

# **EARLY HISTORY OF THE 91ST BOMB GROUP (H)**

**Written by Unknown**

Since that eventful day in October 1942; when the first aircraft of the 91<sup>st</sup> touched down on the soil of England, this Group has been piling up a most enviable record. Those first boys, eager and full of fight; were to be the guinea pigs in the trials and experiments which marked the first phase in the history of heavy bombardment.

One Pilot, Lt. Genheimer; in his eagerness to get to England, left the formation in mid-Atlantic. When the rest of his Squadron arrived 45 minutes late, his ears were still burning from the “eating out” he had received. Our first hero appeared during the crossing operation. Sgt. Wicks, although severely injured himself; rescued Sgt. Harrison from a crash in Northern Ireland.

Our first home was unfinished Kimbolton A/D; but because its runways would not accommodate B-17s—we moved to the “Shoe Place of the ETO” Bassingbourn, a luxury airdrome built just before the war.

By the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1942, the 91<sup>st</sup> BG became operational and the first mission was flown on the 7<sup>th</sup> to Brest, France.

8 of our aircraft attacked and returned to Base without loss even though Enemy A/C were encountered and our claims were 1-2-0. On the next day, we successfully beat up the home of the “Abbeville Kids” escorted by Spitfires. All of our A/C were damaged; but they returned to Base carrying our first wounded; Capt. Haley Aycock, Lt. E. L. Clinard, Lt. L. G. Karnath, S/Sgt. M/W. Knutson, and Sgt. J/.H. Jones.

Thus became the combat career of the 91<sup>st</sup> BG (H), a career that was to carry this Group through long months of toil, sweat, blood and glory to establish an outstanding record of success against the enemy. With (4) other Groups; it was our object to pioneer the way for the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force and discover the battle strategy best suited for heavy bombers attacking “Fortress Europe” in daylight!

Fighter support was very scanty; there were no reinforcements; either of men or machines and 50 sorties for the whole 9<sup>th</sup> AF were considered a tremendous effort. Although casualties and damage were severe; the infant 8<sup>th</sup> AF established the proud tradition of never being turned back from an enemy Target because of flak or fighters! Not until the American and British “Big Wigs” were convinced on our worth; did we get much needed men and material to replace our early losses.

Long-range fighter support came; going to the most distance Targets on the Baltic and into Austria. Our No. 1 task was to engage the Luftwaffe, strangle it to the ground and knock it out of the sky. During the winter of 1943-44; the campaign was at its height and by the spring of 1944—the Allies were dominating the air.

During Nov. 1942, the 91<sup>st</sup> BG participated in (7) attacks to U-Boat installations on the West coast of France, This became a direct assist to the Allied Landings made in No. Africa at the same time.

On 4 March 1943, the 91<sup>st</sup> BG, with (15) A/C led by Major Paul Fishburne, attacked the marshaling yards (M/Y) at Hamm alone with excellent results. N Fanatical E/A and intense flak did not turn our aircraft back; neither did the loss of (4) A/C from their attack.

On 18 March '43, we took part in a mission of great historical importance. The destruction wrought on the shipbuilding yards at Vegesack, convinced all skeptics about the worth of high altitude, daylight, precision bombing and personal messages of congratulations came from such men as Churchill, Lt. Gen Andrews, Maj. Gen Eaker, and Air Chief Marshall Sir Charles Portal, who described this raid as a "Complete answer to criticism" of this type of bombing.

To help clinch the argument, the 91<sup>st</sup> BG gave a pasting to the Renault Works in Paris, Aero Engine Works in Antwerp and a rubber plant in Huls, then came Gelsenkirchen on 12 August 1943, a visit to "Happy Valley"—one of the most heavily defended areas known as "Castration Run."

Shortly afterward, during a fighter attack. Major McPartlin dryly remarked "Look at all those FW's without any ball bearings!" During this same period of time, the 91<sup>st</sup> BG invaded Norway; smashing Nazi aluminum plants at Heroya. The 1250 mile trip to Anklam stirred up fierce swarms of E/A on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Nov. '43; rivaling the attacks on Oschersleben and Schweinfurt.

During this Battle of Germany, which saw the fiercest air battles of the War; we were blessed with not only superb machines; but also men with guts, who even volunteered for extra missions after their tours were completed.

In early 1944, we were dispatched against "Nobles" and "Crossbows" which were difficult V-weapon sites in France and Belgium and succeeded in decreasing the potent threat to Invasion preparations. On 6 March 1944, we saw our first mission to Berlin. By Sept. we had participated in (11) mission to this Capitol of the Reich and by the end of all operations; had totaled (16) missions to this target; including the paralyzing attacks of Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

Early in June 1944, without entirely forgetting strategic targets in Germany; the 91<sup>st</sup> BG turned to tactical targets in the Invasion in Germany; the 91<sup>st</sup> BG turned to tactical targets in the Invasion areas of Normandy, France. Coastal targets, airfields, bridges and enemy transport lines were hit heavily. On D-Day, our A/C spread a destructive pattern of bombs on enemy beach positions minutes ahead of the invasion forces. Close support was given for a short time; but as the ground situation developed favorably, the task of air support was given to the Tactical Air Force.

Once more, our attention was turned to throttling the German war machine in a strategic sense. Airfields, aircraft factories, arm works, and in particular; oil targets became our priorities, the names of Merseburg and Leipzig took the place of Schweinfurt in the vocabulary of the aircrews. The Germans spared no effort to protect his Synthetic Oil Plants, blasting our planes from the air with terrific concentrations of flak and hounding the poorly escorted groups of bombers with fanatical attacks.

In July and August of 1944, the experimental site for the V-weapons at Peenemunde was successfully attacked; slowly up work on Hitler's V-2 program. During Sept. and until the end of the year; emphasis was placed on railroad marshaling yards in Western and Southern Germany—in an effort to cut off

front line supplies. With the rest of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, the 91<sup>st</sup> BG participated in blasting Von Rundstedt in the Ardennes Bulge; hitting communication targets in the front line areas. Bombers took off and flew formations in some of the most trying winter weather the ETO has ever known.

Early 1945 brought exceptional bombing weather and rail transportation was brought nearly to a standstill throughout Germany on 22 Feb. when some 2,000 bombers hit rail targets from North to South. The 91<sup>st</sup> primary target, Stendal; who sent back the strike message, “Wizard Prang”. Although pleased with the bombing results, the “Wheels” restricted Charlie for his fancy language.

March and April were characterized by exceptionally long missions, which involved many hours of preparation and crew fatigue to hit tactical targets. (22) missions were flown in March; trying the Invasion month; and two missions were flown in the same day in support of Eisenhower’s Rhine River crossing. All the remaining missions may be classified as tactical after the ground forces started to surge across Germany.

Visual bombing was the Order of the Day and the 91<sup>st</sup> BG augmented its record superbly. The ideal “milk run” was flown to Girnde Estuary on 15 April in support of French ground and Naval forces; with no opposition of any nature. Operations of an offensive nature did not stop completely on 25 April 1945; with Pilsen being the last target attacked—the 340<sup>th</sup> mission flown for the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group (H).

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