

154 TRAINING SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

154 Aero Squadron organized, 8 Dec 1917

Demobilized, 1 Feb 1919

154 Observation Squadron allotted to NG and activated, 24 Oct 1925

154 Aero Squadron Reconstituted and consolidated with 154 Observation Squadron, 1936

Ordered to active service, 16 Sep 1940

Redesignated 154 Observation Squadron (Medium), 13 Jan 1942

Redesignated 154 Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942

Redesignated 154 Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter), 31 May 1943

Redesignated 154 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 13 Nov 1943

Redesignated 154 Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium), 12 May 1944

Redesignated 63 Reconnaissance Squadron (Long Range, Weather), 4 Sep 1945

Inactivated, 12 Dec 1945

Redesignated 154 Fighter Squadron (Single Engine), and allotted to ANG, 24 May 1946

Extended federal recognition 23 Aug 1946

Inactivated, 10 Jun 1952

Redesignated 154 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, (Photo Jet), activated, 1 Jan 1955

Redesignated 154 Air Refueling Squadron, 1 Jan 1976

Redesignated 154 Tactical Airlift Training Squadron, 1 Oct 1986

Redesignated 154 Training Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX, 8 Dec 1917
Scott Field, IL, 18 Dec 1917
Garden City, NY, 29 Jan-16 Feb 1918
Lark Hill, England, 9 Mar 1918
Stockbridge, England, 19 Mar 1918 (detachments at Eastbourne and Dover, England, after 16 Aug 1918); Winchester, England, 30 Aug-12 Sep 1918
St Maixent, France, 17 Sep 1918
Orly, France, 29 Sep 1918
Nantes, France, 18 Dec 1918
St Nazaire, France, 26 Dec 1918-12 Jan 1919
Garden City, NY, 23 Jan-1 Feb 1919
Little Rock, AR, 24 Oct 1925
Post Field, OK, 27 Sep 1940
Eglin Field, FL, 19 Dec 1941
Daniel Field, GA, 9 Feb 1942
Smith Reynolds Aprt, NC, 9 Jul 1942
Morris Field, NC, 17 Aug-22 Sep 1942
Wattisham, England, 4-21 Oct 1942
St Leu, Algeria, 10 Nov 1942
Tafaraoui, Algeria, 16 Nov 1942
Blida, Algeria, 20 Nov 1942
Oujda, French Morocco, 10 Dec 1942 (detachment at Youks-les-Bains, Algeria, from 21 Jan 1943) Youks-les-Bains, Algeria, 24 Feb 1943
Thelepte, Tunisia, 13 Mar 1943
Sbeitla, Tunisia, 6 Apr 1943
Le Sers, Tunisia, 12 Apr 1943
Korba, Tunisia, 19 May 1943
Nouvion, Algeria, 3 Jun 1943
Oran, Algeria, 5-16 Jan 1944
Bari, Italy, 3 Feb 1944-1 Jul 1945
Drew Field, FL, 21 Jul-12 Dec 1945
Fort Sill OK
Barksdale AFB, LA
Adams Field, Little Rock, AR
Little Rock AFB, AR, 15 Oct 1962 **Sep 1962**

ASSIGNMENTS

Unkn, 8 Dec 1917-Sep 1918
Air Service Acceptance Park No. 1, Sep-Dec 1918
Unkn, Dec 1918-1 Feb 1919
Arkansas NG (corps aviation), 24 Oct 1925
Eighth Corps Area, 16 Sep 1940
Third Army, 3 Oct 1940

VIII Army Corps, Nov 1940
68 Observation (later Reconnaissance
Tactical Reconnaissance) Group, 1 Sep 1941
Northwest African Training Command, 24 May-1 Sep 1943
XII Training Command [Prov], 1 Sep-31 Dec 1943
Fifteenth Air Force, 1 Jan-15 Jun 1944)
Fifteenth Air Force, 15 Jun 1944
Army Air Forces, Jul 1945
Third Air Force, 21 Jul-12 Dec 1945

ATTACHMENTS

XII Air Support Command, 12 Mar-24 May 1943

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

Not equipped, 1925-1926

JN-4

JN-6

DH-4

PT-1

BT-1

O-2

O-38

O-47, 1938

O-39

PT-17

O-49, 1941

A-20, 1942

P-43

P-39

P-40

P-38, 1944

P-51, 1943

P-51, 1946

F-84, 1951

RF-51, 1952

F-51

RF-80, 1954

RF-84, 1957

RB-57, 1958

RF-101, 1965

RF-101, 1972

KC-135, 1976

C-130

Support Aircraft

C-45

C-47

T-33

T-6

C-54

C-131

COMMANDERS

Capt Asbury W. Meadows

Maj Carroll Cone

Maj Adrian Williamson 1 Jul 1933-1 Sep 1941

Maj Luther M. Blevins

Capt Theodore H. Mayer, 27 Sep 1942

Maj John R. Dyas, 20 Dec 1942

Maj Joseph E. Whitwell, Jr., 3 May 1943

Maj Alfred C. Schwab, Jr., 11 Mar 1944

Maj James H. Fuller, 28 Jul 1944

Maj William R. Dinker, 9 Nov 1944-Sep 1945

Lt Col Timothy A. Shea

Maj Ira M. Sussky

Lt Col Carl E. Bailey, Jr.

Maj Ray. J. Mcneill

Capt William B. Putnam

Maj Lawrence O. Savage

Maj Farris D. Fortner

Lt Col Shirley W. Mcarthur,

Lt Col Hoyt W. Bengé

Lt Col Joe Caple

Lt Col Herbert L. Wassell

Lt Col Alfred B. Bailey

Col Charles Linz

Col Shelby G. Bryant

Col Danny R. Smith

Lt Col Christopher T. Raymond

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Antisubmarine, EAME Theater

Air Offensive, Europe

Algeria French Morocco with Arrowhead
Tunisia
Anzio
Rome-Arno
Normandy
Northern France
Southern France
North Apennines
Rhineland
Central Europe
Po Valley
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation
Rumania, 17, 18, 19 Aug 1944

EMBLEM



154 Observation Squadron: On a white diamond, short axis vertical, an Arkansas Indian warrior in full cry, war paint, face copper red, paint red, shadows and hair black, wearing on his scalp, a stylized feathered plume, red and black, and on his neck a necklace of animal's teeth white, nine in number. (Approved, 29 Apr 1954)

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

Repaired and maintained aircraft in Zone of Advance, 1918.

Commanded by 1st Lieut. E. P. Larned. This organization arrived here early in January as a unit from Kelly Field., Texas, enroute to Garden City, to complete its quota of highly skilled

mechanics who were in training at this field. Once organized no time was lost in clearing from the field, and they were again on their way for services beyond the seas.

This repair and maintenance unit moved to England in March 1918 and to France in September 1918. It was demobilized at Garden City, NY. , 1 Feb 1919

Constituted in the National Guard in 1921 as the 154 Squadron (Observation), assigned to the 320th Observation Group (Third Army), and allotted to the Seventh Corps Area. Placed on the deferred list on 2 July 1923, allotted to the Organized Reserve as a Deferred National Guard unit, and redesignated as the 564th Observation Squadron. Withdrawn from the Organized Reserve on 10 September 1925 and allotted to the Arkansas National Guard as the 154 Observation Squadron.

154 Observation Squadron allotted to NG and activated, 24 Oct 1925 as a Corps Aviation unit and initially equipped with Curtiss JN-4 and JN-6 trainers.

Conducted summer training at various locations to include: Little Rock Air Intermediate Depot, Marshall Field, Fort Riley, KS; Post Field, Fort Sill, OK; Fort Barrancas, FL; and Camp Hulen, TX.

18 April 1927 10 officers and 50 enlisted members of the 154 Observation Squadron, Arkansas National Guard and their Curtiss JN-4 and JN-6 began performing relief duties during the great Mississippi River flood, one of the worst natural disasters in American history. Those Guardsmen airlifted food, medicines, and supplies to workers shoring up levees along the river. They also patrolled the levees to spot potential breaks and worked to plug gaps in those embankments. Members of the unit flew over 20,000 miles delivering serum, food and supplies across their state during the flood. The unit was released from active duty on 3 May 1927. They also carried the Batesville (Independence County) mail to Little Rock.

