MAY, 1945

There were no combat operations of the 55th Bombardment Wing in May 1945. Indeed, the non-effective mission of 27 April proved to be the final combat formation flown by the Wing's Bombardment Groups and ordered by this headquarters, As the war in Europe drew to its close the immediate effects of the official policy of redeployment became apparent for the Bombardment Groups assigned to this Wing.

First to be affected was the 485th Bombardment Group (H), which, after its 188th mission was ordered for redeployment, conversion to Very Heavy Bombardment, and returned to the United States.

The 460th, 464th, and 465th Bombardment Groups were covered by a single movement order which transferred them to loses of the Air Transport Command.

Summary of Missions:

The Wing executed 217 missions, 212 of which were effective. Operations personnel prepared 505 Operations Orders; the combined Operations Orders and Intelligence Annexes wrote up 443 Primary and Alternate Targets - some of these were ordered several times. In the 214 effective missions 328 separate attacks were made on prescribed targets (by aircraft aggregating not less than one "bomb"; i.e., bombs dropped by Prior Returns are excluded from this number) (A further exception is that missions executed by individual or by a small number of Pathfinder aircraft, either day or night missions, are counted; these are included because they were executed as ordered.) which were situated in 155 different localities in 10 enemy or enemy occupied countries: AUSTRIA, CZECHCSLOVAKIA, FRANCE, GREECE, GERMANY, ITALY, POLAND, RUMANIA, and YUGOSLAVIA.

AUSTRIA felt the weight of the largest number of attacks and the greatest tonnage of bombs 5,404 sorties dropping 11,271.065 tons in 100 attacks. Approaching these totals were 5,342 sorties dropping 10,848.60 tons on 85 attacks in ITALY. A total of 34 attacks against targets in GERMANY by 2,942 aircraft placed 6,248.085 tons of bombs on the heart of Nazi resistance. HUNGARY was bombed 21 times by 1,755 sorties which dropped 3,789.30 tons. Enemy occupied FRANCE received 19 attacks, in which 1,519 aircraft hit targets with 3,289.35 tons. 1,505 aircraft attacked targets in RUMANIA on 18 occasions, with a total of 3,018.75 tons of bombs. 29 attacks in YUGOSLAVIA were made by 1,066 sorties, with 2,067,96 tons dropped. In CZECHOSLOVAKIA there were 15 attacks by 753 aircraft dropping 1,554.31 tons. POLAND and GREECE were seldom attacked; 2 mission: against targets in POLAND were flown by 187 aircraft which dropped 444.75 tons, and 2 attacks of targets in GREECE were made by 117 aircraft totaling 272 tons dropped.

As AUSTRIA was the most bombed enemy or enemy occupied country, so also VIENNA was the most bombed city. The Wing executed 22 separate missions against 13 different VIENNA targets, including Industrial

Areas (2), a Motor Vehicle Factory (1), an Ordnance Depot (2), 6 missions against 4 different Marshalling Yards, and 10 missions against 6 different Oil Refineries (1 at Schwechat, 1 at Winterhafen, 2 at Korneuburg, 2 at Lobau, 6 against Florisdorf).

A total of 1805 sorties were flown to VIENNA targets, and these aircraft dropped 3,592.10 tons of bombs. It is an indication of the tremendous weight of these attacks that the totals exceed those of sorties and tons dropped on all missions against all targets attacked in HUNGRY (21 attacks, 1755 sorties, 3,589.30 tons) as is true also of missions to FRANCE (19 attacks, 1519 sorties. 3,289.35 tons) and of operations in RUMANIA (18 attacks, 1505 sorties, 3,018.75 tons). Indeed, if targets in the immediate VIENNA area are added (KORNEUBURG O/R, MOOSBIERBAUM O/R, MARKERSDORF A/D, WIENER NBUCORY A/C engine Factory, WIENER NEUSTADT A/Ds, A/C Engine Factory, Industrial Area, and M/Ys the total of attacks, sorties, and tons dropped on targets in the VIENNA metropolitan area is respectively 38 attacks, 2868 sorties, and 5629.97 tons.

Although Oil, Counter-Air, Harbor and shipping, Communications, and various tactical targets were attacked in ITALY, the major part of offensive operations there were tactical, in close cooperation with offensives of the XV Army Group. It was on missions of this type that the closing phase of the Wing's operations was directed. Of significance as illustrating the weight and concentration of maximum effort missions, in 5 attacks between 9 and 17 April 45 in the BOLOGNA area, 721 aircraft dropped 1519.875 tons on enemy positions. On each of 4 of these missions more than 300 tons were dropped with excellent coverage of target areas.

