



ANATOMY OF A MISSION

The 392nd BG had one purpose—to place bombs on the target. This article describes the process by which that happened. Much of the information on mission preparation comes from Roger Freeman's book, *The Mighty Eighth War Manual*. In it, he noted that "For every combatant in 8th Air Force there were 20 personnel in a supporting ground role."

At Eighth Air Force Headquarters

In the early days especially, the main factor affecting air operations was weather. Briefings were held three times daily at 8AF headquarters to give senior operations officers a forecast for prospective target areas and bomber bases in England. If the forecast was reasonable, the Operations staff selected suitable targets from a prioritized list.

Weather also affected the size of an operation. Clear skies might lead to a concentrated attack on one of the most important targets in the priority list. With cloudy conditions, the bombers might be split between several targets to increase their chances of success. If only part of enemy territory had a suitable weather forecast, target selection might focus on that area.

After weighing all options and up-to-date weather and operational data, the 8th's Chief of Operations made a decision about targets, the force required to destroy them, and a coordinated plan for the participating divisions. This information and supporting details became the formal Field

Order (FO). However, to give participating units enough time to prepare aircraft and brief personnel, many operational directives reached units as an advance to the FO. Many FOs were cancelled before they evolved into a mission.

At 2nd Air Division Headquarters

After 2AD was notified of an impending mission, it alerted its Combat Wings who then informed their Groups. When 2AD got the target and ordnance requirements, specialists

studied target identifications, established Mean Points of Impact (MPI, the intended center for all dropped bombs), prescribed the type and quantity of bombs to be used, assessed the force of aircraft needed, plotted routes and times and specified altitudes. 2AD also coordinated appropriate support by 8AF Fighter Command.

These details were sent to Combat Wing headquarters as they became available. Combat Wings and Groups

could start their mission preparations after learning only the intended target, the order of Combat Wings, the number of squadrons in each, and tentative routes and times.

At 14th Combat Wing Headquarters

The 14th CW directed the 44th, 392nd, and 492nd BGs. It dealt primarily with operational matters; its major function was to create a coordinated plan for its Groups during all stages of a combat mission and to act as the controlling

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This photo shows 392nd crews being briefed for the first mission on D-Day. Front row, left to right: unknown, navigator Capt Leonard F. Untiedt, and navigator Capt Walter F. Joachim. Second row, left to right, pilot 1/Lt William Meighen, copilot 1/Lt John J. Mason, unknown. Behind Mason is navigator 2/Lt Thomas Kirkwood. Manning the projector is S/Sgt Harold Buirkle.



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FROM THE EDITOR

Mission Preparation. If reading the article about getting ready for a mission brings back some memories, please let me know! I'll include them in a future issue.

2ADA Reunion. Oak Mackey, our VP to the 2ADA, reports that their reunion will be held from 6-9 Sep 2012 at the Hilton Rosemont Chicago O'Hare, 5550 N. River Rd., Rosemont, IL 60018. The room rate will be \$109 per day plus 13 percent tax. The hotel is just two miles from O'Hare Airport and provides complimentary transportation to/from the airport as well as free parking. Full details will be provided in the Spring issue of the *2ADA Journal* and the 392nd BGMA News for June.

Renewals. Please look carefully at the mailing label. If the number after your name is "11," you need to renew your membership promptly or this is the last issue of the *News* you will receive. When you do renew, please consider changing from receipt by postal mail to receipt by email. The advantages of email: You save \$5 on the membership fee; you get the *News* while the paper copies are still being printed; and you help the Association save money on postage and printing costs.

A New Perspective. 579th Sqdn lead navigator Manny Abrams turned 88 recently. He recalls seeing Civil War veterans riding in open touring cars and being honored during parades when he was a child. He was shocked recently to realize he is as old now as the Civil War veterans were then.

PX Items. Newly converted from VHS tapes to DVDs, several must-have items are available once again. Four DVDs, filmed at the 1993 reunion in Albuquerque, show reunion highlights (including many of the 250+ vets and family members present and an interview with 579th Sqdn CO Myron Keilman and pilot Harrison Cassell) as well as three panel discussions by 392nd veterans. A fifth DVD shows the October 1989 return to Wendling for the rededication of the Memorial.

The DVDs are \$20 each or all five for \$90, including US shipping and handling. For international shipping, add \$5 per order. Make your check payable to Bob Books and mail to him at 1432 Little Creek Dr., Pensacola, FL 32506.

The panels were 1) Ground Support Teams Prepare for a Mission. Moderated by Group Transportation Officer Jim Goar, the session included Station Ammunition Officer Charles Dye, 578th crew chief Ernie Barber; 10th Station Complement Sqdn personal equipment clerk Gil Bambauer; 578th flight engineer Norm Mellow, and Station Flying Control Officer Bernard Glettler. 2) The Tough Missions (Bremen, Kiel, Gotha, Friedrichshafen, Politz, Berlin, Bernberg, Bingen and Wesel). Moderator Bob Vickers led a discussion by Myron Keilman; 579th pilots Vern Baumgart and J.