Inducted into active Federal service 16 September 1940 at Little Rock and transferred to Post Field, Fort Sill, OK, arriving there 27 September 1940. Concurrently relieved from the 47th Observation Group (VII Corps) and assigned to the Eighth Corps Area. Relieved from the Eighth Corps Area on 3 October 1940 and assigned to the Third Army. Further assigned in November 1940 to the VIII Corps. Relieved from the VIII Corps on 1 September 1941 and assigned to the 68th Observation Group.

Moved to Post Field, OK, in September 1940, the 154 OS had one BC-1A, two O-38Es and 10 O-47A/Bs on 31 December 1940. Thereafter, the unit moved four times within CONUS and flew ASW patrols over the Gulf of Mexico before deploying to North Africa, via the UK, in November 1942. Equipped with Douglas A-20s, the 154 OS briefly flew ASW patrols along the Moroccan coast. It then flew Bell P-39s and North American P-51s on tactical reconnaissance missions in Algeria and Tunisia until May 1943, served as a fighter training unit in Algeria between June 1943 and January 1944, and was redesignated 154 Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium).

First a peacetime National Guard unit (the 154 Observation Squadron), this organization became a part of the Army Air Forces on 16 Sep 1940. From then on, training became more intensive. In the summer following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, this unit engaged in its last full scale maneuvers near Winston Salem, North Carolina. Shortly thereafter, the word was given—"get ready for overseas shipment." On the afternoon of 21 Sep 1942, Squadron members left their Morris Field, North Carolina base, loaded aboard a train and headed northward.

22 Sept. 1942: Arrived in Fort Dix, New Jersey and settled into five-man tents. Over the next four days Squadron members dealt with the cold and rain as they were issued Springfield rifles helmets, uniforms, gas masks, and other equipment. The big questions on everyone's mind are, "when do we go," and "where are we going." The next few days are spent doing calisthenics, having final medical exams, and being in formation.

This is the beginning is our thought this morning as we step from a crowded troop train and march as a body into the barren reaches of massive Fort Dix, NJ. Row upon row of green, weather worn pyramidel tents stretch out as far as the eye can see and it is to two such glum company streets that our Squadron personnel is assigned. Once in one of these five-man tents, we smooth out our blankets on a cot and note with satisfaction the rickety coal-burning stove in the center of the floor.

All day long, formations are held one after the other and work details are gleaned from those men caught in the happy art of doing nothing. Most of our time is spent speculating on "when do we go?" and "where are we going?" In the long silences which follow all discussions, we experience the first of many periods of uninterrupted waiting which we will know with such intimacy for many months to come. Early in the afternoon, we pack our "B" bags and stack them at the head of the company street. Before long, these bags are loaded on trucks and shunted away we know not where.

Fort Dix, New Jersey—Sept. 23 Our first firearm is issued this afternoon and with cosmolene jelly coating our arms and clothing, we swab and rub down these new Springfield rifles until they pass an eagle-eyed inspection. We cannot but wonder, "how long before we have to use them?"

Our Supply section works night and day and we turn in all of our OD clothing for greasy impregnates; gas masks are also checked and new ones issued for those found defective. . . . Restricted to the confines of the tent area, some men sullenly complain, "only one hour from home and I can't even get a pass!" . . . Our thoughts are somewhat dulled by the very abundance of impressions; we are apprehensive and yet have that insatiable desire to see for ourselves what war is like. . . . When not on detail, drilling, on KP, or standing unending formations, we sneak off to the PX and guzzle our "last" beer and ice cream or just wander around this maze of a camp through which new recruits pass in clomping bunches. We have that rookie feeling of knowing nothing, not belonging to anything but a great, uncertain mass.

We march up to the further end of the camp this afternoon and pass before an efficient Army

clerk who fills in a small brown folder; another clerk slaps our fingers down upon a black ink pad then onto the same card; we then stand before a lined height scale and have a picture taken. Thus our Army passports are made up. Again comes the thought, "it won't be long."

Fort Dix, New Jersey—Sept. 24 Today, as on each morning here, we rise before dawn, jump into clammy gas-impregnated clothes and clomp off to a period of calisthenics in the rear of our tent area. With our breath steaming white upon the air and a great orange full moon staring down on our separate platoons, we kick our legs, stretch sideways, backwards and forward and jump up and down "to the numbers." Only sour looks greet a beaming soldier who, at the end of this ordeal, claims brightly, "it's good for you; wakes you up!!"

Formation after formation continue to be called during the day and our Commanding Officer, Capt. Theodore Mayer, warns us again of the absolute necessity for secrecy. The tone here is both humorous and undeniably grim and these two moods tumble one right after the other unceasingly. It is a good thing that we have little time to think, but rather lay our exhausted bodies down at the end of a day and let our minds slide into the erasing fluidity of sleep.

Fort Dix, New Jersey—Sept. 25 Another day passes and some men evidence a fatalistic mood and positive break with everything as they shear each other's hair right down to the bone! . . . Tonight we are called out again and under a slash of yellow slanting light thrown down from a tent opening, Lt. "Doc" Snyder gives us our last quick medical exam.

Fort Dix, New Jersey—Sept. 26 We are to leave today for our Port of Embarkation. All day long, we wait. Barracks bags, helmet, overcoat, field pack and rifle—all are ready to be snatched at a moment's notice. Orders come in bewildering contradiction: "we will wear overcoats for the move . . . raincoats will be worn . . . wear overcoats." And so throughout the day! Finally, about six o'clock tonight, we are told to fall out with full pack, ready to go. Within a few minutes, we stand formation under a light fizzling rain and, at the order to march, slog clumsily over the mudded roads on our way to the train.

Arriving at the railroad yards, we begin a search for barracks bags, trucked earlier to a shed nearby. After locating our own in the massive piles and subsequently lugging and pulling them across the sprawling, track-rutted train yard, we finally hoist their leaden weight onto the car assigned. Exhausted and beaded with sweat, we then make gratefully for an empty coach chair and flop down. Three hours have passed when the clash and grind of iron and wood cease in an unknown station and we step from the train into a sheet of pelting silver rain. ("The 154 never goes anywhere but it rains!") Hoisting our barracks bag again on our shoulder, we stagger toward an adjacent- pier and an awaiting ferry boat.

Slowly we are pushed and shoved up to the front of this craft by the river of helmeted men which keeps coming steadily from behind. Once settled, we wait without speaking, our bodies and minds tense and alert, our eyes staring out at the dark waters of the harbor, at the flat, misted silhouette which is the famed city of New York (seen thus by many for the first time), and at the tugs, ferries and barges plying silently back and forth and calling out warnings in a

sad, throaty whistle.

The ferry now begins to turn slowly and sharply into a harbor-side pier, cautiously edges up to the great hulk of the ship which is to take us "over there." More lugging of barracks bags, another formation in the high-vaulted, voice-echoing dock warehouse, then onto the boat with its maze of halls and compartments and finally to our assigned cabins—triple decker bunks, twelve to eighteen in a small room.

Aboard HMS "Queen Mary"; at sea—Sept. 27 Early this morning, the ship's machinery begins to turn over, slowly at first and then in a constant, deep thudding. We are already setting out to sea. As we are not allowed on deck, we cram the portholes for a last glimpse of the U. S. A Sunday morning quietude seems to pervade the land on this slate-grey day. Pier after pier slide silently by and we watch with strange feelings the small human figures and moving cars on the shore. Now and then a small fishing craft or tug passes by and we wave to tiny figures which wave back. While conversation is at first boisterous, it now becomes limited and hushed. Some men dash over to the 'right side of the ship, crane to get a last look at the "old lady," the Statue of Liberty. Soon, nothing but water can be seen and only the clanging of the channel buoys tells us that we are yet in sight of land.

Before long, we note that this sound too has ceased and we realize that we are putting out to sea. . . . "Well, who wants to play a game of rummy?" asks one man expectantly. In a second, the silent spell is broken and we fall into a more spirited picture. Once well out to sea, we are permitted outside. Up on the wide decks of this mammoth ship, we roam around and look things over or take up a permanent spot and seize onto the latest facts and rumors—"there's 15,000 on board, they say—hope they feed good; this morning wasn't so hot, though!—we're making the trip all alone; no convoy, no nothing; she's a fast ship, though."

