

NOVEMBER HISTORY 491ST. BOMB GROUP

1944

DECLASSIFIED
DOD DIR 5200.5

06034894

P.R.C.

Mission 102
1944-16

Nov Mission 76 F. Schweitzer

462769-20

GP-491-HI (BOMB)
Nov 1944 x

RETURN TO
Director
Headquarters
11th Air Force
Maxwell Field
Montgomery, Ala.

NOVEMBER HISTORY

491ST. BOMBARDMENT GROUP

14TH. COMBAT WING

2ND. BOMBARDMENT DIVISION

8TH. AIR FORCE

46846000

P.R.C.

DECLASSIFIED
DOD DIR 5200.9

4-2709-20

NARRATIVE

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At the end of it's sixth month of combat operation, the 491st. Bomb Group could correctly be termed a well organized, smooth working outfit. By gradually digesting the vital lessons gained from actual combat operations and profiting from normal mistakes and errors the 491st. has assumed it's rightful place of importance as a recognized contributing factor in the overall success of Eighth Air Force operations. The records tell the story. We've done a good job. We've hit our assigned targets and we've hit them well. That, in pointed essence, has been and will continue to be our primary mission, and all concerned may well be proud that, to date, this mission has been carried out in efficient successful manner. If reasons need be given for this success, then a multiple of factors must be included. An understanding efficient leadership, a thorough and practical training setup and the general high calibre of personnel may perhaps be held up as the prime factors.

In setting down those matters and events for the month which are pertinent and necessary inclusions in the history of this Group, first mention must be made of the completion of our hundredth operational mission. The date of this mission, which divisional records show to be the ninth of November, was arrived at after a series of expert pencil and paper manipulations which left the majority of personnel gasping in wonderment. A few strokes of the pencil, a couple of telephone calls and overnight the Group's total number of missions had miraculously jumped from ninty two up to ninty nine. At first the situation appeared to

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be a little on the ludicrous side. The flying personnel especially were provoked to loud guffaws by the news that they had flown seven missions overnight without lifting their feet from terra firma. However when the matter was brought into a good clear objective light, a general realization was gained that our statisticians were well within their rights in manipulating the figures toward such a favorable end for the Group. Up to this point they had been adhering to a more or less common sense count, while at the same time other outfits were padding the books well within legal bounds set up by higher headquarters. It seems that if a Group sends up planes which strike at two or more different targets, as was very common in June and July, when no-balls were high on the priority list, instead of receiving credit for only one mission as we were figuring, one full mission was tallied up on the credit ledger ^{BY OTHER GROUPS} for each single site hit. Thus, when our records were observed in this new light we were able to pick up the seven miraculously flown missions mentioned.* Needless to say the change in figures produced an enormous headache for all the figure compilers and chart maintainers on the base, as was evidenced by the loud unrecordable outbursts so clearly heard with each stroke of an eraser.

Next, mention must be made of two rulings sent down by higher headquarters which drew forth an adverse, ~~and~~ disconcerting reaction from our flying personnel. The first ruling concerns the discontinuance of the automatic awarding of the D.F.C. at the completion of a tour of duty. Naturally the men who were affected

* REFERENCE NOTE ON LAST
PAGE OF NARRATIVE

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by this ruling were quick to evidence their disapproval and raised vociferous questions as to just why such a move was instigated. No explanations, however, were forthcoming. An order had been given by high authority that all men who had not completed twenty missions by the fifteenth of September would not be eligible for the D.F.C. at the completion of their tours, and that was all there was to the matter. It can be generally assumed that some logical reason necessitated such a move, however, an equally general impression has been left that the ruling could have been made far more palatable to the men if a measure of reason and explanation could have been served up with this bitter pill.

The second ruling descended in an equally indigestible state. During our first months of combat operation, flying personnel were relieved after the completion of thirty one missions. All personnel were informed, however, that the figure of thirty one would probably not remain constant but could increase at any time up to thirty five if replacements were slow in making their appearance. This bit of forewarning had a very sound practical basis as was proven when the flow of replacements did subsequently slow up with the result that the normal tour of duty jumped to thirty five missions. Since the men expected this they were more or less reconciled when the situation first confronted them and there was no discernable bad taste in their acceptance. However, a definite hitch arose during the past month when a number of the men were told they would have to fly these extra missions in the

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capacity of nothing more than dead weight. Where was the logic prompting such an order which forced a man to risk his life several times over hostile territory while he did nothing but take up room and add weight to the plane? Nobody seemed able to even attempt an answer to this question and as a result the general impression was gained that SNAFU had the uncanny ability of cropping out in the highest as well as the lowest elements of our Air Force.

Once again, during the month of November, the Group had a change in it's commanding officer. Lt. Col. Jack G. Merrell took over temporarily in place of Col. Reed who was placed on DS at wing, pending General Johnson's return from the States. It is generally hoped that Col. Merrell will be given permanent control of the Group and that he will be allowed to hold the reins in his hands for at least a reasonable period of time. This feeling in no way reflects upon the abilities of Col. Reed. It is a feeling which has chiefly been engendered by the fact that the men as a whole do not take well to the profusion of leadership changes they have been subjected to. It is generally felt that these constant changes, no matter what the reason for them may be, tend to instill confusion and inefficiency in the outfit.