Fred Thomas; 578th pilots/copilots Cliff Peterson, Carroll Cheek, J.D. Long and Dick Griffin; and 577th ball turret gunner Jim Buzick. 3) The Early Days. 578th navigator Keith Roberts chaired a review by 392nd CO Lawrence Gilbert, Gil Bambauer, Jim Goar, Myron Keilman, Group Navigator Ken Paddock, and Group (later Division) bombardier Joe Whittaker.

392nd BGMA Coins. Members have found creative ways to display their Crusader pride. The display on the left was prepared by David and Sylvia Strahan in honor of Sylvia's uncle, S/Sgt Frank G. Bleickhardt. He was killed in action on 28 Jan 1945 just a few hours after the 392nd BG ceremony commemorating the 8AF's third anniversary. It includes a coin, a photo and an article from the Stars & Stripes about the ceremony. (More details about the event are on page 3 and about the mission on page 7). The B-24 at the right, with a coin embedded in its base, was given to 577th Sqdn Exec Willard Pennington at his recent 99th birthday celebration. The coins are 1 3/4 inches round, hand-painted in vivid color, gold-plated, in a clear plastic case. Cost is \$13 each for US shipping and \$15 per coin for international mail. To order, see <http://www.b24.net/392nd/lit.htm> or send a check payable to Annette Tison to 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039.



President's Message



M/Sgt Ernie Barber, 578th crew chief, was one of the 392nd's gems. In his late teens when he joined us at Tucson, he was illustrative of a lot of members of our generation. With only an "almost" high school graduation, he rapidly developed into a highly effective keeper of a four-engine bomber, with a Bronze Star to prove it.

After the war, he was just as effective for the Memorial Association as our archivist. He collected and took charge of our memorabilia and delivered it in his faithful pick-up to our reunions. One trek was truly cross-country, from his home in Georgia to California.

I visited him countless times at his rural home near Lincolnton, Georgia (strange name for a Deep South community). We fished the lake near his home and he was an accomplished fisherman. We attended the little rural Methodist church where he was a lay leader and where he fended off the widows of the congregation with "I don't do yards."

Loyal to the conventions of rural Georgia, he owned two pick-ups; one for every day and one for Sunday. Once when I commented on the rifle slung in the back window of the truck, he said, "I'm afraid you'll think that I'm a redneck."

All these memories came flooding back to me when the web site received a query from a Paul Collins of Norfolk. Mr. Collins reported that he had come into possession of a foot locker with Ernie's name and serial number emblazoned on it. He asked if Ernie was still living. I remember that Ernie often wondered what had happened to his foot locker. Well, Ernie, up there, it came to light, the same as my memories of one of the finest men I have ever known.

Editor Annette Tison's response to Mr. Collins was "Ernie passed away on 2 May 2008. He is sorely missed by those of us who were lucky enough to have known him. Whenever you look at the foot locker, please consider it a memento of the 392nd's presence in England and of a 23 year old farm boy who served our Group so well."

M/Sgt Allen Holtman, our Friend in St. Louis and a retiree of the latter day USAF, is ever helpful to us. He noted that the Military Records Depository has now reopened after a disastrous fire some years ago. He sent me a copy of the form needed to enquire into one's military record. If any reader desires a copy, write me at 1555 N. Main St., Frankfort, IN 46041 and I'll send you one.

Both Annabelle and I are up for a date with our surgeons in April. Neither are life-threatening, except for that risk to oldsters. Wish us luck.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar



Editor's note: At near right, Ernie Barber's stencilled name is still visible on the top of his foot locker; he is also in the photo at the far right.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, 8TH AIR FORCE!

The 8AF recently turned 70, having been established on 28 Jan 1942 at Savannah, Georgia.

In 1945, its third birthday was commemorated in England at the highest levels. 8AF CO LtGen Jimmy Doolittle pointed out that on 24 Dec 1944, the 8th "sent over Germany 2,034 heavy bombers and 936 fighters, the greatest single force of airplanes ever dispatched in history. Well over 21,000 Americans flew in that armada over marshalling yards, vital communications centers and airfields behind the enemy lines. Many times that number worked on the ground to launch those planes, and many more again performed the great varieties of services which have built the Eighth into the deadly weapon it was intended to be."

He noted that in 1944, 8AF airmen dropped 430,000 tons of bombs during 1.7 million operational hours and used 522 million gallons of fuel in the process. However, "The story of the Eighth is the story of all of you... Every member of this Command has contributed some element in it." For example, in that same year Ordnance and Chemical workers "loaded more than 3,000,000 bombs and incendiaries—most of them during the long hours of the night—and hand-linked, repositioned and loaded 53,000,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in the course of their duties."

The front page of the Stars & Stripes for 29 Jan 1945 announced, "A three-minute silence was observed yesterday on the occasion of the third anniversary of the 8th Air Force as thousands of men and women at fighter and bomber stations of the 2nd Division paid tribute to the men who have died in the air war against Germany. Every GI from Maj. Gen. William Kepner, division commander, to the mechanic on the line quit work for the tribute."

