APRIL, 1945

A table of April 1945 missions follows:

Serial Number (June)	Mission Number (Current)	Date	Target	Groups Participation			
1.	199	1 Apr 45	GRAZ, AUSTRIA, M/Y	460			
2.	200	2 Apr 45	GRAZ, AUSTRIA, M/Y	460	464	465	485
3.	201	5 Apr 45	TURIN, ITALY, Lingotta Loco Depot (AT)			465	485
4.	202	7 Apr 45	Non-Effective	460	464	465	485
5.	203	8 Apr 45	FORTEZZA, ITALY, M/Y	460	464	465	485
			MEZZOCORONA, ITALY, RR Br (AT)	460		465	
6.	204	9 Apr 45	Enemy Positions, BOLOGNA, ITALY, Area	460	464	465	485
7.	205	10 Apr 45	Enemy Positions, BOLOGNA, ITALY, Area	460	464	465	485
8.	206	11 Apr 45	VIPITENO, ITALY, M/Y	460		465	
			GOITO, ITALY, Fuel Depot (AT)		464	465	
			CAMPO DI TRENS, ITALY RR Br				485
9.	207	12 Apr 45	PONTE DI PIAVE, ITALY RR Diversion Bridge	460	464	465	485
10	208	14 Apr 45	OSOPPO, ITALY, M/T Repair	460		465	485
			KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460			485
			PALMANOVA, ITALY, Ammo Fcty		464		
11.	209	15 Apr 45	Enemy Positions, BOLOGNA, ITALY, Area	460	464	465	485
			PONTE DI PIAVE, ITALY, RR Diversion Bridge	460			
			CASARSA, ITALY, RR Div Br			465	
12.	210	16 Apr 45	Enemy Positions, BOLOGNA, ITALY, Area	460	464	465	485
13.	211	17 Apr 45	Enemy Positions, BOLOGNA, ITALY, Area	460	464	465	485
14.	212	19 Apr 45	KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460			
			ROSENHEIM, GERMANY, M/Y (AT			465	485
15.	213	20 Apr 45	ROVIGO, ITALY, Road Br	460	464		
						465	485

			GARZARE, ITALY, Road Br				
16.	214	23 Apr 45	PADUA, ITALY, Road Br	460	464	465	485
			CAVARZARE, ITALY, Road Br	460	464	465	485
17.	215	24 Apr 45	CASARSA, ITALY, RR Div Br	460			485
			BRONDOLO, ITALY, RR Br		464	465	
18.	216	25 Apr 45	LINZ, AUSTRIA, M/Ys	460	464	465	485
19.	217	26 Apr 45	Non-Effective	460	464	465	485

Operations during the month of April, 1945 -- which proved to be the final period of combat operations by the 55th Bombardment Wing - involved marked changes in nature from the type of bombardment previously accomplished. For the rapid advance of the Allied Ground Forces in all European theaters of operations, including the final offensive of the XV Army Group in ITALY, brought about the end of strategic bombing, so that the final phase of the Wing's combat operations was one of tactical bombardment.

During this period 2,806 aircraft were dispatched, as against 2,767 in March, and 73% of these, 2,053 aircraft, were effective sorties. Unfavorable weather accounted for almost all the non-effective sorties. On 17 effective missions 4,792 tons of bombs were dropped in April (4,909 tons were dropped in March); there can be no doubt that if an equal or greater number of effective missions had been flown than were executed in March the bomb tonnage would have exceeded that of the previous month. The maintenance figure for April was 93% -- the highest figure in the Wing's combat experience.

During the month of April the Wing flew 17 effective and two non-effective missions. (The two non-effective missions were given numbers and appear in the record in compliance with directive defining the categories of missions.) As the combat operations are analyzed it will be perceived that while weather was a deterrent factor to keep the total number down, the surrender of enemy forces in ITALY and the advances of Allied forces in Southern GERMANY and AUSTRIA so narrowly constricted the potential area of bombing as practically to cause the stoppage of bombardment in advance of the cessation of hostilities; thus what proved to be the final combat mission of the 55th Bombardment Wing was Number 216, executed on 25 April 1945, against the marshalling yards at LINZ, AUSTRIA. A mission was attempted the following day, but it was a tactical mission which required conditions permitting visual bombardment and weather made it ineffective.

