MARCH, 1944

A tabular view of 55th Bombardment Wing missions flown during March, 1945, follows:

Serial Number (June)	Mission Number (Current)	Date	Target	Groups Participation			
1.	179	1 Mar 45	MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA, O/R	460			
			ST. POLTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460	464		485
			AMSTETTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)		464		485
			FELDBACH, AUSTRIA, M/Y (TC)			465	
			MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA, M/Y (AT)			465	
2.	180	2 Mar 45	LINZ, AUSTRIA, N & S Main M/Y	460	464	465	485
			AMSTETTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)			465	
3.	181	4 Mar 45	SZOMBATHELY, HUNGARY, S M/Y	460	464	465	485
4.	182	8 Mar 45	VERONA, ITALY, Porto Nuova M/Y	460	464	465	485
5.	183	9 Mar 45	GRAZ, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460	464	465	485
			LJUBLJANA, YUGOSLAVIA, M/Y (AT)	460			
6.	184	12 Mar 45	VIENNA, AUSTRIA, Florisdorf	460	464	465	485
7.	185	13 Mar 45	REGENSBURG, GERMANY, S M/Y	460	464	465	485
8.	186	14 Mar 45	NOVE ZAMKY, HUNGARY, M/Y	460	464	465	485
9.	187	15 Mar 45	MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA, O/R	460			
			WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460			
			GRAZ, AUSTRIA, N & S M/Y (AT)		464	465	
			ST. POLTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)				485
10	188	16 Mar 45	VIENNA, AUSTRIA, Korneuburg 0/R		464		
			AMSTETTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460	464	465	485
			GRAZ, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)			465	
			PRAGERSKO, YUGOSLAVIA, M/Y (AT)			465	

11.	189	19 Mar 45	MUHLDORF, AUSTRIA, M/Y	460	464	465	485
12.	190	20 Mar 45	AMSTETTEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y	460	464	465	485
13.	191	21 Mar 45	NEUBURG, GERMANY, A/D	460	464	465	485
14.	192	22 Mar 45	VIENNA, AUSTRIA, Heiligenstadt M/Y	460	464	465	485
15.	193	23 Mar 45	GMUND, AUSTRIA, M/Y	460	464	465	485
16.	194	24 Mar 45	NEUBURG, GERIANY, A/D	460	464	465	485
17.	195	25 Mar 45	PRAGUE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, Letnany A/D		464	465	485
			WELS, AUSTRIA, A/D (AT)	460			
18.	196	26 Mar 45	BRATISLAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, Rangier M/Y		464		485
			WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA, N/Y (AT)	460		465	
			BADEN, AUSTRIA, M/Y (TO)	460			
19.	197	30 Mar 45	VIENNA, AUSTRIA, N Station & Goods Depot*				485
			GRAZ, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)*	460	464	465	
			KAPFENBURG, AUSTRIA, Tank Factory*	460		465	
20.	198	31 Mar 45	VILLACH, AUSTRIA, M/Y (AT)	460	464	465	485

1* PFF mission: individual aircraft, bombing only through cloud.

Operations during the month of March, 1945, were highly effective, in total effectiveness surpassing any previous month, including the previous high point of August, 1944. Only in part was this effectiveness due to improved weather, for although weather improved after the middle of the month, it was by no means favorable at the month's beginning. The new high point was attained by the determination to drop, at this phase of the war's development, the greatest possible tonnage of bombs on enemy targets, and the implementing of that purpose by extraordinary effort in maintenance. As a result, 20 missions were flown, and all of them were effective. All Bombardment Groups of the Wing participated in all of the 20 missions and on each mission bombs were dropped on some designated target. Fifteen missions were flown against targets in AUSTRIA and GERMANY, two against targets in CZECHOSLOVAKIA, two against targets in HUNGARY, and one against a target in ITALY.

The previous high point of the Wing's combat effectiveness had been reached in August, 1944, when 2,435 B-24 aircraft were dispatched, of which 2,109 aircraft bombed assigned Primary or Alternate Targets or Targets of Opportunity and dropped - total of 5,135 tons of bombs. These impressive totals were secured in 22 missions. In March, 1945, during which period weather was much less favorable than in August, 1944, on 20 missions 2,767 aircraft were dispatched and of these 2,314 were effective sorties (of the 453 non-effective sorties 219 were attributable to weather; excluding these the rate of early returns was 3.9%, the lowest figure in the combat experience of the Wing except 3.8% in February and as against 6% in August, 1944), and these 2,314 effective sorties dropped 4,909 tons of bombs. Note that 226 tons more bombs were dropped by 205 fewer aircraft in August, 1944, than were dropped in March, 1945; the difference is readily explicable when it is remembered that in August, Yugoslavian and Italian targets were frequently assigned, enabling more missions with heavier bomb loads. It is obvious that had weather in March, 1945, been comparable with that in August, 1944, and had it been possible to have flown an equal number of missions, the March, 1945, total of sorties and tonnage dropped would have exceeded the totals of August; 1944, by far.