The 392nd BG marked the event in a short but heart-felt manner. A flag ceremony at Station Headquarters conducted by the Station Honor Guard began the tribute, followed at 1056 by Taps and the National Anthem. A two-minute silence between 1058 and 1100 hours was then observed.



The 392nd BG honors the 8AF's third anniversary and especially its members who had been killed in action. Left to right: 578th crew chiefs M/Sgt Ernie Barber and M/Sgt George W. Kent and combat airman S/Sgt Edward H. Ivey Jr.

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agency throughout. A flurry of annexes to the FO flowed back and forth along the chain of command, advising of changes and adding new information.

At the Bomb Groups

The individual Groups were told of an impending mission via a telephone call on the secret "scrambler" line in Group Operations' Message Center. The Watch Officer immediately had his duty clerk notify all affected base services that an alert message had been received. They included the CO, Air Executive, S-3 Group Operations Officer, S-2 Intelligence Section, Group Navigator and Bombardier, Weather Office, Flying Control, ordnance and armament sections, engineering office, signals and photographic units, mess hall, transportation (motor pool) and the Charge of Quarters (CQ, or duty sergeant) on each squadron living site.

The ripples from the alert order kept spreading. The duty officer informed the guard room, told the base telephone exchange to restrict calls and asked that Military Police be posted at the doors of Operations and the War Room (the main office of the Intelligence Section). CQs raised a red flag on the living sites, restricting personnel to the base.

Squadron operations officers went to Group Ops to get advance FO information on how many a/c the group had to provide and bomb and fuel loads. Their first job was to update crew and aircraft status boards. Then, a list of available planes and crews was created and assignments made.

The initial alert gave the name of the target in code. In the War Room, the S-2 officer decoded the target and clerks pulled the appropriate folder. The S-2 officer plotted the MPI on target photos while S-2 clerks assembled maps, photos and all other target material needed to brief combat

airmen. Ops personnel affixed a ribbon to the large map in the briefing room to show the route to and from the target and points of fighter escort.

The Group Navigator's office plotted courses, distances, and times for assembly. After weather data for temperature and wind speed expected on the route were obtained, air speed, ground speed and drift on each leg of the route were calculated and checked against Division figures.

The Group Bombardier's office assessed target conditions and used wind, a/c speeds, drift and heading data to compute bombsight settings for the attack altitude.

A schedule was established so the Group would be ready on time. Working backward, planners needed to allow at least an hour from the first take off for formation assembly (longer if the weather was poor); 10-15 minutes for marshalling and taxiing; 10-15 minutes for starting engines; 10 minutes for crews to board a/c; an hour before engine start for crews to inspect their a/c; an hour for main briefings; an hour for breakfast; and 30 minutes for crews to be awakened. Reveille for combat crews was therefore about five hours before take off time.

Bombs and Bullets

Ordnance was informed as soon as the required bomb load was learned and the process of moving the bombs onto trailers at the bomb dump, transporting them to the hardstands, and loading them into the planes began.

Other personnel brought belts of .50 caliber ammunition to the planes. The wooden boxes were placed throughout the ship for the gunners to set up when they arrived. The machine guns, removed from the planes after every mission for cleaning, were also brought back.

See the article on pages 8 and 9 for more information about this process.

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392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown directly after your name. "11" means your membership **HAS EXPIRED** and you need to renew **promptly**. LM means Life Member and FRND means that you receive the *News* with compliments of the 392nd BGMA. Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045. You may also join or renew on-line at <http://www.b24.net/392nd/join.htm>.

The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial difficulty, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box. If you feel that you can help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below.

Name _____ Ground [] Air [] Sqdn/Unit _____

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Email address _____ Telephone number _____

If a spouse, friend, or relative served in the 392nd, please give us his name and unit: _____

Dues: [] \$25/year if you wish to receive the *News* by postal mail OR [] \$20/year for receipt by email
Please feel free to renew for multiple years! Just let us know what your wishes are.

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Ground Crews

Aircraft maintenance personnel were awakened about three hours before take off (although crew chief Ernie Barber, who slept in a line shack near his hardstand, once noted that the noise of the ordnance trucks woke them up even earlier.) The crew chief and assistant crew chief pre-flighted their plane. They began by manually turning each propeller to remove fuel in the cylinders and circulate the oil. Then the crew chief climbed into the cockpit and began engine priming procedures. After starting the putt-putt (a portable generator) to boost battery power, the assistant, with fire extinguisher at hand, positioned himself near the engine to be started where he could also see hand signs from the cockpit. The first engine cranked up was always the one that drove the plane's electrical generators.

Each engine was started, then run up and held at maximum revolutions to check oil pressure, turbo-supercharger and magneto performance. Prop feathering mechanisms were tested as well as all electrical and hydraulic functions that could be checked on the ground. When all seemed in order, the crew chief cut the engines off.

Ernie said each plane was generally refueled to about 2,750 gallons when it returned from a mission, nearly one-fourth of the gross weight at take off. More could be added via two auxiliary fuel tanks, each holding 400 gallons.

An oxygen truck ensured that all tanks and walk-around oxygen bottles were full.

