



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

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The *other* unit history book

Every member of the 780th Bombardment Squadron association knows about *780th Memoirs*, the 160-page comprehensive history of the squadron written and published by Maj. Charlie Davis in 1946. But did you know there is another history of interest to the 780th, published a year earlier?

A few years ago former longtime squadron secretary Eleanor Ball, widow of 780th crew chief Jack Ball, sent me photocopies of unclassified 780th records that Jack obtained from the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. The papers were mostly official historical narratives written by group headquarters during the

war and a variety of special orders, but also included were copies of a book, *The 465th Bomb Group in Combat, May 1944 - May 1945*, published at Pantanella Airfield on May 15, 1945. I had no idea about its existence.

The book, which in the photocopies looks to be in softcover, measures 5.25 inches by 8 inches. It has a narrative, some statistical charts (see page 2) and a half-dozen or so photographs -

including some of aerial bombing. It only totals 12 pages, but those pages lay out a concise yet complete history about the 465th's entire time in combat - from May 5, 1944 to late April 1945. The book is dated May 15, 1945 with a foreword written by 465th commander Lt. Col. William F. Day. Col. Day wrote: "This brief summary of the operations of

our group has been prepared so that each member might have a record of the events in which each man has played a significant part." He continued, "The coordination of departments, the cooperation, hard work and courage of every man, has made possible the excellent results of a year in combat against the enemy: a year culminating in the total defeat

and unconditional surrender of the German armies and her satellites.

"This, then, is your own story. Purposely omitted are the personalities within the Group as it is intended that later a complete history will be published and made available to all personnel."



The back and front covers of The 465th Bomb Group in Combat, May 1944 - May 1945.

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I don't know if "a complete history" of the 465th was ever published, but we have 780th *Memoirs* - and now this book.

It starts with "The Year in Italy," and describes the group arriving in Italy in April 1944 with the mission to destroy Germany's Air Force and deprive her of her most vital and vulnerable resource: oil. The third part of the overall mission was to "hamstring" Germany's railways. "Big Week" in February 1944 had taken its toll on the number of Messerschmidts and Focke-Wulks but many aircraft factories and facilities remained, and oil production was still a going concern.

Meanwhile, the enemy's strength was still strong, and what's more - it was aware of its vulnerable areas and, as a result, increased its protection of these targets with large concentrations of fighters and anti-aircraft guns.

The group's first attack was on German Headquarters at Podgorica, Yugoslavia, reportedly killing 500 Germans ac-

According to ground reports at the time. With its "freshman" mission behind it, the 465th joined the more experienced bomb groups of the 15th Air Force, heading out "day after day" for targets like Ploesti, Wienerneustadt and Munich.

By the early summer of 1944 the history re-

ports that Germany's aircraft industry was so reduced that attention could be directed at crippling the oil industry. "One by one the great refineries of the Germans felt the weight of our bombs," the history states, naming refineries in Hungary and Rumania, Blechhammer, Vienna with seven refineries itself, Poland, Czechoslovakia, France and Yugoslavia. Huge synthetic-oil production plants were especially fortified. The history claims that Blechhammer and Brux

each had more anti-aircraft guns than the entire city of Munich, itself a vital communications and manufacturing center.

By winter the remaining chief concern of 465th air crews was flak, accounting for more of the group's losses than any other cause. When weather canceled the main target destination the group would bomb railroads instead, "and were the most frequently attacked."

Fighter attacks no longer were an issue for the 465th after December 6, 1944 (Mission 115 to the Bratislava, Slovakia marshalling yards, in which nine 780th aircraft participated). By March 1945 oil refineries within range were out of production, and rail traffic

was "in a state of chaos." Soon Germany's last best hope - jet-propelled aircraft - were eliminated. In April Allied ground forces finished off the strategic war.

The last operations of the group were to support the 5th and 8th Armies below Bologna. The

THE RECORD				
Missions.....	191			
Effective Sorties....	4,749			
Tonnage Dropped....	10,528			
Enemy Aircraft	Destroyed	Probables	Damaged	
Air	72	18	32	
Ground	25		27	
Type of Targets	Attacks			
Oil.....	45			
Railroad.....	74			
Aircraft Factories and Inst.....	19			
Tactical Support (Direct).....	12			
Naval Installations.....	8			
Miscellaneous.....	37			
"The Rough Ones" (or "Flak Alley")	Attacks			
Vienna (Including Wiener-Neustadt and Moosbierbaum O/R).....	24			
Munich.....	17			
Blechhammer.....	13			
Budapest.....	10			
Linz.....	9			
Ploesti.....	7			
Brux.....	2			
Friedrichshafen.....	3			
Major Air Battles	Dest	Prob	Dam	
Friedrichshafen	3 August	9	6	3
Nimes, France	12 July	10	2	2
Ploesti	6 June	6	4	5
Florisdorf	8 July	7	0	3
Wiener-Neudorf	16 July	7	2	5
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Above and right, aerial views of daylight bombings by B-24 Liberators of German troop concentrations in Podgorica, Yugoslavia

465th "dropped thousands of tons of bombs on German front lines, often within a half-mile of our forward troops." The war was over.

The 465th's statistics were outstanding. The group destroyed 67 fighters in its first six months of operation. In conjunction with other groups it knocked out six oil refineries on the first and only attack, stopped production at Blechhammer four times, and made a total of 45 attacks against oil installations. Three high-priority pilotless and jet aircraft works at Friedrichshafen were totally destroyed.

Ground personnel of the 465th were commended as well, however the first two pages to their story are missing from the papers *The Flightline* has. A paragraph notes achievements such as an "enviable" safety record that included 10,000 hours of flight training with no accidents. In fact, the 465th had the best safety record in the entire 15th Air Force with not a single fatal accident traced to maintenance. It's unfortunate *The Flightline* can't recount more of the contributions of the ground crews and other personnel who "Kept 'em Flyin'."

The 465th Bomb Group earned the Distinguished Unit Citation twice - for the attack on



the Florisdorf Oil Refinery and Marshalling Yard at Vienna on July 8, 1944; and the Manzell-Dornier Werks where jet-propelled parts were produced on August 3, 1944. At the personnel level, one member of the group earned the Distinguished Service Cross - the second highest military award that can be awarded - for extreme gallantry and risk of life in combat with an armed enemy force. Two earned the Legion of Merit and four the Silver Star.

In its conclusion, the 465th history took pride in quoting German Field Marshall Gerd von Runstedt:

The systematic destruction from the air, coupled with the lack of fuel and raw materials, were among the principal reasons for Germany's defeat.

And the 465th would not have been so successful without the 780th Bombardment Squadron.

Do you have a copy of *The 465th Bomb Group in Combat, May 1944 - May 1945*, or were you aware of its existence? If so please let *The Flightline* know. It is a rare book.

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Flightline

"When a barnstorming stunt pilot decides to join the air corps, his two goofball assistants decide to go with him. The Air Corps doesn't know what it's in for!" Heathcliff (Costello): I gotta go home, I forgot something! Blackie Benson (Abbott): What'd you forget? Heathcliff: I forgot to stay there! The comedy of Abbott & Costello may be dated, but the sentiment was so true.