Aboard HMS "Queen Mary"; at sea—Sept. 28 Another day passes by at sea. We sprawl on deck, stand with taxed but resigned patience in the PX line which reaches almost the full length of the ship, then return to the open deck and munch a meal of chocolate bars, cookies, sardines, oranges and apples. "If it weren't for these chocolate bars, I'd starve!" . . . The ship itself is marked "a floating hotel" and we spend many hours wandering around the spacious decks and through the richly veneered interiors. . . . Come mealtime, we are given numbered badges and thus form lines deep within the ship.

Shuffling along, we finally come to the high-ceilinged, table-crammed dining hall and are brusquely herded inside. Within a matter of seconds, hands are interlaced up and down the table and in words of the wise, "you either grab or starve!" After what seems but a few minutes, a bell timidly pings out into the air and KP's and Mess Sergeants feverishly begin to funnel us to the opposite side from which we came in. On the way out, hustled soldiers indignantly protest, "you don't call that food do you?!" Such is the routine each and every meal. Posted on the ship's bulletin board is an interesting report from German sources: "the 'Queen Mary' has been sunk in the North Atlantic!"

Sept. 29 A calm atmosphere and a warm bathing sun flow over those on deck this morning when sudden, quick, staccato bursts of gunfire violently shatter the silence and rend the air with ear-ringing power. Within a few seconds, this "test firing" ceases and as before comes the complaint born of boredom, "only practice! I wish something would happen for a change!" Others, visibly shaken by the blast, groan, "I almost jumped out of my skin!" Although unescorted on this trip, we have an inner sense of safety and security and continually assure the dubious, "well, she's the fastest ship on the seas, isn't she?" At sunset, the decks are cleared and the ship blacked out. We mill belowdecks, sprawl out on the floor near the ship's library, fill the corridors with our stretched-out forms, play cards, or talk of girls, the world series and of food—in that order.

Sept. 30 An air raid drill this morning, but we are no longer rookies and take it all in our stride. Meanwhile, the ship's wake curves and wends crazily to ward off the U-boats; gunners intently scan the skies. Another day of the sea and the sun passes into darkness. In a choppy sea, the ship heaves and rolls and many of us, cooped up belowdecks, know the sapping exhaustion of seasickness. Poker games, however, gain in popularity and go on with renewed vigor! With an eye-twinkling and broad smile we listen to the English loud speaker vibrate with—"all kitchen porters report to the dining hall." "Kitchen porters is it?" queries one of our men imitating a pained Englishman. "What'll it be next, old chap?!"

Oct. 2 As we stand on deck this afternoon and gladly note the capricious forms of two British cruisers around us, a never-to-be-forgotten scene cuts into our dulled consciousness. One of the cruisers to our starboard suddenly appears in the forward path of our prow. There is a dull thud and then we see the shredded for half of the cruiser slide swiftly through the waters on our port side.

Our eyes follow the sinking craft with a strange intensity. An empty, futile feeling fills our being as we stare at her small human figures racing wildly to the high parts to be clear of the rising waters, only to be helplessly engulfed as the ship issues forth a last protesting cloud of black smoke, then slides under the swirling waters. . . . "God, what a horrible sight to see ... in less than a minute she went down . . . those poor devils on board!" . . . (According to a newspaper story issued two and one half years later, the "Queen Mary" wheeled to starboard to escape a suspected U-boat; at the same time, the cruiser turned sharply to port to deal with the sub.

At that time, the collision took place.) Our ship now makes only half its original speed and creeps along almost sullenly. By mid-afternoon, we see the unbelievably good sight of a friendly plane. This craft circles around us, tags us for a while and then is gone. With crushing sound the Queen Mary sheared the cruiser cleanly in half amidships, with both halves sinking in about four minutes. With a gaping hole in the bow, the Queen Mary has to reduce its speed by half. It was later learned by the Squadron that 338 men perished aboard the Curacao.

Aboard HMS "Queen Mary"; Firth of Clyde, Greenock, Scotland—Oct. 3 The ship's engines are stilled when we wake this morning and long before dawn we are on deck and gaze fixedly at the ring of grey might around us — battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, corvettes, cargo ships,

troop transports —and then stare even more intently to the east, for there is the land again! The land of Scotland!

As a cold drizzle sifts over the harbor early this afternoon, we leave the "Queen Mary" and transfer to a small boat which heads out over the pallid waters of the Firth of Clyde. From our positions on the open air decks of this boat, we get a good view of the great bite in the prow of the "Queen Mary." "You mean to say we were out on the ocean with a hole as big as that in the ship?" asks one of our men as he stares and shivers apprehensively. As we move southward, both sides of the tracks are spotted with men, women and children waving flags, handkerchiefs and aprons, smiling and gesturing wildly and creating in every one of us a warmth of feeling for the plucky Scotch people. In burry Scotch tones, the youngsters shout out for "souvenir, American souvenir!" ("They make you feel really welcome," exclaims more than one man overcome and deeply pleased by this reception.)

4 Oct. 1942: Sunday – Arrived by train in Needham, England on a frosty, foggy morning to load onto waiting trucks driven by Black U.S. soldiers, who speak of "tuppence" and "ha-penny" in a chuckling southern drawl. After about a thirty-mile trip the Squadron arrived at the Wattisham airdrome (RAF) and were billeted in two large, two-storied stone barracks buildings. Officers received a big shot of Scotch upon arrival.

9 Oct. 1942: Squadron members experience their first German bombing when a lone Dornier 17 made one sweep across the airfield and dropped four delayed-action bombs on two hangers. None of the bombs exploded, and were later hauled off by British bomb disposal units. RAF personnel assure them it won't be the last. Days are spent drilling, attending section classes, wondering what comes next, and discussing the strange manners and customs of the British.

20 Oct. 1942: Relief! The first mail is received from the U.S.

22 Oct. 1942: Pack up, board a train and it is north to Scotland once again.

23 Oct. 1942: Arriving in Greenock, Scotland, the Squadron again boards ship, this time the troop ship HMS Letitia. Assigned to quarters on the second level below decks, the men are informed that during the day the quarters will serve as a mess hall, at night as a sleeping place, with hammocks and tables used as beds. (Again, officers are assigned to cabins on "A" deck.) For the next four days the ship takes on additional troops. With hundreds of men together and the resulting stench, many choose a sleeping spot on deck.

Early this morning, we again set foot on the fog-shrouded station-pier of Greenock, Scotland. Before long, we are loaded into every available corner aboard a small harbor boat which quickly carries us to a medium size transport in the outer harbor. Once again, we lumber into the gaping entrance of a grey troop ship and are assigned to "quarters" on the second level below decks. While we sit at tables crammed together in this hold, we are told that during the day our quarters will serve as a mess hall, at night as a sleeping place, with hammocks and the tables

themselves as beds. "Now I know what they went through in the last war," puts forth one of our men as he surveys this jam-packed room.

Greenock, Scotland—Oct. 24 Our ship continues to take on more troops of all types and, along with the unusually large number of other boats in the harbor, still remains at anchor. With hundreds of men forced to sleep in the holds and the resulting stench, many choose a sleeping spot on the moon-washed deck. . . . We sing all the old songs as we lie on deck tonight and wait for sleep to come. Aboard HMS "Letitia"; Firth of Clyde,

27 Oct. 1942: The Letitia finally leaves the Firth of Clyde, and complaints of the quality and quantity of food increases – poor food and only two meals per day.

Aboard HMS "Letitia"; at sea—Oct. 31 The North Atlantic has been surging and swelling for three days and staggering, white-faced soldiers gazing dejectedly over the rail were not uncommon. But today, the sun shines forth again, a cool breeze blows stiffly and the decks are strewn with sleeping, sprawling soldiers soaking up the sun and guzzling PX supplies. ... Of our food, one man says, "look at these peas!" He bounces these leaden-heavy green pellets on the table, listens disgustedly to their brittle pop, then recalls the lot of spoiled chicken served us a few days ago . . . "what slop! It wouldn't be so bad, but they're getting paid for every meal!" And so our mainstay continues to be tightly-rationed slices of bread and fresh New Zealand butter—"Bread and butter, that's all I live on!" complains one man sullenly. The huge convoy stretches far behind, ahead, and on either side of us and we sail on relentlessly.

