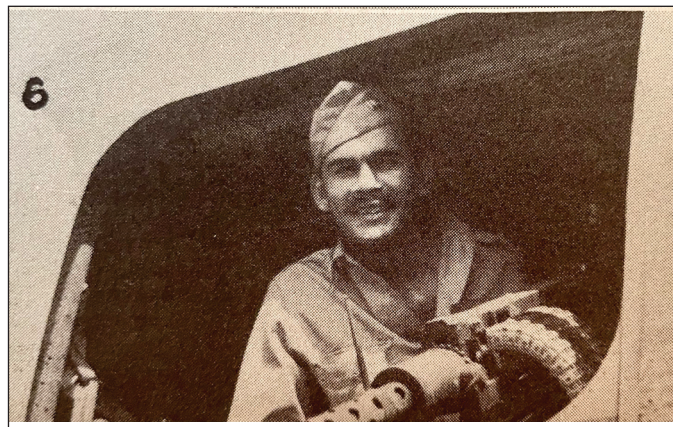
This is part five of the official history of the 780th Bombardment Squadron, drawn from unclassified military records obtained from the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, and 780 Memoirs, the squadron history book. Editor

During July 1944, the Squadron flew 19 effective combat missions for a total of 54 since becoming operative on 5 May 1944. For more than half the month the phenomenal record continued. Also in July Lt. Biddle and Sgt. Greer received injuries requiring hospitalization. Thus Lt. Biddle had the honor of becoming the first combat casualty of the squadron.

On 19 July 1944, flying on its 47th mission, the fine record established by the 780th came to an end. On this mission, the objective was the Allach aircraft factory near Munich, Germany. The ship piloted by Lt. Archie C. Davis failed to return. Later information revealed that all members of the crew with the exception of Lt. Ballach bailed out successfully and were interned in Switzerland. Thus the squadron established a record of flying 46 consecutive combat missions without the loss of a single

person or piece of equipment -- a record that will live long in the memories of every member of the 780th and one which, when the history of the Air Force is finally written, will undoubtedly

be considered one of the outstanding performances of the war itself. Many of the missions flown were over heavily defended targets and in the face of severe fighter opposition. It was not all a matter of luck that such a fine record was established, but rather a tribute to the superior quality of flying of our combat crew members, the high standard of airplane maintenance of our ground crews, and the excellent fighter protection we received



780th gunner Miguel M Garcia earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for shooting down three enemy aircraft in August 1944, a rare feat. Garcia and many others set 780th performance records in the summer of 1944.

on all our missions.

It may be of interest to note that during the period 5 May to 19 July 1944 780th aircraft flew a total of 395 effective combat sorties. Prior to becoming operational, the squadron flew a total of 826 training sorties at McCook, Nebraska, including the overseas flight to North Africa, as well as an additional 303 training sorties in North Africa, for a grand total of 1,524 sorties flown since activation of the squadron, without the loss of a single airplane or person.

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Three days after losing our first airplane, on 22 July 1944, on its 49th effective combat mission, the ship piloted by Lt. Duncan ran out of gasoline just short of the field, compelling the crew to bail out safely near Canosa, Italy. Lt. Huff and S/Sgts. Krofft and Carpino were injured. On 26 July 1944, while on a mission to bomb targets at Vienna, Austria, Lt. Godfrey and his crew failed to return. Later information revealed that Godfrey and his co-pilot, Lt. Hooper, were killed attempting to crash land the airplane while the remainder of the crew bailed out safely. Thus we finished our third month in combat with the loss of two crews and three airplanes.

Again our gunners were active during July, receiving official credit for 14 enemy aircraft. The quota of officers and men eligible for rest camp leaves and furloughs was increased during the month. With the approach of warm weather, swimming at the nearby beaches fronting the blue Adriatic continued a popular diversion, particularly on "stand down" days. And despite many operating obstacles our showers provided quick relief from the warm weather to those who remained on the field.

Both Officers' and Enlisted Men's clubs were now operating on a regular basis and were the

source of many interesting parties and gatherings. The fine health of squadron personnel continued to reflect the many precautionary measures taken to guard the men against the usual diseases prevalent in that section of Italy during the summer months.

A notable staff change occurred on 20 July 1944 when Capt. Davis was relieved as Squadron Intelligence Officer to take over the duties of Squadron Executive Officer. Another and important addition to the staff occurred late in June with the selection of Capt. Zewadski to fill the vacancy of Squadron Operations Officer, vice Capt. Woodward, relieved.

During the month personnel had the opportunity to visit Bari, Italy, to see the presentation of Irving Berlin's famous "This is the Army" show.

As the month of July came to a close word came that a cadre of ground personnel was being formed to return to the United States to become part of a B-29 organization being assembled. The quota from the squadron was set at 13 and the "lucky 13" selected were:

M/Sgt. William E. Yeager
Sgt. Charles D. Hadsell
T/Sgt. Joseph A. Flory
Sgt. Andrew V. Anderson
T/Sgt. John P. Shephard

780th Membership as of December 2023

The only way to estimate how many 780th veterans remain is through the *Flightline* address list. Bob Bleier created the address list and it has been added to and subtracted from since 2009. The numbers here are what is known to the squadron, they do not represent how many 780th veterans may still be living.