Attacks against targets in GERMANY were particularly concentrated; the 34 bombings were of only 11 localities, only three of which were once each bombed. The main weight was against the BLECHHAMMER Oil Refineries, in GERMAN SILESIA, where, although the target was at extreme range of penetration, in 10 missions (one of them by 5 individually dispatched Pathfinder aircraft) 839 aircraft dropped 1,769.09 tons. MUNICH was bombed 7 times (two of these missions were by a small number of individually dispatched Pathfinder aircraft) and 518 aircraft dropped 1,047.75 tons of bombs on the natal place of Naziism. The Oil Storage, A/C Factory, and A/D at REGENSBURG were severally bombed on three missions, 391 aircraft dropping 7.475 tons. ROSENHEIM and FRIEDRICHSHAFEN were each thrice bombed, the latter missions becoming the classic of the Wing's effort, when 309 aircraft destroyed three top priority targets with 713,25 tons.

Targets in HUNGARY were strategic, including Oil, Counter-Air, and Communications. BUDAPEST, naturally, was the focal point: on 6 missions 503 aircraft dropped 980,25 tons. Of the communications attacks the objective of the strategic bombing was the destruction of targets in advance of the offensive operations of the Russian Armies.

By far the most of the attacks against objectives in FRANCE were related to an aspects of "Operation Dragoon" - the invasion of Southern FRANCE on 15 Aug 44. Directly a part of this operation, the three missions against Coastal Gun Positions at SETE and ST TROPEZ were brilliantly executed and highly successful, when, bombing by boxes a total of 24 enemy installations were attacked, 334 aircraft dropping 760.85 tons. Highly effective also were attacks, related to the subsequent invasion, against Marshalling Yards and Bridges (Rail and Highway). Oil Harbor, and Counter-Air objectives were also attacked in FRANCE.

It is almost gratuitous to point out that of targets in RUMANIA the Oil Refineries at PLOESTI were the prime objective. On 9 missions here 807 aircraft devoted 1,539.75 tons to the effort of denying to the enemy his greatest source of natural petroleum products.

The most successful of the 15 attacks in CZECHOSLOVAKIA were those against Oil and Counter-Air targets; destruction of the Oil Refinery at PARDUBICE was all but complete, and scores of enemy aircraft were destroyed in attacks on the PROSTEJOV and PRAGUE Airdromes.

Operations against targets in YUGOSLAVIA were conditioned by factors which while the number of missions was considerable, did not enable major destruction. "Freshman Missions" were the rule for each Bombardment Group as it became operational, and YUGOSLAVIA was the location of suitable targets on which to gain initial combat experience. The chief limitation of effectiveness, however, was that to reduce possible casualties among loyal Partisans it was ordered that targets in YUGOSLAVIA could be bombed only under conditions of full visibility, and the bombing of Targets of Opportunity was prohibited for the same reason. Despite these limitations, targets of strategic importance were successfully attacked, of which BELGRADE and SMEDEREVO Oil Refineries and the MARIBOR Marshalling Yards were the most significant and the most successfully bombed.

There were only two missions against targets in POLAND, where, although at extreme range of penetration, 187 aircraft dropped 444.75 tons on CZECHOWICE and OSMIECIM Oil Refineries.

Likewise the requirements of general strategy called for only one Wing mission to GREECE, when the SCARAMANGA Harbor and the SALONIKI Marshalling Yard were attacked by two Bombardment Groups at each objective, 57 aircraft dropping 130 tons on the former and 60 aircraft dropping 142 tons on the latter target.

In these 214 effective missions, 29 different types of targets were attack In classifying these according to general categories, Communications targets led in number of attacks, sorties, and tonnage - 9,506 aircraft dropping the terrific total of 20,303.975 tons of bombs on these targets. Oil targets were second, 4,669 aircraft bombing these objectives with 9,850.775 tons. Counter-Air target were

attacked by 2,693 aircraft which dropped 5,469.68 tons. Grouping several types of targets together as Tactical Objectives, 1,374 aircraft dropped 2,794.1 tons on these. 769 bombers hit Harbors with 1,656.48 tons. Industry (excluding Aircraft and Oil) was bombed by 681 aircraft dropping 1,531.2 tons. 331 aircraft dropped 607.8 tons on Ordnance Depots.

Of the 204 attacks on Communications targets, Marshalling Yards received the largest number: 152, in which 7736 aircraft dropped 16,276.925 tons. Of these M/Ys, the most frequently bombed were AMSTETTEN (6 attacks), GRAZ (11 attacks), KLAGENFURT (6 attacks), LINZ (3 attacks; however, the Marshalling Yards at LINZ was inevitably hit on attacks upon adjacent targets on all 10 attacks), MARIBOR (5 attacks), MUNICH (4 attacks), SALZBURG (5 attacks), VIENNA (6 attacks) VILLACH (8 attacks), and WIENER NEUSTADT (3 attacks).