Aboard HMS "Letitia"; at sea—Nov. 2 pans, gratefully suck in a breath of air, then duck below again amidships and take our place in a long food-issue line. As the line begins to move forward, we pass down a flight of metal stairs and wind through steamy kitchens. Here, sweaty English cooks, in food-stained uniforms, ladle out the meal, slop and pour the food into our buckets and cast a cold glance at anyone who dares to question the usually skimpy serving. After a few tours of KP, we pass through the routine without a word, just stretch out our pans and pails, wait until they are filled, then climb upstairs again. . . . "The "meal" over, the rush begins once more.

But this time, it is in the direction of the washrooms where scores of men all try at once to clean their food dripping pans. . . . Up on deck afterwards, one man confides to another, "I got so God damned hungry, I spoke to one of the cooks and got this beef sandwich for \$2.50!" Other men, not willing to strive and beg for food, take what is dished out, eat sparingly and quickly, then dash up on deck to resume their day long "prone position." Started taking malaria pills, which were "yellow, powdery pills slightly larger than aspirin and they taste like Hell."

4 Nov. 1942: Issued head nets and mosquito netting, desert goggles, sterilizing kits for water, along with a small, blue covered booklet, "North Africa." With full packs practice begins climbing up and down rope nets. Officers meet with the men to talk about the landing – the beach at the Gulf of Arzew near Oran, Algeria. Small American flag patches are issued to each

man to sew on the sleeve of their uniform, as it is hoped that the French will not fire on American troops.

Aboard HMS "Letitia"; at sea—Nov. 4 Issued to each man today are head nets, mosquito cream, and a small blue-covered book entitled "North Africa." ("So that's where we're going! Well, I'll be damned!") We pour over this book and our first images of North Africa (in our mind a land peopled with black, big-lipped, breech-clouted natives; vibrating with tom-toms; closed in by jungle growths etc.) are shaped by its contents. Formed into six separate platoons, we gather around our Officers in the ship's hold this afternoon and are told that we are part of the invasion armies heading for North Africa; our objective—the beach in the Gulf of Arzew. "Infantry troops will precede you; when you get to the beach, dig your foxhole and dig it deep. The natives may be friendly but don't take anything to eat or go anywhere with them." Scouts are chosen from each platoon and told what their duties will be; maps are rolled out and diligently poured over. The very fact that we are part of an invasion force, the first in this part of the world, does not yet fully pierce our consciousness and we have not come to the point where we can accurately define our feelings.

6 Nov. 1942: At about 2325 the Letitia passes the Rock of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea. Some men comment that it is smaller than they had imagined.

8 Nov. 1942 (Sunday): Shelling and the landing of troops begin as the Center Task Force of Operation Torch proceeds. At Noon the ship's captain announces that Oran is in Allied hands. From the diary of Warrant Officer Francis S. Kalinowski: Awakened by heavy gunfire at 4:00 A.M. At last we are here and the battle is ON. Went up to the top deck to watch the battle and the gun flashes. Ship dropped anchor a couple of miles off shore and the men started going over the sides down the scramble nets at 6:00 A.M. At daybreak, the mosquito boats layed smoke screens between ships and shore.

The invasion barges are shuttling back and forth between the ships and beach as fast as they can load and unload. Now it's a steady rumble of the big guns. Rifles & machine guns are keeping up a steady fire on shore. Can see two battleships in the distance shelling the port of Oran. Our troops are sending up smoke rockets and smoke pots are floating all over the water. Stayed up on deck all morning watching the fight. A few of our barges were sunk by gunfire from a fort on shore. Some were shot up and wrecked on the beach. Two barges collided in the smoke screen and sank. The battle went on all afternoon and troops kept pouring to shore. The fight is now subsiding into the hills. Our troops have the shore pretty well in hand.

God Bless America. Wrote few words to Bobbie after supper and went back upon deck to watch the lights and flashes of the battle. At times the sky towards Oran turned a bright red. Boy! They are catching HELL there. Can hear the cannons of our tanks off in the hills some-place. At about 10:15 P.M. a band of Arab guerillas came down out of the hills and attacked some points on shore. It's midnight and in a minute it will be tomorrow. Cannoneering and cracks of rifles and rattle of machine guns still rumbling in the night. I have my battle dress on, my pack is here

beside me, my gun is loaded, my knife is sharpened and my spirits are 100% stars and stripes. Fell asleep in my bunk shortly after midnight.

May be over side anytime. Even before dawn this morning, the "Letitia" vibrates to the heavy rumblings of gun fire. We now know that we are off the coast of our invasion point, the Gulf of Arzew. Before long, every deck and railing on the starboard side of the ship are lined with men who peer in toward the African coast. So powerful is the in-shore bombardment of the African mainland that it whips our clothes tightly against our bodies. Strangely quiet again, the scene is ominously grey.

Many ships are anchored around us and all seems outwardly calm and peaceful. Despite this, we fully expect all hell to break loose any minute. Soon, we note speck-sized, snout-faced invasion barges bob up and down on the slate-grey waters and move ever nearer to the shore. Still aboard ship, we stare intently at the smoke-shrouded beach, watch men run, fall, then get up and run forward for a few more yards. "Wonder if any enemy planes will show up?" asks one soldier apprehensively. For those in our Squadron assigned to man the ship's guns in case of attack, this question has a burning significance. "We'd be duck soup out here for them if they did come over. I'll certainly be glad to get off this tub!"

9 Nov. 1942: The first parties of the 154 climb down the rope nets to barges in order to go in. The remainder of the 154 followed the next day. Although there are still snipers, the Squadron forms into two single file columns and march along the coast road leading eastward. Before nightfall they turn into the town of St. Leu. From the diary of Warrant Officer Francis S. Kalinowski (9 Nov. 1942) Awakened at 5:00 A.M. for breakfast. Had eggs and bacon which will probably be the last for a long while.

This is zero hour for our outfit. Swung equipment on my back and went over the ships rail at 6:15 A.M. still dark. Made the 40 feet of scrambled net straight down to the invasion barge bouncing up and down without a scratch. It was so much fun that I felt like doing it over again. Our ships let up a balloon barrage this morning. At dawn, two ME-109's attacked from the east but the ship and shore guns drove them back. Landed on beach near Arzew at 8:00 A.M. Got my feet wet a bit. Didn't even notice that our men were pouring off the barges all along the beach. After the last man landed we started out down the road to town, column of files down each side of the road about fifteen feet apart. Marched through Arzew hugging the walls on each side of the street.

The going is slow because the hills and buildings are full of snipers taking pot shots at our troops. Stopped by snipers in church steeple. One of our tanks came up and put a 75 mm shell right in the steeple and knocked it clear off the map. Seventeen Frenchmen and Arabs were captured there and they had a stock of rifles and machine guns and ammunition. Out we go through town and down the road to the hills.

Two ME-109's harassing and strafing roads every once in a while. We scrambled for cover and hit the dirt quite a few times. Halted for lunch at 1:00 P.M. I had a can of cold hash, dog biscuits

and a chocolate bar. Marched on and off until 5:30 P.M. and halted for the night. Had cold G.I. iron ration for supper but brewed myself a hot cup of coffee. Went to sleep in a barn in a pile of hay. During the journey it is noted by Gillies that the Army "C" rations taste "pretty good" after the chow on the boat.

11 Nov. 1942: The Squadron enjoys an invigorating swim and much-needed bath in the crystal clear but cold waters of the Mediterranean.

13 Nov. 1942: It is noted by WO Kalinowski in his diary that, "Since we got off the boat we've been eating iron rations every meal, three times a day. It was either hash, meat and beans, plus the dog biscuits and coffee. Some of the water we were rationed looked like coffee before I even put the powder in."