According to photo lab technician Harvey DeVoe, two to three lab personnel installed a camera in the floor hatch (between the waist area and the tail) of designated B-24s. They then attached trip wires to a bomb or bomb shackle. When activated, the camera took photos automatically at pre-set intervals until it ran out of film. The developed photos were used to analyze bomb strikes at the target and thus, mission effectiveness. An electric blanket covered the film section and camera mechanism to keep the camera from freezing up at altitude.

Air Crews

Lead crews were awakened first so they could attend pre-briefings. As they were briefed, CQs woke up the rest of the men. Officers and enlisted personnel were billeted separately but all were grouped by crew, so the CQ had only to call out a pilot's name to awaken the right men. They dressed, washed and shaved (to ensure a tight fit for their oxygen masks), and then went to breakfast, the cooks having been awakened even earlier.

Chaplains

Bert Prost was a gunner on the Wittel and Paroly crews in the 576th. He remembers, "Capt Paul A. McDonough (from Massachusetts) was our Group Catholic chaplain and a very good and dedicated man. On mission days we'd be awakened early, typically about 2:30 or 3:00am. We would proceed to the combat mess for a hearty breakfast. There at the rear of the Mess Hall were the Catholic and Protestant chaplains. Father Mac would give me Holy Communion and Conditional Absolution. The Protestant chaplain, Capt Donald B. Clark, could only shake hands and pray."

Briefings

The main briefing was attended by everyone in the selected

crews. The "highlight" was when the mission map was revealed. 577th copilot Les Hadley recalls, "It was a real map; the route in and out was shown by colored tape pinned on the map. It was covered with a cloth that was drawn aside as the mission briefing commenced. The covering was withdrawn from west to east, so first we saw where our base was. Let me tell you, I and everyone held their breath as the curtain was withdrawn to the right, showing the continent and our route and the target area. As we flew more missions, we got to know where we would encounter the most flak enroute so we really looked at the map. Wish I had the ability to express our feelings at briefings...the Hollywood movies never came close."

Crews were told the location and importance of the primary and any secondary targets, camouflage in use, the route, check points, mission procedures, enemy defenses (both flak and fighters), and forecasted weather conditions. Emergency landing spots and POW and escape procedures were covered. As the war progressed, the current location of Allied and enemy troops on the ground was also given. The briefing ended with a "time hack" to synchronize watches.



"Time hack" before the 392nd's 100th mission, the first of three on D-Day. At left with pistol is CO Col Irvine A. Rendle, in center is Group Bombardier Capt Harold Weiland.

Navigators and bombardiers then went to additional briefings. According to 579th lead navigator Manny Abrams, "There we did our map planning, circling flak installations along our route, and developing a flight plan in advance."

Gunners had their own briefing, too. It covered the target and route; type of friendly fighter support with time and place to expect it; type of enemy fighters anticipated and where, as well as probable attack tactics; the formation set-up; when to disperse chaff to confuse enemy flak radars and how much; and escape and evasion information.

Radio operators got specific signal details such as the day's wireless codes, radio call signs and frequencies.

Flying Equipment

As each briefing ended, the men went to the personal equipment room and collected their flying equipment. (Flak aprons and helmets were delivered to the hardstands). Escape kits with foreign money, maps, matches, chocolate, and other items useful in evasion were distributed.

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Manny notes, "WWII was before the present day of pressurized or heated cabins. The air inside the plane was the same temperature as that outside. This required human adaptation to a harsh environment—frequently down to -40°C or lower. So, heavy underwear, heavy socks, regular uniform shirt and pants, heavy electric jacket and electric pants (a sturdy suit with copper heating wire running throughout), electric gloves, heavy shoes that fit inside sheepskin boots, a wool scarf and, of course, a parachute. As I recall, we would often have a chest pack 'chute as a back-up.

"When aloft, add an oxygen mask, a flying helmet, goggles, and a flak jacket when needed. Finally (!) a steel GI helmet fitted on top of the flying helmet.

"I never weighed all of these articles of clothing, but I would estimate the total to be at least 40 pounds before flak helmet and jacket—round it all off at 75+ pounds. Standing



Dressing for a mission. The man on the left is pulling an electrically heated flying suit over the heated boot inserts. The flying boots are in the foreground; parachute harnesses are in the background. The man on the right is wearing the complete outfit.

for eight hours, the navigator could not think of feeling tired. At any moment, his information might become vital."

Transportation

When properly equipped, the airmen were taken to their planes.

Jim Goar was originally the 578th Sqdn Supply Officer. He says, "One of the early missions almost didn't get off the

ground because the trucks weren't there to take crews to their aircraft. I was appointed Group Transportation Officer and I fully understood that I was to make sure it didn't happen again. I assigned a truck to two crews of the same squadron, and that truck was to be at the disposal of those two crews both for launch and recovery. Sometimes it took several trips to get everyone from Operations to the hardstands."

Jim also recalls that for safety reasons, Group Flight Surgeon Maj Robert M. Holland prohibited anyone from riding on truck tailgates. "I sometimes had to tell men going into combat that they couldn't sit on the tailgate because it was too dangerous."