			2023	2022	2015
	Mail	Email	Total	Total	Total
Veterans (including other squadrons)	11	1	12	20	49
Widows	4	4	8	12	10
Children	25	27	52	52	38
Other family	10	3	13	10	12
Associations	4	4	8	8	4
Unknown connection	0	1	1	2	8
TOTAL	54	40	94	104	121

S/Sgt. John A. Sokody
S/Sgt. Sebron L. Howard
Cpl. Lawrence E Nis
Sgt. Francis L. Waters
Cpl. Adolf U. Honkala
Sgt. Charles F. Dodge
Cpl. James M. Summers
Cpl. Alvie O. Gibson

All these men were experts in their respective specialties. Squadron strength at the end of July 1944 was 85 officers and 396 enlisted men.

In August 1944 the 780th reached its peak in combat activity as well as suffered its heaviest losses. A total of 21 missions were flown, the greatest of any month since becoming operational, making for a total of 75 combat missions since 5 May 1944. Six crews failed to return from missions with one later returning. Most of this crew became casualties later in the month when their airplane exploded in mid-air.

On 3 Aug 1944, while flying on a mission to bomb the Manzel Aircraft Works at Friedrichshafen, Germany, planes piloted by Lts. Clarke and Crane were the victims of one quick "pass" by enemy aircraft. Clarke's plane was out of control, with one engine feathered. Crane's plane was last seen in the same area with wheels down, under control, with an undetermined number of men attempting to bail out to safety.

On this same day Gunner Sgt. Miguel M. Garcia accounted for three enemy aircraft in a very short space of time, garnering the Distinguished Flying Cross for his rare feat. On 7 Aug 1944, Zewadski and his crew on a mission to bomb Blechhammer, Germany, were unable to return to base but managed to land safely in Lwow, Poland, returning to base nine days later.

On 16 Aug 1944, Lt. Secor and his crew failed to return from a mission to bomb Friedrichshafen, Germany. He was last seen with one engine feathered after having called in to say that he was heading for Switzerland, where it was believed he made a safe landing.

With few exceptions the personnel from all these planes were later returned to military control.

Our final and heaviest losses in the history of the squadron were suffered on 24 Aug 1944 when, on a mission to bomb the Fanto Oil Refinery at Pardubice, Czechoslovakia, the airplanes piloted by Lts. Lengvenis and Buck failed to return. Lengvenis' plane had a wing shot off and then exploded in mid-air, killing the entire crew. Buck's plane made a forced landing in the Adriatic Sea after running out of fuel, Flight Officer Nolan was the lone survivor after a harrowing experience in the sea. It was the crew of Lengvenis' plane that had accompanied Zewadski on the 7 Aug 1944 mission and was unable to return to the base until nine days after this mission.

As a partial offset to our losses during the month our gunners accounted for 10 enemy aircraft, including one ME-109 destroyed by 2nd Lt. William F. Stephens on 24 Aug 1944.

The squadron was fast assuming veteran status as personnel were completing their tours of duty and being returned to the United States for rest, rehabilitation and reassignment. First in the squadron to finish was Lt. Draper on 3 Aug 1944, followed by S/Sgt. Shoemaker on 6 Aug 1944. However, after Shoemaker left for rest camp one of his missions was ruled "incomplete," necessitating his flying one additional mission. That allowed T/Sgt. Brouhard to complete his second combat tour of duty and finishing his "fifty" on 13 Aug 1944 to become the first enlisted man in the 780th to finish his current tour of duty.

On 11 Aug 1944 the squadron was honored by being selected to receive the history-making airplane "V-Grand" - the 5,000th B-24 Liberator bomber manufactured by Consolidated Aircraft Corporation at its San Diego, California plant. This aircraft had already received wide publicity in the United States prior to being flown overseas.

On 13 Aug 1944, the previously mentioned "Lucky 13" selected to return to the United States left the field. And not to be outdone by all the historical occurrences of the month, Myrtle, the squadron's mascot, gave birth to seven puppies, thereby presenting somewhat of a problem as to their care and maintenance.

This series will continue in the next issue of Flightline.

Flightline

A gift for the future

'Greatest Generation' coins come in 2024

If you didn't finish your holiday shopping in time don't fret. Early next year the U.S. Mint's Greatest Generation commemorative coins will be available for purchase. Not only would the coins make a thoughtful gift, sales of the coins will support the National World War II Memorial for future generations.

The \$5 gold coins will be sold for \$35 each, the silver \$1 coin for \$10 each, and the clad half-dollar coins for \$5 each. A complete set will cost \$50.

The sales price of each coin will include a surcharge, payable to the Friends of the National World War II Memorial, to support the National Park Service in maintaining and repairing the memorial, and for educational and commemorative programs.

The coins will be available for purchase in early 2024 on the Mint's website at catalog.usmint.gov/.