15 Nov. 1942: Captain Mayer managed to "requisition" two large 250 gallon barrels of "real French wine" from a blown up winery, and each man is issued one canteen full.

16 Nov. 1942: In what will prove to be fairly regular for the next months, the men pack up their belongings and board trucks to move to Tafaraoui Airdrome, just south of Oran. It seems that no sooner are they set up that they get orders to take down and be ready to move.

18 Nov. 1942: After about an 11 mile ride to Oran, the Squadron loads into French "torture boxes," the infamous French freight cars known as "40 by 8s" (40 troops or 8 horses).

Blida Airdrome, Algeria, N. Africa—Nov. 21 For two nights, we have ridden eastward in railroad box cars and are crammed so close together that we cannot fully stretch out at night and not overlap another body. This morning, however, we take grateful leave of these "crates" and later hike it from Blida station to the airdrome just outside of town. On our arrival at this field just at dusk, we can look out to the northeast and watch the yellow rain-curtain of ack-ack flung up at enemy raiders over the nearby city of Algiers. After the inevitable period of waiting around here on the field, we are finally marched to a large metal hangar which is ironically dubbed "home." On its concrete floor we throw down our blankets and shelter-half and, after a supper of British compo-rations, lay down to sleep in our clothes.

Blida Airdrome, Algeria, N. Africa—Nov. 22 Our clothes so dirty they "could stand up by themselves/" we spend the day washing and cleaning up—"where'd we ever collect so much dirt?" we ask looking at the murky wash water!

Blida Airdrome, Algeria, N. Africa—Nov. 24 Our days here pass in a series of as yet undefined impressions. Each morning, we stand formation near the hangars and hear First Sergeant ("Woo-Woo" Richard shout out the day's announcements, then grimly listen to the work-detail list. During our few spare hours, we wander around this "barren" base, watch the British at work on their "Beaufighter" planes and feel somewhat awed because "they are actually doing something in the war."

Between periods of boiling clothes beside the hangar, we try out our so-called French on the native soldiers here on the base, somberly handle each other's money and souvenirs, and continually nod to one another to convey a sense of deep understanding. At chow time, we watch the English line up before their mess hall for a hot meal, then resignedly eat our own cold supper of "not-so-hot" English compositions ("too much tea and steak-and-kidney pudding!") . . . With varied attention marking their efforts, Officers tell us what to do in the event of any crisis; we later and privately conclude, "they don't have any more notion of what to expect than we do!"

Our nights are spent in talking vaguely about the war ("we don't even know what's going on!"), enjoying to the full the heavy French pastries brought back from town, watching or playing in the midst of a spirited poker session. Come time to sleep, we remain in our clothes, stretch out on the blanketed floor. Some men manage to obtain bundles of camouflage netting and use these for padding against the damp and cold. Those of us on guard circle around the hangar, strain our ears at every night-bourne sound issuing from the pitch darkness. So ends another day.

27 Nov. 1942: Thanksgiving is celebrated one day late with chicken from the county-side, a welcome relief after having eaten British compositions (especially despised was ox-tail soup) for some time. Note: The British composition was based on feeding a group of people rather than an individual. A box of Compo would feed an infantry section (about 8-10 men) for a day or a tank crew (around 5 men) for two days. Compo was essentially a box of lots of cans of food. Its primary attraction was the great variety of food it had. Rather than a set menu, the British made sure each box had a balance of meat, vegetables, bread and condiments. (Description used with permission of the 63rd Infantry Division Association.) Thanksgiving dinner consists of boiled chicken, dressing, boiled turnips and string beans, olives, oranges, scallions, tea, and real dark French bread.

2 Dec. 1942: After three days of scrubbing and cleaning out the barracks, members are able to move in. For the first time the 154 has a mess hall.

4 Dec. 1942: A red-letter day! Hot cakes and real American coffee for breakfast! The first real American breakfast in months. Later that day the first A-20 Havocs begin arriving from Oujda, Morocco, led by 1st. Lt. Robert Downie and S/Sgt. Gerrel "Ollie" O'Quin. The men learn that during the trip across the Atlantic five men and two planes were lost.

7 Dec. 1942: The first overseas promotions come through.

11 Dec. 1942: On the move again, the Squadron boards air transports to Oujda airbase, French Morocco, where they meet the remainder of the flight echelon, making the Squadron complete for the first time since leaving the States. Other pilots give accounts of the harrowing journey from Palm Beach, Florida past hurricanes, the Atlantic crossing, and dust storms. Out of 36 aircraft that began the journey, only 23 arrived in North Africa. On base is the 111th Squadron,

personnel of the parent 68th Observation Group, plus French Air Force Personnel. Note: At this time the 154 was part of the 68th Observation (later Reconnaissance; Tactical Reconnaissance) Group (motto: Victoria Per Observatiam [Victory Through Observation]). That evening the men are treated to a mess kit piled with wieners, canned tomatoes, bread and jam, and cupfuls of real American coffee.

Oujda Airbase, French Morocco, N. Africa—Dec. 15 As darkness comes on and coolness slides in over our field, we gather around campfires to boil eggs bought from enterprising Arabs, test out the soluble coffee found in C-ration cans ("not so hot") or just sit around and talk. To the oft-repeated question, "when's the war going to end?" (the favorite topic next to women and mail), one man answers knowingly, "another year or so, but not much sooner; it won't take long to clean up Africa."

Oujda Airbase, French Morocco, N. Africa—Dec. 16 At 0755 hours this morning, we at last become an operational unit. At this time, 1st Lt. Fred Monthei, accompanied by Gunner-Sergeant Gerrel O'Quin, pilots the first Squadron A-20 on combat sub-patrol over the waters in the Oran area. Along one leg of the course, our pilot spots a twin-engine plane down 18 miles west of Habibas Island. After returning to La Senia airbase, Lt. Monthei leads a flying boat to the wrecked plane's position. "No sub sightings as yet." ... (In general, such sub-patrols will be within a 50-mile radius of Oran. Along with other 68th Observation Group aircraft, we will fly a close-knit, overlapping course, thus minimizing the chance of overlooking any enemy sea craft in the area. Four 250 pound depth charges will be the main offensive weapon carried by each A-20.)

18 Dec. 1942: It's about time! First mail call in two months!

20 Dec 1942: Captain John R. Dyas assumes command as the C.O., replacing Captain Mayer, who has been injured in a motor accident.

Oujda Airbase, French Morocco, N. Africa—Dec. 21 In "Good-bye, Mr. Chips" we see our first American movie since leaving England. Despite the poor sound and bitter cold, we crowd the wind-wailing hangar to capacity tonight and stare eagerly at the flickering screen.

23 Dec. 1942: Conditions at Oujda's airfield can be best explained in a poem written by WO Kalinowski in his diary (note change in spelling of Oujda):

Now the mud in Oujji's pastures,
is a sticky, clinging lump,
it goes above your ankles,
and it may contact your rump.
Jesus, how the damn stuff gets you,
how it clings to shoe and boot,
how it soaks your damn dern breeches,
how it messes up your suit.
You get mud in every chow plate,

you get mud in bed, it seems,
you get mud in your best helmet,
you get mud in your best dreams.
Sure I know that this is wartime,
sure I know it's sweat and blood,
but good cripes must I perish,
in this damned Ouiji mud.

24 Dec. 1942: The Christmas program in the hanger is interrupted by a rumor of an invasion of Spanish troops just ten miles away. Although the rumor later proves to be false, festivities are halted. Each Squadron plane has two men stationed with it to destroy the aircraft in case of a big ground attack. The muddy condition of the field would prevent any take off.

25 Dec. 1942: After four days of rain, mud, and gritty wind, Christmas day dawns. In a surprise to the Enlisted Men, the Squadron's Officers did all of the food preparation and KP duty that day. As WO Kalinowski described it, "We told them not to get excited because it was only a mirage." At Noon the mess hall doors open to a festive meal of chicken, gravy, stuffing, potatoes, vegetables, pickles, onions, jelly, deviled eggs and Cognac eggnog, all served by the volunteer Officer-KPs.

31 Dec. 1942: The year ends with SNOW! Snow fell all morning and covered the ground with the exception of the mud puddles.