As has been noted, March was a month in which weather conditions changed from unfavorable to favorable. All missions dispatched were effective, but on two of them the assigned Primary Target was not reached; these were the missions of 9 and 31 March. Inevitably it was necessary to navigate and bomb by Pathfinder during this period: missions on 1, 2, 9, 12, 13, 30 and 31 March were accomplished by this means. The mission of 30 March was a "lone wolf" expedition of individual aircraft briefed to bomb only through cloud, since these individual aircraft were unescorted and had only their "Panther" equipment as defense against flak. It was obvious that the general tactical situation required the dropping of the maximum tonnage of bombs on priority targets, and every effort was made to do so. It was at this time that the German offensive against the Russians was at its maximum power (in the area Southwest of Budapest), and toward the end of the period it was apparent that the Russians were due soon to capture Vienna. As a matter of fact, the mission of 30 March was the last mission flown against Vienna.

Targets of the month of March clearly reflect the general war situation. Twenty-seven targets in Austria were attacked and hit, 3 in Germany, 3 in Yugoslavia, 2 in Czechoslovakia, 2 in Hungary, and l in Italy. Of these, 29 were Marshalling Yard targets, 4 were Oil Refineries, 4 were Airdromes, and 1 was a Tank Works.

Analysis shows the relationship of these targets to the general strategic bombing program. The counter-oil program had been highly successful, and these four oil targets, all in the Vienna area, represented the objective of the final policing required to keep to the absolute minimum any usefulness to the enemy of these oil resources. The attacks against marshalling yards followed the familiar

pattern of strangling the enemy's supply and troop movements in connection with current operations. Perhaps the most surprising feature of the objectives attacked in March was the resumption of the counter-air program. These missions were ordered in response to immediate tactical considerations: the enemy's jet-propelled project had developed to the point that appreciable numbers of ME-262 aircraft were to be seen on certain airdromes in the Air Force area and some of them had been seen in operational use; further, the Russian advances in SILESIA and CZECHOSLOVAKIA had required the enemy to move large numbers of his operational aircraft in use on the Eastern Front to airdromes in the rear, including airdromes within the Fifteenth Air Force area. Indeed, there had been some resurgence of enemy aircraft activity during the month, since enemy aircraft were seen in numbers totaling up to 131 on 17 missions (most of these missions on which enemy aircraft were seen were on or near the HUNGARIAN front, although on 8 March three enemy aircraft were seen in North ITALY); no enemy aircraft were, however, encountered during the month. The four counter-air missions were highly successful. In each case units of this Wing dropped fragmentation bombs with the objective of destroying aircraft. The claims of 23 destroyed, 14 probably destroyed, and 8 damaged on the two missions against NEUBURG A/D and of 31-8-11 at KBELY and LETNANY A/Ds near PRAGUE proved to be conservative, so that the missions to NEUBURG were effective against jet-propelled aircraft, and the mission to PRAGUE was even more effective in the destruction of enemy aircraft withdrawn from the Russian front.

The mission of 19 March 1945 is of particular interest since it marked the first anniversary of the 55th Bombardment Wing's combat operations. During the year 189 Wing missions were flown. It was a great contrast to observe, on 19 March 1945, the dual force effort totaling 161 B-24 aircraft make rendezvous and to recall the two attack units totaling 33 B-24s which flow the first Wing mission against the marshalling yard at METKOVIC, YUGOSLAVIA, dropping 61 tons of bombs. On Mission 189 the marshalling yard at MUHLDORF, AUSTRIA, was the target, and 156 B-24 aircraft dropped 383.5 tons. During this twelve months of operations a total of 189 Wing missions was flown (the 460th Bombardment Group executed 177, the 464th flew 159, the 465th. flew 163, and the 485th flew 160; a total of 659 Bombardment Group missions), 21,491 aircraft were dispatched, of which 16,650 effective sorties dropped 36,971.5 tons of bombs. On neither the first nor the 189th mission was there opposition from enemy aircraft, but in the interim bombers of this Wing had validated claims of 278 aircraft destroyed, 125 probably destroyed, and 106 damaged in aerial combat, while 73 were destroyed and 52 damaged on the ground. The first Bombardment Group of the Wing, the 460th flew its first mission one month and eight days after the arrival of the first contingent of its personnel; this achievement indicates the determination of the Wing Commander to have his organization operational at the earliest possible date. In order, the 464th, 465th and 485th Bombardment Groups became operational on 2 May, 5 May and 10 May 1944; on this date, 10 May 1944, the entire Wing was operational. This minimum time, taken into consideration together with weather conditions and the "normal"

difficulties of setting up bases and effecting combat readiness, indicates an achievement of heroic proportions, and warrants historic notice of the calendar anniversary.

As a final point of special interest, attention may be called to the effectiveness of the period of 19-26 March, when on eight consecutive days a maximum effort was put forth with the result that 1,041 aircraft dropped 2,259.42 tons of bombs. When these totals are compared with the totals for the entire month (2,249 effective sorties dropping 4,774.045 tons) it is seen that on these eight days almost one-half of the effective sorties was flow and little short of one half the month's tonnage of bombs was dropped. Fully to appreciate the significance of this achievement requires the awareness of the herculean labor of ground crews to keep the aircraft operational and to maintain the steady supply of gasoline, bombs and other ammunition; these personnel, as well as combat crews who executed the missions, were directly involved in the coordinated task of accomplishing so great a result in strategic bombing.