Attacks of Oil Refineries were necessarily more concentrated than upon M/Ys The 62 attacks of this type of target were against only 25 localities. It follows that there was a large number of "repeats"; this was necessitated not by the failure to hit the target but by the fact that the enemy made every effort to repair his oil producing and refining facilities, so that frequent "policing" missions were required. BLECHHAMMER, MOOSBIERBAUM, PLOESTI, and VIENNA accounted for 34 of these attacks and the greater fraction of the 4,669 sorties and 9,850.775 tons dropped on oil targets.

Attacks on Railroad Bridges (23; 995 sorties, 2,162.3 tons), Railroad Diversion Bridges (4; 220 sorites, 542,5 tons), and Highway Bridges (9; 450 sorties, 1,090.75 tons) are details of breakdown of Communications. Most of these targets were related to tactical operations in ITALY and FRANCE.

Of the Counter-Air targets, Airdromes led the list, with 21 attacks, 1,578 sorties, and 3,024.98 tons dropped. In attacks 152 enemy aircraft were destroyed and 52 damaged (on the ground). Other Counter-Air objectives were Aircraft Factories (9 attacks, 803 sorties, 1,730.25 tons), Aircraft Components Factory (1 mission, 92 sorties, 203.5 tons; this target, the Zeppelin Luftschiffbau at FRIEDRICHSHAFEN, was completely destroyed), and Aircraft Engine Factories (2 attacks, 220 sorties, 480.95 tons).

Completing the total of the 29 types of targets attacked are Ammunition Factory (1 mission, 31 sorties, 69.625 tons), Armament Works (PILSEN Skoda, 1 mission, 93 sorties, 162.25 tons, Army Headquarters (PODGORICA, YUGOSLAVIA, 1 mission of 2 aircraft destroying the target with 4.50 tons) a Chemical Plant (FRIEDRICHSHAFEN Oberraderach, heavily damaged on 1 mission, 97 sorties, 213.5 tons), an Engine Factory (1 mission, 83 aircraft, 181.7 tons), a Fuel Depot (1 attack, 24 sorties, 60 tons), a Motor Transport Repair Depot (1 attack, 71 sorties, 176.25 tons), a Motor Transport Factory in VIENNA (1 mission, 62 sorties, 1x1 tons, a Railroad Bypass (1 mission, 62 sorties, 126.5 tons), a : VISIO, 1 attack, 43 sorties,

105 tons), Tank Works (2 mission 118 sorties, 379 tons), and 3 Towns (3 attacks, 357 sorties, 435.5 tons). Attack on Coastal Gun Positions, Enemy Positions, Military Stores, and Troop Concentrations have been included in the figures cited for Tactical Targets.

It is of interest that the maximum number of aircraft bombing on a single mission was 163 (the targets were enemy positions in advance of the Fifth Army), and that the maximum tonnage dropped was 383.5 (this was on Mission No. 189, 19 Mar 45, the first anniversary of the beginning of the Wing's combat operation.

The grand totals of the Wing's achievements are as follows: 217 Wing Missions, 770 Bombardment Group Missions, 25,447 sorties of which 19,710 aircraft dropped bombs as effective sorties (there were 2,964 ineffective sorties due to weather and 2,773 sorties ineffective for other reasons). The 19,710 aircraft bombing (this total includes prior returns) dropped 43,909.25 tons of bombs. 126 aircraft were lost to flak, 60 were lost to enemy aircraft, and 97 were lost by other causes; 166 aircraft were reported missing. It is noteworthy that the rate of loss was extremely low: 1.9%. 318 aircraft suffered severe and 312 sustained slight battle damage. There were 1,325 encounters with enemy aircraft; 278 e/a were destroyed, 125 probably destroyed, and 106 damaged in aerial combat; thus there were 4.7 victories per loss. 151 e/a were destroyed and 92 were damaged on the ground.

From any point of view these figures are impressive. The significant fact, in which all personnel of the 55th Bombardment Wing can take pride, is that they attest success in combat. When this organization was changed in status from an OTU to a combat Wing these achievements were in the unknown future, but they materialized by reason of one basic and underlying fact: the capability of the Wing Commander.

Combat furnished the occasions and the opportunities of the outstanding success which is but one, albeit the most important one, of the many reasons for which General Acheson has and has always had the complete and unswerving loyalty of personnel under his inspiring command.