In view of the fact that Col. Merrell has been with the Group since its date of activation he can be considered from every logical angle to be a man well fitted and prepared for the job. He is thoroughly acquainted with the vast majority of key men and he has the invaluable advantage of having personally observed and

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taken part in the preparatory phases of the Group, the various movements of the Group in the States, from the States to England, and in England, and lastly the early operational problems which confronted the outfit and the subsequent measures which were employed for their solution.

From an operational viewpoint the month produced two outstanding events. On November 16th. the entire Eighth and Ninth Air Forces, plus a substantial number of R.A.F. bombers were called upon to cascade a maximum tonnage of bombs upon German troops and positions opposing our armies east of Aachen. It was the type of mission in which all our crewmen were eager to participate. They were thoroughly briefed on the major importance of such a vast air operation and the vital necessity for absolute accuracy. The mission was flown and completed with good results. Unfortunately weather conditions over North Pickingham were so bad at landing time that a diversion was necessitated. Most of the planes didn't return to the base until a full three days later. The men had no complaints, however, for to a man they were well fed and housed at the bases to which they were diverted.

On November 26th. the 491st. experienced by far the blackest day of its history. Sixteen of our planes failed to return after taking off on a mission to Hannover. The official narrative of this mission is related as follows:

At approximately 1155 hours 3 jet-propelled E/A were observed

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flying parallel to our formation and about 2,000 yards to the left. As group approached I.P., at 1226 hours, a fight between friendly and enemy fighters was seen taking place at about 30,000 feet altitude and one-half mile to the south-east. It is believed this was a decoy instituted by the enemy to draw our fighter support away from the bomber stream. Our fighters left the bomber formations, shortly after the I.P., to engage the enemy. At 1240 hours, two minutes after our group had dropped it's bombs and turned south from the primary target, we were attacked by approximately 75 S/E E/A, consisting mostly of FW-190's with a few ME-109's. It was particularly noted by the crews that while the groups ahead were getting flak attacks over the target, the flak had practically ceased during our run over the target. Friendly fighters returned about 25 minutes after the first attack by E/A and engaged them. No further attacks were made on our group.

The actual attack by E/A proceeded as follows: It is reported, the high squadron (9 B-24's) was attacked first by approximately 75 S/E E/A in waves of 5 or 6 abreast from 6 o'clock high and level, followed by individual attacks. One B-24 was observed being hit by a single FW-190 which came straight up and appeared to stand on it's tail while shooting into the bomber. The B-24 was seen to go down immediately afterwards. No aircraft from this squadron has, as yet, returned.

The low squadron leader, due to an accidental release, caused the entire squadron to drop their bombs approximately 15 miles before reaching the primary target. In order to avoid possible

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flak over the target, the squadron turned to the left before the P.T. and while attempting to get into it's proper position in the group was attacked by E/A. At the time of the attack this squadron was approximately 1,000 to 1,500 yards behind the lead squadron. A vicious attack was made from 5 to 7 o'clock low by waves of 7 or 8 S/E E/A abreast, followed by single attacks on those B-24's that remained in the squadron. These single attacks were in a pursuit curve from all directions with the exception that only one attack was made directly from below. One of our aircraft had, due to mechanical failure, dropped his bombs through the bomb bay doors, leaving two of the doors dangling below the airplane. Evidently realizing this bomber to be in difficulty, 3 FW-190's pressed an attack from 6 o'clock low but the B-24 continued to fly straight and level. However, this aircraft was later reported as having crashed in Belgium; 4 of the crew bailed out and landed safely. One E/A made a desperate attack from 6 o'clock very high and dove directly between the lead and no. 2 airplane of the squadron. Out of 10 bombers in the squadron, 3 returned safely.

The lead squadron was last to be attacked. Coming directly out of the sun, at 10 o'clock high, the enemy attacked in waves of ~~A/A~~ 7 or 8 abreast, breaking away below the bombers. About 8 to 10 waves of E/A came in followed by attacks from 3 and 9 o'clock simultaneously, by enemy fighters 4 abreast or in echelon; break-away was also below. Numerous attacks followed by E/A coming in singly from all directions, each selecting a specific bomber to

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attack. No belly attacks were made. One bandit attacked our lead airplane head on, level, and broke away to one side at extreme close range. All aircraft in this squadron returned safely.

All gunners reported the enemy as attacking with extreme determination, pressing his attacks to within 100 yards, in the face of defending fire. However, whenever our gunners were able to fire a few bursts at him before he commenced his attack, he always turned off to attack some other bomber.

It is generally believed, the 3 jet-propelled E/A seen before reaching the I.P. were scouting the course and formation of the bomber stream, and, possibly, keeping close contact with their fighter and flak personnel. It is also significant that our fighter support was caused to engage the enemy shortly before our bombers were bounced by E/A, and, likewise, the strange absence of flak at the time of attack.

The action of our gunners during this engagement merited the highest praise. When the smoke of battle had ~~had~~ cleared and all claims had been forwarded and returned through proper channels it was found that our group was responsible for destroying seven enemy planes, probably destroying ten more, and damaging an additional three.

So the month of November lends itself to the past history of the 491st. Bomb Group. However, before "finis" is officially written to this month's activities, mention should be made that the quantity and quality of rumors concerning the future movements of

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the group have reached astonishing proportions. Every latrine seems to add a new nuance and shading to this maze of unofficial prognostication. If by chance all sources should prove correct then we should emerge by far, the most widely traveled bomb group in existence, for there is scarcely a spot on this globe that has'nt been designated as our ultimate destination.

* A further change was made after the writing of this history whereby the total number of missions, instead of increasing seven, upon the recheck increased only by two.

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