1943: The year opens with a continuation of sub patrols by the Squadron's Havocs. P-39s start coming to the squadron, and by 14 January 1943 the third P-39 crashes in two days, leading many to believe the plane is a jinx.

7 Jan. 1943: The first combat casualties come when one of the A-20 Havocs fails to return and the crew, Capt. Clyde A. Knapp, Lt. John H. Gravestock, S/Sgt. William F. Pozzi, and Pfc. Edward H. Reynolds are listed as "missing in action. A search fails to find any trace of the ship or crew.

8 Jan. 1943: The A-20 planes and crews transfer to the 16th Observation Squadron while the 154 receives a new group of P-39 pilots and ground crew.

18 Jan. 1943: As described in WO Kalinowski's diary: "A dawn patrol A-20 took off right through our dispersal area in the dark this morning. It chopped one of our ships to shreds, got off the ground over another P-39 and then crashed and burned. All four of the crew got out but one of the gunners died of the injuries. The ship was burning right in our dispersal area so I had some men down untying and moving our ships away while the flares and ammunition were going off like fireworks.

Two depth charges went off before we got down there and then after we got down to our closest ship the third depth charge went off and just about knocked us for a loop. The explosion threw flames and red hot A-20 parts about 400 feet in the air. We all dived under our ships while it rained red hot nuts, bolts, and rivets. Something went through the aileron of the ship I was under. After the fire we picked up small and big parts of A-20 and our P-39 for half an hour. By nine o'clock it was work and flying as usual for all day."

21 Jan 1943: The move begins to Youks-les-Bains, Algeria. From now until 24 Feb. the Squadron will be split between Oujda and Youks-les-Bains. The main field at Youks-les-Bains is on a large plateau area banked on one side by the well-named peak, "the Frenchman's Hat." Shortly thereafter the P-39s are ordered to look for "targets of opportunity," i.e. Axis trucks, tanks, or the like.

26 Jan. 1943: The first Squadron reconnaissance mission over enemy territory is conducted at 1400 hours by Lts. Eugene P. Pitts and Robert M. Anstine. The area to be covered is Tebessa and Sened, Tunisia.

1 Feb. 1943: The food here is the best yet, and almost daily – steaming pancakes, jam, fried eggs, great slices of white bread and hot coffee. Officers and Enlisted Men sweat out the chow line regardless of rank or duty and the spirit here is uncommonly close.

2 Feb. 1943: Up on a dawn mission over the Kairouan area, Lts. Eugene F. Hilliker and William R. Yost are attacked by four FW-109's which swoop directly out of the sun. Lt. Yost, presumed to be hit and heading southeast of Kairouan, does not return to base by day's end.

5 Feb. 1943: Congratulations to C. O. Dyas who is now a Major. Ground attacks continue with the P-39s making good use of their 37 mm cannon.

6 Feb. 1943: Back at Oujda airbase, screen star Martha Raye steps from an A-20, and grins widely as she is greeted by the group of grimy soldiers who have heard of her coming. Later in the day she performs in the hanger, and later has supper in the mess hall with the men. All agree that she is "a good sport."

17 Feb. 1943: An impressive claim total is amassed for the day from 10 pilots: destroyed – 2 tanks, 8 trucks, 25 personnel; damaged – 1 medium tank, 2 half-tracks, and 8 trucks.

20 Feb. 1943: Word of the German success at Kasserine Pass cause preparation for evacuation, but heavy rains prevent any activity.

22 Feb. 1943: Pilots and planes take off to participate in an all-out effort to drive Rommel from the Kasserine Pass. Seventeen sorties are flown, with one loss, Lt. Eugene Hilliker, "too eager," shot down in a second pass over an Axis motor convoy.

24 Feb. 1943: Finally, the arrival of the last elements of the Squadron from Oujda.

26 Feb. 1943: Mud, mud, and more mud! As described by WO Kalinowski, "You walk ten steps and your feet are as big as bushel baskets and weight twenty five pounds apiece. The damn mud gets in your boots and just cakes up your socks and lumps up just enough to pee anybody off."

6 March 1943: Days of hail and rain make the camp a "brown, gooey pudding of mud," preventing flight and flooding out many tents during the night.

11 March 1943: By bumpy truck the Squadron moves to Thelepte Airfield, Tunisia, which had been recently occupied by the Germans. The entire Squadron settles into the evacuated dugouts. The base is a flat, scrub covered area set below a three-quarters ring of far away mountains. For the next few weeks the photo-recon missions keep the photo section (in a trailer) busy, supplying reconnaissance photos to General Patton's headquarters. In addition, attack missions continue against Axis ground troops and vehicles. Days are punctuated with occasional air raids from German aircraft, as well as overhead visits from "Foto Fritz," the German reconnaissance aircraft. At this time the Squadron is known as the 154 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron.

13 March 1943: The Squadron now has 24 aircraft.

Thelepte Airfield, Tunisia, N. Africa—March 20 A total of seven missions (Lts. Mayse, Osborne, Routh, Gentzler, Randerson, Friedman, Maj. Adams, Capt. Pitts, Lts. Monthei, Powell, Anstine, Morgan and S/Sgt. Myers) have been run at day's end and our pilots are becoming well acquainted with the area around El Guettar, ironically dubbed "Happy Valley." Three photo-recon. and two attack missions comprise the day's operational activity and Major Dyas, Capt. Whitwell, S/Sgt. McFarland, Lts. Billups, Utesch, Wilder, Howard, Nutzal, Slagle, Kelsey, Hearrel, and Randerson pile up a record score: 10 trucks destroyed; a 75mm field piece, 6 trucks and a supply dump damaged. From dawn until dusk here at Thelepte, our planes, pilots and crewmen are on the alert for any missions which the XII Air Support Command in Feriana may request.

Teletype operators sit in the Operations-Intelligence pit 24 hours a day. With the clicking of the keys, our Operations Officer, Capt. Whitwell, impatiently scans the names on the alert board and awaits the completed mission request. From the full message, Capt. Waters, our Intelligence Officer, briefs the pilots, has them take a last look at the flak map. All within a short time, our pilots are in a jeep, then in the air. With their going, the tension of preparation loosens and crewmen and pilots not on the alert scatter over the field and relax, some starting a game of volley ball before the Operations-Intelligence pit. . . . Only with the drone of the returning planes does everything once more take on a somewhat strained tone.

We search the skies and carefully count the planes. Some days a ship or ships do not return and on the faces in Operations, on the line, and in camp appears that strange mixture of resignation and hope. Never was there a sweeter sound than that of a plane which straggles back long after the mission has been completed and all hope abandoned. On their return to base, our pilots are

interrogated and the mission report immediately teletyped to the XII Air Support Command Headquarters. Here the information is evaluated, then fingered out to various key points. And as night comes on in camp, a more casual spirit takes over. Pilots gather together in their underground quarters and talk over the day's missions. Crewmen bemoan the troubles on the line and the lack of mail. The days pass and are without identity. We do whatever is requested and have a strange sense of passive timelessness.

Thelepte Airfield, Tunisia, N. Africa—March 28 From our first attack-recon. mission this morning, Lt. Korba Landing Ground, Cap Bon, N. Africa—May 30 A small convoy of five jeeps, headed by Lt. Vapaa, leaves Korba early this morning, heads toward the city of Tunis, then west to our new base, Nouvion. . . . Later in the day, more members of our Squadron pile into a limited number of C-47 transports which also head westward. A small rear echelon still remains here at Korba.

(by) 2 April 1943: Six new P-51 Mustangs have arrived. On the afternoon of 3 April one of the new P-51s spins in and "... really smashed up all over the field." Lt. Howard Kenner is killed in the crash. The P-51s have yellow stripes painted on their wings to keep them from being fired on by Allied gunners due to the plane's resemblance to an ME-109.

6 April 1943: The Squadron is ordered to strike camp and the move begins to Sebeitla, landing ground, Tunisia. Along the way the roads are littered with the hulks of both Allied and Axis tanks in the bombed out countryside.