Personnel of the Wing have "held together" to a remarkable degree. However it was inevitable that changes of key personnel should occur. Soon after arrival in the combat theater Col John F. Batjer, A-3, was transferred to assignment as Commanding Officer of the 301st Bombardment Group (H), and Lt Col John N. Melcher was assigned A-3. Lt Col Harmon P. Lampley and Lt Col E. R. Schmidt were for brief periods assigned A-3; Lt Col Melcher returned to the United States 6 Sept 44. Major Dale S. Seeds became A-3 on 7 Nov 44.

On 28 June 44, Col Arnold L. Schroeder, Executive, was assigned Commanding Officer of the 464th Bombardment Group, vice Col Marshall Bonner, MIA on 26 June 44. On 28 Aug 44 Lt Col John P. Tomhave, who had replaced Col Schroder as Executive, was assigned Commanding

Officer of the 485th Bombardment Group vice Col Arnold, MIA. On 18 Sept 44 Col Bertram C. Harrison, formerly Commanding Officer of the 460th Bombardment Group, became Wing Executive, which assignment he held until 1 Dec 44, when he was returned to the United States and was succeeded as Executive by Col Charles A. Clark, formerly Commanding Officer of the 465th Bombardment Group.

Capt (now Major) Earle L. Osborne succeeded Maj Henry P. Dolim as Commanding Officer, Headquarters Squadron, on 16 Sept 44, Maj Dolim assuming command of a Squadron of the 485th Bombardment Group.

Lt Col Lloyd H. Benning, Signal Officer, was returned to the United States, and was succeeded by Capt (now Major) Frank V. DeGarcia on 16 Nov 44.

A change of key personnel which was of major significance and which caused infinite regret was the return to the United States of Lt Col Horst W. Tittel, Adjutant, on 27 Oct 44. Lt Col Tittel enjoyed the affection and commanded the respect of all with whom he came in contact. He had crowned his long career in the Army, as an Enlisted Man as well as an Officer, in his assignment as Adjutant and his Section, benefitting by his complete knowledge of Army Regulations and procedures, was a model of efficiency. He was succeeded by Lt Col Frank A. Rogers, Jr., who held the assignment until 31 Mar 45, when he was followed by Maj Edward J. McClure. Maj Wesley D. Colmer was subsequently assigned Adjutant.

The assignment as Air Inspector was held respectively by Lt Col John P. Tomhave, Lt Col Frank A. Rogers, Jr., Lt Col Douglas M. Cairns (subsequently, on 18 Feb 45, Commanding Officer, 485th Bombardment Group, vice Col John P. Tomhave, MIA), and Lt Col William B. Campbell (formerly S-3, 460th Bombardment Group).

On 29 Jan 45 Lt Col Ralph E. Reiner, Wing Surgeon, was transferred to XV Air Force Service Command, and was succeeded by Maj (now Lt Col) Clarence W. Reuter. Following an illness, Maj George Bodo, Administrative Inspector, was returned to the United States on Apr 45, and was succeeded by Capt Thomas J. Bitterly, transferred from the 460th Bombardment Group.

Maj J. W. Lewis, Armament Officer, was returned to the United States on 24 Jan 45, and was succeeded by Maj H. M. Ogan.

On 20 May 45 Maj Robert S. Felknor, Technical Inspector, Maj Andrew Mainor. Engineering Officer, and Maj Frank V. DeGarcia were returned to the United States for assignment to Very Heavy Bombardment.

Three of the Enlisted Men of the Wing received direct Commissions while in the combat theater: M/Sgt Willard V. Kupias, assigned to the Inspection Section was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant on 6 Oct 44, S/Sgt

John J. Drennan, of the Medical Section, was similarly commissioned on 28 Feb 45, and T/Sgt Clarence C. Shepherd, Photo Interpreter Clerk in the A-2 Section, was commissioned on 22 May 45.

There were no battle casualties of Wing personnel. However, subsequent to their transfer to the 485th Bombardment Group Col John P. Tomhave, formerly Air Inspector and Executive Officer of the Wing, and Maj Olen C. Bryant, formerly, Wing Navigator, were reported Missing in Action. Maj Bryant was repatriated after the surrender of enemy forces in ITALY.

Dinner on 31 May 1945 became an informal farewell. General Acheson expressed his satisfaction with the job done and his pleasure in the work of personnel assigned. All present responded in a toast to him as the best Commanding General of the United States Army Air Forces. To him is due the opportunity for the Wing to serve our country in combat, and to him is due the distinguished record which the foregoing post record. These pages will, it is hoped, serve as a reminder of the worthy achievements in which personnel of this organization have had a part. Thus this record may assist, where memory might otherwise dim, but memory and reflect on may also brighten the sense of achievement as time moves into history, wherever we may go, to whatever duty assignment we find ourselves ordered, we will be the better and the abler for having served under Colonel and Brigadier General George R. Acheson in the 55th Bombardment Wing.