At the Planes

Generally, waist gunners installed their guns and ground crew personnel installed turret guns. The pilot(s) and crew chiefs walked around the plane for a final visual inspection.



With 42-95151, Monotonous Maggie in front, B-24s on the taxiway wait for the go order. CO Col Lawrence Gilbert noted that when a mission was cancelled, the entire procession moved around the taxiway with pilots pulling off to their hardstands as they came to them. For some crews, this meant a slow trip around the entire airfield.

Parachute harnesses and Mae Wests were checked, chute packs and flak jackets placed at crew positions.

Finally, the crew took their positions for take-off: navigator, bombardier and nose gunner usually on the flight deck; engineer between the pilots; radio operator at his desk; and the other gunners in the waist area.

Taxi Time

The pilots started engines again. By this time, the Group Operations Officer was at the control tower. He would supervise the take off and handle any problems.

Flying Control fired a green flare as the sign to start



Men at the Flying Control trailer watch #42-50323, Heaven Can Wait, approach.

taxiing. Each pilot knew his assigned place in the queue; the general order was lead, then high and low squadrons in the formation. In turn, each pilot signaled the ground crew to pull away the wheel chocks and then moved his ship onto the taxiway. Eventually, the Group and section lead planes stopped at the head of the runway, with a bomber's length between each plane lined up behind them. Depending on the number of planes, the entire taxiway could be filled.

The noise of over 100 open-exhaust engines running and

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the frequent squeal of brakes was deafening. Each bomber used about 60 gallons of fuel during this period.

Launch

A green light, flashed from the checkered Flying Control trailer, was the go-ahead for take off. The lead pilot immediately released his brakes and headed down the runway while the copilot set all throttles for maximum power and the engineer monitored instruments. A fully-loaded B-24 needed about 3,000 feet to become airborne but common practice was to use the entire runway so as to gain maximum airspeed. (At Wendling, one runway was 6,000 feet long and two were 4,200 feet long.)



The 392nd's assembly ship, #41-23689, Minerva

As one plane moved down the runway, the next a/c got into position; the engines were revved to full power with brakes applied. As the first plane lifted off, the control van signaled the second plane to move. Once in the air, each B-24 kept straight for about two minutes then headed to the Group assembly area, climbing at a predetermined rate.

To assemble with the correct Group, crews looked for their own Group assembly ship (a war-weary a/c painted in unmistakable colors) or for a plane shooting a specific color combination of flares.

Once fully assembled, the formation headed toward that day's target. Ground support personnel rested, for they would have work to do when the planes returned.

Editor's Note: A future article will discuss procedures aloft and when landing as well as what happened on the ground after the planes got back to the airfield.

Mission to Dortmund 27/28 Jan 1945

At 1952 hours on 27 January, the 392nd was alerted for a mission the next day and the appropriate individuals and sections notified. At 2024, the 2AD's Flak Annex and Intelligence Bulletin were received. Field Order 584 in its entirety arrived at 2204; soon after, 392nd planners set the pre-brief for 0445, the gunners briefing for 0500 and the main briefing for 0530.

Target Importance

About midnight, the 392nd got 2AD's Intelligence Annex No. 1. It stated, "The MPI is on the coking plant which is very active in producing benzol for motor fuel. Its listed priority (21) does not indicate its actual priority at this time as many higher on the list have been knocked out, or are only partially active... Benzol is of very high value as a motor fuel on account of its high octane rating. Being heavier than gasoline it leads to starting difficulties if used in undiluted form. It is therefore normally used for blending with gasoline, its high octane rating being a valuable characteristic. Crude

benzol requires refining before it can be used efficiently as a motor fuel and this is carried on at the coke ovens.

"As long as gasoline production from crude and synthetic sources remains at a low ebb, the importance of benzol needs no emphasis. Since benzol is a by-product of the manufacture of coke, damage to a target which prevents the manufacture of coke will effectively prevent the manufacture of benzol."

The Mission

The lead plane and squadron leads took off at 0759, 0800, and 0801, followed by 13 a/c in the next 28 minutes. Snow squalls then stopped take offs for 25 minutes. Five more planes then got aloft. At that point, conditions deteriorated so much that the other eight planes were grounded.

Of the 21 planes in the air, four were unable to find the 392nd's formation and bombed with other Groups; four more aborted. Led over Dortmund by a PFF plane from the 44th BG, the 13 remaining ships acquitted themselves well. Six planes from the lead squadron (576th) dropped 71 percent of bombs within 1,000 feet of the MPI and 85 percent within 2,000 feet. Seven a/c from the high squadron (577th) had 51 percent in 1,000 feet and 80 percent in 2,000 feet.

The Photo Interpreter summed it up by saying, "...it was EXCELLENT bombing on a tiny, difficult target and should curtail work here for some time at least. It isn't likely that the target was completely knocked out but it was badly damaged. A good job done under unusually hard circumstances."

The next issue of *Target Victory*, the 2AD's newsletter, went a step farther. Under the headline "Best Hit by a Group This Week" an article reported, "392nd, No Miss—Huns No Octane" and said "knockout aiming of the week was hammered in by 392nd Bomb Group."