9 April 1943: Lt. Alfred C. Schwab, Jr., up on the first Mustang (F-6A, serial No. 41-37328) combat mission flown by any pilot in the United States Army, successfully photographs the enemy-held Kairouan Airdrome and returns without incident. Note: Although the first Mustangs to see operational service were with the 154, after only a few weeks the aircraft were transferred to the 111th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, part of the parent 68th Observation Group.

10 April 1943: Arrive at Le Sers airfield, Tunisia. Here, photo-recon missions continue.

15 April 1943: Two new P-39Ns arrive, bringing the total number of aircraft for the Squadron to eighteen.

24 April 1943: Major Dyas is awarded the Silver Star "For exceptional valor and service during the Tunisian campaign."

30 April 1943: The Engineering Section of the 154 is converting an F-4 Lightning (photo version of the P-38) into an R-1 recon ship. The nacelle of the ship has been modified with an observation window and is capable of carrying an observer, who sits with a .50 caliber machine gun over each shoulder. By 3 May it is completed, with several Generals visiting to see it, including Twelfth Air Force Commanding General Jimmy Doolittle.

1 May 1943: The days settle down to a casual pace. The fields around the base are splashed with masses of red poppies; large black “doodle bugs” are everywhere. The soldiers listen regularly to “Axis Sally,” and agree the music she plays is better than the English programs.

5 May 1943: Major Dyas departs and Captain Joseph E. Whitwell, Jr. assumes command of the Squadron.

9 May 1943: With the arrival of seven new P-39Ns and one P-40 the Squadron aircraft total is up to 29.

13 May 1943: Two more aircraft join the Squadron, giving them a total of 32:

5 P-51s

1 A-36

11 P-39Ls

3 P-39Ms

8 P-39Ns

1 P-38

1 F-4

1 R-1

1 P-40

19 May 1943: Time to break camp and once again it is loading onto trucks headed northeastward to Korba on the Cape Bon peninsula. On the way the Squadron passed large POW camps and trucks full of POWs. Once they arrived in Korba a great deal of time was spent hunting and trading for souvenirs, hunting, rifle practice, and swimming.

30 May 1943: Moving again, this time in a combination of trucks and C-47s to Nouvion airfield, Algeria, which will be shared with the 111th Observation Squadron.

3, 4 June 1943: The big event of the day: ice cold lemonade!

13 June 1943: Learn today that the Squadron will be known as the 154 Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter), as had been determined on 31 May 1943.

7 July 1943: Distinguished guests visit: General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Teeder, Captain Harry C. Butcher (Naval Aide to General Dwight D. Eisenhower), and Lt. General Mark Clark.

15 July 1943: It is now “Major” Whitwell as C. O. Over the next few weeks, photo-recon missions continue in the morning, and the 154 participates in a “mock air-ground war,” with part of the Squadron based at Orleansville Airfield, some eighty miles distant. Training missions are also increased.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—Aug. 7 Capt. Anderson, our Soldier-Vote Officer, tells of the response to

vote application cards: "about one third of the Squadron filled them in." In general, interest in the coming Presidential Election (Roosevelt vs. Dewey) is only moderate and there is a marked disgust and disappointment with the barriers which many States have constructed to impede or just about deny the soldier overseas a chance to vote.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—Aug. 8 Flying in a sifting white haze, Lts. Turner, Cox and Smith cover the Lake Balaton, Split and Pola area and radio back reports which ground all 15th Air Force bombers for the day. A thunderous rain tonight and we gather in the Red Cross for ice cream, a game of billiards, ping pong, or just a cozy chair and a book. "A good night for sleeping." murmur some as they slip contentedly into their cot back in camp later tonight.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—Aug. 17 Inaugurating the first phase of a "Special Assignment" over the Ploesti (Roumania) oil refineries, our weather P-38's provide continuous cover over the five distinct targets in the specified area, radio information directly to the approaching bombers, and name the position of those targets not obscured by smoke screens. Our life in camp passes much the same from day to day and even the changing of the seasons brings forth little basic difference. At 0615 each morning, the Sergeant of the Guard puts a chirping whistle to his lips and produces a trembling, throaty whistle-roll.

One by one, we leave our tents, rub sleep-swollen eyes and gradually focus on the mess hall. Here all is quiet and roomy for early risers. But comes the deadline period from 0715 to 0730 and half-dressed soldiers stream from tents, mess kits crash tinnily in the air, and a long line pushes out from the mess hall door. Before eight o'clock, we are on the road leading out to the airdrome and, arriving at the line, are greeted noisily by the alert crews that have been down here since the hours before dawn.

A mission has just returned and engineers, armorers, radio, photo and gas truck men converge on the ships and ready them for the next flight. With all the morning's missions down at base, the line is disturbed only by the roar and gritty blast of other units' transports, pursuit planes and photo ships which take off almost continually. . . . Come noontime, we head back to camp, take a look at the war situation map. air our daily predictions, then line up before the mess hall. After we "mangare" heartily, and have discussed the day's news, the events of the morning and the latest rumors, there follows a brief midday siesta—an issue of the "Stars and Stripes" for some, the "sack" for others. ... At one o'clock, we re-trace our morning route back to the line and fan out to our sections.

Heat waves simmer ropily on the field and work goes on with the demands of the day. . . . With the coming of early evening, we gather in our tents, in the Day Room, over at the Red Cross, at the horseshoe pits, or on the Red Cross tennis courts. Towel-girded soldiers ply back and forth between tents and the cold-prickling showers and ask the hopeful question, "how's the water?" and hope against hope not to hear the inevitable reply, "cold as hell!" As darkness slides in, we oftentimes fill the camp side amphi-theatre, stolidly sit through a movie ("you're afraid not to go because you might miss something, but then when you do go, you wonder why!"). The movie over, we stream back to our tents, sit around, talk, read, write letters, while some make

directly for their cot. One by one, the camp lights fold into night. The guard watches the last yellow glow in camp and then that too is gone.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—Aug. 19 As the day comes to a close, we complete the last phase of a unique three-day "special assignment" over the flak-walled Ploesti oil refineries in Roumania. During this period, our weather craft (Capt. Dinker, Lts. Nelson, Taylor, Field, Leavens, Major Fuller, Lts. Ade, Cook, Nutter, Horrocks, Pitner, Hopkins, Turner, Cox) are over the target long in advance of the bombers. Circling and weaving to avoid the enemy box pattern of flak, our pilots have obtained technical weather data, plotted the direction and intensity of the ingenious smoke screens over the refineries, and kept watch on all seven areas marked for attack. In bomber assaults, our weather P-38's have photographed the effects of the entire operation. Despite a relative defenselessness against a large potential of enemy fighters and flak, all of our pilots taking part in this highly coordinated operation return to base without loss or damage sustained.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—Aug. 22 This morning, as on almost every morning, a jeep-with-trailer winds out from camp and bumps half way across Italy. Hours later, this vehicle returns, its trailer now filled with large chunks of ice. Into home-made ice boxes a box within a box, the outer rim packed with sawdust goes this summertime luxury. At day's end comes the real appreciation for this service. Returning from the line, we wash up quickly, then grab for a chilled, water-beaded bottle of beer—"nothing like it!"

27 Sept. 1943: The one-year anniversary of leaving the states is marked as a "holiday" for all enlisted men, and the officers take over duties.

18 Oct. 1943: At odd moments between gunnery flights today, work progresses on the Officer's Club-to-be. Standing off and viewing their handiwork and then pitching in again are Lts. Francis S. Kalinowski and James O. Glanville, working on voluptuous and novel character murals, and many other officers doing carpentry and other work.

22 Oct. 1943: It has been noted that a major activity is trading items, especially soap, to the local Arabs for fresh eggs, which are fried in the tents and eaten until one can eat no more.

25 Nov. 1943: The second Thanksgiving away from home is celebrated with turkey, sweet potatoes, turnips, onions, dressing, gravy, Jello, chocolate cake, and American coffee.

24 Dec. 1943: The second Christmas evening away from home is spent in the Chapel for a special service, followed by a radio broadcast by President Roosevelt, who reminds all of "the struggles yet to come." All over camp and well into Christmas morning, small groups of men gather together in the Day Room, around the bar, in crowded barracks, or on the water mirrored streets. Barbershop quartets roam through the area, shadowy figures grouped arm-in-arm wail discordantly but happily into the crisp night air ... so comes Christmas morning, 1943.