Of the targets listed, 22 are located in ITALY, 5 in AUSTRIA and 1 in GERMANY. As has been noted, tactical targets predominate over strategic; however, marshalling yards again lead in target type with 9 such targets attacked. Other types of targets were as follows: Enemy Positions, 5; Railroad Bridges, 3; Railroad Diversion Bridges, 4; Road

Bridges, 4; Fuel Depot, 1; Motor Transport Depot, 1; Ammunition Factory, 1.

Results achieved were gratifying. Since in almost every case it was ordered that bombing was to be accomplished only under visual conditions, it was possible to score bombing accuracy when other than fragmentation and 100 pound bombs were carried, and excellent scores were attained: 66.4% by the 460th Bombardment Group at VIPITENO M/Y on 11 April; 58.6% by the 460th, 63.9% by the 464th, 87.9% by the 465th, and 52% by the 485th at PONTE DI PIAVE Rail Diversion Bridge on 12 April; 48.6% by the 460th at OSOPPO M/T Repair Depot, 86% by the 464th at PALLANOVA Ammunition Factory, 42.2% at OSOPPO by the 465th, and 96% at OSOPPO by the 485th on 14 April; at ROVIGO Road Bridge the 460th score(85.3% and the 464th scored 85.2%, while at the GARZARE Road Bridge the 465th scored 89% (20 April); on 23 April the scores of the four Groups at the PADUA Road Bridge were respectively 51%, 84%, 88%, and 86%, while on the same date at the CAVARZARE Road Bridge the scores were 34.7%, 80%, 60%, and 67.7%. On 24 April the scores were 83,3, 87.6%, 38.4%, and 54%. Although it was not possible to score the fragmentation attacks against enemy positions in the BOLOGNA area (operations in close cooperation with the offensive of the XV Army Group) results as shown by bomb strike photographs were excellent. In the operations of this type the attacks in areas South of BOLOGNA, before the 5th Army, included the use of demolition bombs, and while results were good the very small area of the targets and the difficulty of target identification present problems of great difficulty and precluded results comparable with those in the area East of BOLOGNA, before the 8th Army, where areas were covered with excellent patterns of frags.

The tremendous weight of bombs on certain of these missions in which maximum effort was exerted is striking. For example, on 9 April 163 a/c dropped 334.5 tons, on 10 April 162 a/c dropped 348 tons, on 15 April 182 a/c dropped 365.4 tons, on 17 April 158 a/c dropped 352.625 tons, on 20 April 159 a/c dropped 395 tons, on 23 April 138 a/c dropped 339 tons, and on 24 April 161 a/c dropped 392 tons. This maximum effort continues the phase begun in March, 1945 (19 March, 383.5 tons; 20 March, 347 tons; 24 March, 304.66 tons), as befitted the purpose of inflicting the utmost possible destruction of the enemy in what was destined to be the final phase of the combined ground and air offensive against the enemy. To be sure, a 300- or more ton mission is no new achievement for the 55th Bombardment Wing; as long ago as 2 July 1944, on the Wing's 54th mission (Target: BUDAPEST Rakos M/Y) 124 a/c dropped 303.75 tons, and in all 6 missions on which more than 300 tons were dropped were flown in 1944. Thus in the Wing's 217 missions there were 13 on which more than 300 tons of bombs were dropped.

A factor in securing the maximum effort so characteristic of combat operations in April was the use of dual (Red and Blue Forces) force efforts and on one occasion (23 April) of multiple (Red, Blue, Yellow and Green Forces) force effort.

It is of interest that on 15 April 1945 the Wing had the maximum number of sorties in its combat operations: 182; and that on 20 April its all-time high of tonnage was dropped: 395 tons. What these achievements required of maintenance personnel and organization must be understood to appreciate the team-work of ground and air crews in securing maximum results in heavy bombardment.