392nd Losses

Sadly, two ships went down. Just after bombs away, 577th planes piloted by 2/Lt James R. Dodd and 2/Lt William H. Schuster collided, reason unknown. The only survivors were Dodd's waist gunners, Sgt John J. Muka and Cpl Maclovio Olivas. Both bailed out just before impact and survived, albeit with broken legs.



The 18 airmen were buried in the small town of Garbeck, Germany. On 4 Jul 1945, Sgt Bill Harron, brother of Schuster crew navigator F/O Robert J. Harron, visited the cemetery. He placed flowers at each grave, erected a cross, and carved a marker with their names. It said, "In loving memory of these men of United States Army Air Forces who died 28 Jan. 1945 in the service of their country and buried here 2 Feb. 1945. Our love to our brave."

Bombs and Bullets

The Field Order gave the number of ships each Group was to provide, the type and number of bombs per plane and the settings for the nose and tail fuzes.

The Army Air Corps and the Navy used the same bombs but attached them to their planes differently. As a result, each bomb had three lugs: one near the front and tail for use in AAC planes and one in the center on the other side for use in Navy planes. (576th armorer Tom Perry said the Navy's lug "always got in the way" when loading bombs.)

A metal clip called a shackle was clamped onto the two lugs; the shackle was then hooked onto the bomb rack. When the bomb was released, the shackle disengaged simultaneously from both ends of the bomb. A bomb was



Men at work in the bomb dump on 2 Jan 1944.

"hung up" when one end did not completely separate from the shackle. An airman then had to step out on the narrow catwalk in the bomb bay (without a parachute, as he wouldn't fit if he wore one), often at bombing altitude, and kick the bomb loose.

8AF bombs ranged from 6 to 4,000 pounds and were of five types: General Purpose (High Explosive), Incendiary, Armor Piercing, Semi-Armor Piercing and Fragmentation. Different types and weights of bombs were often carried in the same B-24. For example, on 29 Apr 1944 the 392nd's planes were each loaded with five 1,000-pound GP bombs and three 100-pound Incendiaries.

The bombs had a fuze in both the nose and tail; as a precaution, these were inserted at the last minute. A cotter pin kept the firing pin locked in place, preventing detonation. This cotter pin was pulled out by an airman when the plane was on its way to the target.

Each fuze also had an internal wind-driven vane which had to rotate between 18 and 690 times (depending on the type of fuze) before the fuze was fully activated. As each bomb



This display shows the variety and sizes of bombs dropped by the 392nd BG (and therefore unloaded, inspected, stacked and stored by the 1825th Ordnance Co.)

was loaded in the plane, a wire was attached to each fuze vane and then connected to the bomb rack. This arming wire kept the vane from spinning while the a/c flew to the target. As the bomb dropped, the arming wires pulled out, enabling the vanes to spin freely and completing the arming process.

1825th Ordnance Supply & Maintenance Co.

1825th CO Jack Teufel says his main responsibility was the bomb dump at Honeypot Wood. Convoys carrying bombs showed up at all hours of the day and night. After unloading the trucks, 1825th personnel inspected each bomb for damage in shipment and then stacked them in rows, by type and size. It was a daunting task. For example, the 1825th history says that during July 1944 alone, 1,367 tons of bombs were unloaded from convoys while 840 tons were loaded for bombing missions.

Each squadron had its own revetment at the bomb dump with different-sized bombs in their own bays. The larger bombs (2,000 pounds and up) were stored by the side of the road for easy access by cranes.

Charles Dye, Station Ammunition Officer, says the 1825th had fuze personnel who inspected and maintained nose and tail fuzes for each type and size bomb. They set the fuzes as required in the Field Order and delivered them and arming wires to the ordnance office just outside the bomb dump.

Bullets

Charles recalls, "When we first started operations in September 1943 the ammunition came to us in boxes already linked into belts. Later, as more Bomb Groups arrived and more ships flew, the ammunition came loose in wooden boxes as did the metal links. They had to be linked by hand with a machine that could link 10 rounds at a time. This was a time-consuming job. Later, we received an electric linking machine but still had to feed it by hand. Following the linking, the belt had to be checked for proper spacing to ensure that the gun wouldn't jam.

"Men in the ammunition section spent eight to twelve hours a day linking bullets. After the belts were inspected, they were turned over to squadron ordnance, which kept a large supply of belted ammo at their huts. 1825th personnel replenished the supply of belted ammo as necessary."

"Initially, the ammunition was linked 5-1, that is, 5 armor-piercing and 1 tracer. Later when the incendiary round became available we linked them 2-2-1, meaning 2 armor-piercing, 2 incendiary and 1 tracer.

"Many gunners 'smuggled' extra bullets onboard. There were a few instances when the a/c commander had to actually restrict this practice due to overload of the aircraft."

Squadron Armorers

S.J. "Sandy" Elden was an armorer in the 577th Sqdn. He recalls, "There were 30 of us who shared the responsibility of delivering the bombs out to the aircraft. We had four bomb service trucks, each with a crane at the back. That was used to load the bombs on to trailers. Two trailers could be attached to each truck if required.

