

Gray's 98th Chalks up 250th Mission with Smashing Blow at Vienna Aircraft Plant

98th Bomb Group (PRO__) “The Continental Air Lines”, as veteran airmen of Lt. Col. Marshall R. Gray’s command often call themselves, chalked up its 250th mission on Monday, June 26, with a smashing bombing attack against the German aircraft factory at Schwechat, Austria, just outside of Vienna.

“We’ll let the bomb strike photos speak for themselves,” Lt. Col. Gray said, as he stepped from his Liberator, after leading his long overseas group on its 250th run across a German target.

Bomb strike photos did plenty of talking. Preliminary 47th Wing appraisals gave “Gray’s Lines” 66.2 percent of its hits within a 1,000-foot circle of pinpoint, 29.8 more percent within 2,000-foot ring

Fifty-mission airman, S/Sgt. Donald E. Stoll, radio operator gunner put into words what the bomb strike photos graphically showed:

“It was number 250 for our group, and number 50 for me. I think it’s the best mission I’ve ever flown. One of Hitler’s aircraft factories is really ‘missing’ after that job.”

As “continental air lines” airmen trekked back from the flight line with their jubilant bombing reports for interrogation West Pointer Gray and Major Roland B. Bergamy, 415th Squadron Commander, who with the 98th Commander piloted the lead ship, had outspoken praise for their fighter cover of P-47 Thunderbolts, flown by American Negro pilots.

For this veteran outfit, one of the first U.S. “Heavy” groups to fly from the African continent in support of the British 8th against Rommel, it was a “molto buone” mission to chalk up as number 250. The 98th now looks ahead to a double-barreled celebration of the groups second anniversary of its first mission and first anniversary of its participation in the storied, tree top-high, low-level bombing attack against the Ploesti oil fields. This anniversary date will be reached on August 1.

Other 98th airmen had this to say of their group's 250th mission: S/Sgt. Frank Wyda, St. Clair, Pa: "The bombing accuracy of our group today was tops. The Jerry's installation was completely destroyed."

1st Lt. Jack M. Delano, Denver, Colo., first pilot: "On the rally from the target, we could see huge columns of smoke rising from the pinpoint."