As was noted, during this period the strategic bombardment program of the Allied Air Forces in Europe was concluded, and it was so announced on 1 April by General Spaatz. This required for the 55th Bombardment Wing a concentration upon targets in ITALY which were suitable to strategic bombing and vital to the program of that effort. This required missions against targets in the BRENNER ROUTE, and involved also the attack of bridges of several types. An interesting illustration of the change in type of target was furnished by the Railroad Diversion Bridge targets (see table); these were makeshift bridges devised by the enemy to carry railroads over streams whose permanent railroad bridges had been destroyed. Built for the most part on fills, so that as short a section as possible was over water, these bridges were not only harder to hit, but unless destroyed over the water section were repairable with relative ease and in minimum time. In order to block the enemy's withdrawal as he retreated toward the ADIGE line several bridges of this type were attacked, and this Wing enjoyed great success in that effort.

Of the greatest interest were the operations in close cooperation with the ground forces of the XV Army Group. These occurred in two phases: on 9 and 10 April in the area East of BOLOGNA before the 8th Army and 15, 16, and 17 April South of BOLOGNA before the 5th Army. Since each mission required the carrying of bombs over friendly troops and dropping immediately forward of their extreme front positions, the planning and the execution of these missions required the most extreme care. It was evident both in the special briefing for these missions at Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters and in the execution of the missions, that the basic planning and the preparation of the needed target materials was thorough and so successful as to be above praise. Lead and Deputy Lead Bombardiers were flown over the target areas in advance of the execution of the mission, so as to familiarize them with the several markers and with the details of target area identification. The position and route markers proved to be effective, especially the flak bursts. It was gratifying that in all five of these Missions there were no accidental releases or premature releases of bombs by aircraft of this Wing which burst over friendly troops.

A milestone in the Wing's history was reached on 2 April 1945, when its 200th Mission was flown. The target on that occasion was the M/Y at GRAZ, AUSTRIA, and the power of the attack - 121 aircraft dropping 296.25 tons – was in tremendous contrast with the first Mission when 33 aircraft dropped 61 tons. Reference to the first Wing Mission suggests the similar achievement of one of its Bombardment Groups: the 460th flew its, 200th Mission on 19 April, 13 months after

its and the Wing's initial Mission. (It may be noted that what proved to be the final Mission Number of the assigned Bombardment Groups is as follows: 460th, 205; 464th, 187; 465th, 191; 485th, 188.)

When the Mission of 25 April 1945 was executed it was impossible to perceive that no other effective Mission would subsequently be flown by this Bombardment Wing. When this fact became apparent there was retrospective satisfaction to be taken in the fact that the last effective Mission was flown against LINZ, AUSTRIA - the 216th Mission in the Wing's combat operations, the 11th attack on this city: On 25 July 1944 the Hormann Goering Works at LINZ was the first LINZ target to be attacked by this Wing; on 25 April LINZ was the target for the last bombs dropped against the enemy in EUROPE. In the months following the dropping of PLOESTI from the target list combat crews had seen the measure of their success in the related advances of the Allied Ground Forces occupying BLECHHAMMER, BUDAPEST, VIENNA, and MUNICH; when by their combined and complementary efforts Ground and Air Forces inexorably encompassed the defeat of the Fascist and Nazi enemy the potential area of remaining targets steadily and at the last rapidly lessened. Having turned from strategic to tactical bombing and in this short phase effectively achieved objectives in North ITALY, LINZ was the last symbol, and it furnished a suitable target for what proved to be, for the 55th Bombardment Wing, a farewell to arms in the battles in EUROPE.

In April 1944 the opportunity was extended to personnel of this Wing to visit CAIRO and PALESTINE by using the B-24 aircraft assigned. The facilities of rest camps were used, and to those formerly available those at CANNES (for Officers) and at NICE (for Enlisted Men), FRANCE, were used for the first time.

During the month of April the relocation of Staff Sections within the headquarters building was completed. This relocation was begun in March, when as the result of the change of type of Service Group was put into effect, thus releasing space on the ground floor of the headquarters building. The work proceeded slowly, since each room in advance of the move was whitewashed, painted, and thoroughly cleaned. The advantages of the moves were immediately obvious: the A-3 Section, heretofore grossly overcrowded, now had ample room for all its activities and personnel, the security safeguards for the planning of Missions were greatly improved by locating the War Room between A-3 and A-2, Weather now had ample room to relieve the serious overcrowding which had formerly obtained, and all Sections involved in the relocations had much better lighting conditions.