"Virtually all the missions were called late at night. When we received word of a mission coming up, we all headed to our squadron headquarters to pick up our equipment. We then drove to the Bomb Dump, loaded up the type of bombs

See BOMBS on page 9

BOMBS from page 8

assigned to the mission and we then delivered them to the planes. At each plane site, the bombs were individually placed in cradles. Fuzes were then screwed into the nose and tail of each bomb and the fins attached; they were then left to be loaded into the aircraft. We returned to the bomb dump and repeated the process until all our planes had their bombs. The process took several hours.

"When a mission was cancelled, our crews were called out, more often than not in the middle of the night, to return the bombs to the dump. Generally this happened before the bombs had been loaded into the planes.

"In the months leading up to D-Day, the frequency of missions significantly increased and our crews worked relentlessly. There was much loss of sleep. But all in all, on a comparative basis, our work was easy compared to our air

crews and we always kept this in mind."

Guy Spinelli remembers that his team loaded the bombs using muscle power. "One man would hoist the front of the bomb, one would hoist the back end, and a third would squat so the middle of the bomb rested on his back. Then we would lift up together. None of us ever complained of back problems, either."

Roland Brown says his section had about 15-18 armorers and they all worked to load bombs. It was not a fast operation. But, they always got the job done and usually with time to spare. He also recalled that they used a winch to load the heaviest bombs—2,000 pounds and up. He eventually was trained and became a Power Turret Specialist. He ensured that the two .50 caliber machine guns and the hydraulic controls in his turrets were working correctly. That job was not nearly as exhausting.



576th Sqdn armorer Tom Perry says, "At the far left of this photo is the bomb service truck's I-beam, which had the rolling hand crank hoist for loading and unloading the heavier bombs. Using the winch took too much time, so we usually loaded the bombs by hand. The man at the back of the trailer is attaching the tail fin, which is secured by a ring collar screwed onto the threads on the bomb itself. The four men by the waist window are using grappling hooks on two rods to lift the bomb onto the dolly, a three-wheeled cart. Then, the bomb shackle is attached and the dolly moved under the bomb bay. We hoisted it up and hooked the shackle to the bomb rack. The last step was to attach the nose and tail fuzes. Usually a team worked on each side of the same bomb bay. There was a beehive of activity at the planes before the crews arrived!"

FOLDED WINGS REPORT

Please report the death of a member or spouse and provide a copy of the newspaper obituary if possible.

Name of deceased _____ Unit/Sqdn _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date of death _____ Survivors _____

Reported by _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The 392nd BGMA is engaged in a fund-raising effort to financially support our website, www.b24.net. It contains the history of the 392nd Bomb Group. You could make no greater tribute to your loved one than a donation for this living and ongoing memorial to the 392nd. Please send this report, hopefully with your check payable to the 392nd BGMA-Website, but send it with or without it, to: Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039

PHOTOS FROM THE FILES



Loading 42-7466, Ford's Folly, with bombs and bullets for a mission on D-Day.



Moving bombs at the bomb dump. Note the camouflage netting overhead and the two lugs on top of the bomb to which the shackle would be attached.



578th Sqdn personnel at work. At left, Cpls Gaetano (Guy) Spinelli and Ken O'Boyle prepare to hoist fragmentation bombs into a bomb bay for D-Day. At right, ordnance personnel move a dolly and bomb to the bomb bay.



This is the map shown at the crew briefing on 28 Jan 1945. It shows where P-51 fighter escort was expected, the I.P. (Initial Point, at which the 392nd would turn toward Dortmund), targets for the 96th, 2nd and 20th CWs, and locations of the 1st and 3rd US Infantry Divisions.



Many people gathered at the Control Tower to wait for the planes.

Inventing the Radio Bomb Release

by Bill Braddock, 578th Sqdn radio operator



In June 1941, I graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering. Then I went off to Boy Scout Camp for the summer, where I was the camp director. When I returned in the fall, I went back to my jobs at Link Belt Supply and doing patent drawings for

my father, a patent attorney.

On December 7, 1941, I was relaxing in my room in my parents' house listening to our small short wave radio when my folks called from downstairs to turn off the radio and come listen to the news. The news, of course, was that the Japanese air force had bombed Pearl Harbor. When I returned to the short wave radio, there was only dead silence. Not a single station kept transmitting.

Then President Roosevelt sent me a postcard indicating that a "group of your peers" had decided that I should go into the army and that I should show up at Fort Snelling at a specified time and date. I did as ordered. My vision was good enough that I was given a choice between desk duty and flying duty. I chose what was then called the US Army Air Corps, easily the more interesting of the two. On March 11, 1942, I was inducted into the Army at Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

I went first to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, for basic training and then to Scott Field, Illinois, to become a Radio Operator and Mechanic, partly due to my previous skill at Morse Code gained in my Scouting activities. Then off to Harlingen, Texas, for gunnery training and thence to the formation of our 392nd Bomb Group at Davis-Monthan Air Base at Tucson, Arizona, in January 1943.

I became a member of the first crew of the 578th Squadron. We trained by flying border patrol over the West Coast in case the Japanese warships and carriers came for us across the Pacific. In February 1943, we departed for Orlando, Florida, for further training, then on to Biggs Field in El Paso, Texas, where we were issued our plane, #42-7466—one of the first built by Ford in their plant at Willow Run, Michigan.

Later, we named the plane "Ford's Folly," after the name called the Model T when Ford first started manufacturing in large quantities.

We arrived at our air base in England in August 1943. We had had about a year of preparation for the duties we were to perform and had established a camaraderie that served us well in our subsequent flights.

After completing the then requisite 30 missions, we were offered an opportunity to return to the USA. Col Lawrence Gilbert, then the Air Executive, asked me first to verify that I had a degree in Electrical Engineering and then asked for my help in solving a problem.

Every flight of B-24s on a bomb run fly very close to one another. When the bombardier in the lead plane releases his bomb load as planned, the other bombardiers in that

flight are to release their bombs as soon as they see the bomb load of the leader or another plane in the flight go falling by. At that time there was no other way for the lead or other bombardiers to signal when to release their bombs. This could possibly result in a direct hit by the lead plane with all other hits far beyond the designated target.

Col Gilbert asked if I could find a way to cause every aircraft in each flight to release its bomb load simultaneously with the bomb drop from the lead plane. I said I would try.

Our plane had left the Ford plant with the full commercial electrical equipment on board, including the guidance system that allowed a plane to fly from point A to point B without the pilot touching the controls. There was a strong "end of the line" receiver on each of the other planes. For testing purposes, for our lead crew, we connected a strong transmitter across the Folly's "Bombs Away" circuit. I don't remember which other plane we had with us, but we connected the existing "end of the line" circuit on the second plane. There was decreed radio silence during our runs and this low-frequency circuit could not be sensed from the ground, thus we would not be putting our planes in danger.

We put a practice bomb (ten pounds of flash powder and 100 pounds of sand) into each plane and sent the two of them off to the nearest practice field to check out the performance. I was told that the two practice bombs landed together.

As soon as our first test was successful, the Signal Corps stepped in. I did not have much to say about R.B.R. (the "radio bomb release") after the Signal Corps took over the project, but the test was fine and virtually all of our B-24s had the needed equipment on hand.

The only contact that I ever had with the Signal Corps was my Morse Code contact with a Signal Corps Sergeant. We never saw one another but we did have a goodly amount of Morse Code back and forth. When our project had come to an end, he sent this last message—"I thought you might like to know that my Captain made Major on your invention."

I was awarded a Bronze Star for my contribution and also received \$2 per month added to my pay.

This is a case of the Army actually coordinating all my previous experiences to get a good result. As a Boy Scout, I had the Morse Code expertise; as a graduate engineer, I had the background in circuitry; and as a patent draftsman, I had the ability to figure out the connections and make the asked-for result to accomplish the mission.

After all the bad press about how the Army never used the talents of their recruits properly, this is one case when the whole picture came together for a positive result. Col Gilbert was a unit commander with the ability to find the right man for each job and make sure they did whatever was the best use of their talents.

Editor's Note: By war's end, the Bombardier's Checklist included step-by-step instructions for Radio Bomb Release by receiver and transmitter a/c. The Bombardier's Mission Report also asked how the bombs were dropped. Options were Bombsight, Toggled, Salvoed, Pilot Salvo, and R.B.R.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn Armorer

In the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 11, we read that a Lawyer asked Jesus what should he do to inherit eternal life? Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law?" The Lawyer replied, "You shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." The lawyer then asked who his neighbor was and Jesus replied with the story of the Good Samaritan (you can read this story in Luke, Chapter 11).

We currently have many, many neighbors who are in desperate situations caused by storms, earthquakes, tornados and economic situations and should have compassion for them by working at or giving contributions to Soup Kitchens, Homeless Shelters, food banks, Rescue Agencies, or your favorite Charity.

The Lord Bless You Real Good.



**THE 392ND MEMORIAL
AT WENDLING**

But we...shall be remember'd;



**We few, we happy few,
we band of brothers.**



**For he to-day that sheds
his blood with me
Shall be my brother...**

**William Shakespeare
Henry V**

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association
9107 Wood Pointe Way
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
USA

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class Mail

Almighty God, Who has blessed us with the will and courage to do our duty, we praise You for our comrades whose death kept freedom living. We praise You also for giving us the years we have lived since their departure. We pray that You will strengthen and sustain our devotion to truth and justice, so that we may be faithful beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Continue Your mercy to our comrades; keep them in Your care; and bring us all at last into Your presence there to rejoice Eternally. Amen. — Composed by 576th pilot the Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, retired Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.

∞FOLDED WINGS∞

Kenneth A. Healing, 579, Aug. 3, 2011
E. Richard "Dick" Esenwein Jr., 577, Jan. 16, 2012
Franklin D. Smith, 577/9, Nov. 23, 2011
John E. Stroh, 577, Feb. 14, 2012