25 Dec. 1943: Sleeping until the unheard-of Army hour of 0900 hours, we finally rise and go over for Christmas morning breakfast prepared and served by the officers. But the best was yet to come. At precisely 1600 hours, the doors open and the men are treated to mess kits piled high with turkey, potato, dressing, pickles, salad, tomatoes, cranberry sauce, cake and coffee.

26 Dec. 1943: With the rumor among the men about soon being out of the XII training Command (to which the Squadron had been assigned since 1 Sept. 1943), the question becomes, "Just what are we going to do?"

28 Dec. 1943: Remaining P-39s take off to go to the French for patrol duty. The Squadron now has the distinction of having no airplanes.

31 Dec. 1943: at the stroke of 2400 hours, the Squadron is no longer under the operational control of the XII training Command. Late into the night are heard the cries of "Happy New Year" as the Squadron celebrates, still unsure as to what the new year will bring.

3 Jan. 1944: After many false alarms, word is given to begin packing.

5 Jan. 1944: After a two-hour ride the Squadron arrives at the Canestel Staging Area, Algeria, east of Oran and near the southern base of Lion Mountain. Here they wait for the next assignment.

16 Jan. 1944: A night ride takes the Squadron to Oran Harbor to board the Liberty Ship USNS George G. Meade.

20 Jan 1944: Arrive in Bone Harbor for repairs after having to leave the protection of the convoy. The good news is that troops are allowed leave into town (Bone).

24 Jan 1944: With repairs made, it is off to sea again, and the Meade joins another convoy.

31 Jan. 1944: After a stop in Bagnoli Harbor, Italy, today the Meade puts in to Naples Harbor.

1 Feb. 1944: The Squadron settles in to the Nesida Staging Area, Naples. Major Whitwell announces that the Squadron will be attached to the Fifteenth Air Force as a weather reconnaissance squadron. An attachment of Officers and Enlisted Men who have already been doing this work (the 15th Air Force Weather Reconnaissance Squadron) will be integrated into the 154.

2 Feb. 1944: On trucks again, this time heading for Bari, Italy.

12 Feb. 1944: After a week in Bari in temporary quarters at the 22nd Replacement Center, the Squadron moves to Bari Airdrome, where it will be stationed for the remainder of the war.

13 Feb. 1944: Operations commence as everyone looks at the four new P-38 Lightnings which arrive. Flying the first all-Squadron weather-reconnaissance mission in Italy, Lt. Walter Pittman takes off from the mud-rutted airfield and returns less than three hours later after a flight over Rome. Weather flights over the next year will be long – from 3 to 4 hours, and will be flown at 20,000 –30,000 feet. Most flights will take off before 0600 hours. The Squadron will initially provide pre-bombing coverage in Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Greece, and France. Later operations will include the Balkans and Romania.

3 March 1944: Three more P-38s are added to the Squadron, bringing the total of operational aircraft to “an unimpressive seven.”

12 March 1944: Major Joseph Whitwell transfers back to the States, and Captain Alfred C. Schwab, Jr., takes over as C. O.

21 March 1944: increased operational activity is the order of the day as six missions wing out over Budapest, Vienna, Genoa, Milan, Florence, Klagenfurt, Munich, Nice, Sofia, and Belgrade.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—March 29 One by one, grimy and red-faced from their cross-country truck trip from Naples, 1st Sgt. Townsend, M/Sgt. Patrick, S/Sgt. Gibbons, Sgts. Waters, Girola, Ondovchik, Geekie, Simetkosky, Cpls. Hubay, Winstead, G. Stanley, Quist, Fill-ingim, Pfc. J. Smith and F. Stanley, (Cpl. Grochowski is hospitalized at the embarkation point), all returned from 30-day furloughs in the States, come into our mess hall at supper time tonight. "Buttonholed" by eager questioners, these men are nowhere in agreement about the trip—"I wouldn't do it again—the furlough was O.K., but that boat trip!!—had us all on KP, even Doyne (Townsend)—it was worth it just to please the folks at home."

Of the States, these returnees say: "just about the same as ever—more cars on the road than ever before—one well-meaning woman asked me what was the difference between the bronze and silver battle stars; I told her that the silver one was for a bigger battle! She believed it too!—it was good just to walk down the streets of any town, large or small, see kids clean and dressed right, nice houses; gives you a new outlook on things." . . . Four of our men (John Waters, Andrew Ondovchik, Mike Simetkosky and Douglas Quist) take the nuptial vows while in the U. S. and are soon marked "old married men" and given the usual kidding. . . . "The worst part about it all was the leaving. That's why I wouldn't do it again." . . . "Hell," puts in another soldier, "I'll still take anything they give me!"

31 March 1944: On the last mission of the day, a weather-recon flight to Budapest, Lt. Walter Pittman obtains photo coverage along the route and directly over the target, thus inaugurates the use of the K-24 aerial camera which had been modified and installed by Squadron Photo and Engineering personnel. Lt. Robert P. Zirkle scores a “destroyed” on an ME-109 while flying his P-38. As he described it, “... one of these enemy planes ... attacked head on. Noting that the tracers from the ME were passing below me, I raised the nose of my plane to keep above his fire. As the ME approached, I stalled my ship and dropped down so that one of my belly tanks

hit him. The enemy plane spun out of sight and I saw a parachute open." It should be noted that in most instances the P-38s flying reconnaissance missions had three of the five machine guns removed to accommodate the cameras. In some cases there was no armament, and the greatest defensive weapon the pilot had at his disposal was speed.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—April 4 Among other results of a Squadron meeting in the Red Cross tin hut guffawing and stunned silence greet this idea and long after the meeting, this dog "purge" is discussed—"it's getting pretty bad when you can't look a dog in the face! . . . this Squadron has really had it! ... imagine the whole camp riled up over a bunch of dogs! ... a dog's life isn't what it used to be!"

5 April 1944: Outstanding in the day's assignments successfully completed is that of supplying pre-attack reconnaissance for the first 15th Air Force, Italy-based bomber attack on the Ploesti, Rumania, oil refineries. Pilots are Lts Harry S. Cook, James W. Tipton, Dana C. Lovejoy, and Capt. Harold R. Slagle

8 April 1944: Another red-letter day – the first bottle of ice cold Coca Cola in 18 months is issued by the PX.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—April 9 Early this morning, our pilots are briefed for the day's operations: "it is the intention of the British Eighth Army to establish a bridgehead over the River Santerno with a view to rapid exploitation northward toward Ferrara and, in conjunction with operations of the Fifth U. S. Army, westwards toward Bologna—this Air Force, operating in close co-operation with the ground forces, will attack enemy troop concentrations, gun posts and defense installations in the area." Then, more specifically—"the targets for weather checks are the Innsbruck, Bologna, Pola and Lugo area."

Within an hour's time after this briefing, our weather craft are heading northward to provide route and target weather data to 15th Air Force bombers which follow at first light. Telling of his flight to Northern Italy, Lt. Milne remarks, "the bombers made a perfect run and from what I saw, I'm sure there couldn't be a living thing left on the ground in the bombing pattern." Just at midday today, a terrific ripping and deep rumbling blast shake the earth and all upon it. At the noon meal in our mess hall, we at once think—"the gas supply; exploded!" We rush outside in one headlong' dash and crane to find out what has happened.

Over by the harbor to the east, a tall knotty plume of white smoke curls up into the flawless blue sky, is soon fused with a twisting mass of dark black smoke—"must be a ship blown up in the harbor." . . . In Bari itself, our Intelligence and Operations personnel undergo the full weight of the blast. These sections, in the large 15th Air Force building to the south of the docks, are one great litter of sprawling windows wrenched from their frames, shattered glass, buckled and shredded plaster and wood. Cpl. Eugene McKenna and Lt. Andrew Tice, in the Operations room at the time of the blast, are thrown on the floor and escape without injury. Cpl. Ralph Horwich and Sgt. Fred Gillies, just leaving the 15th Air Force building, also have a story to tell. "The blast came as a complete surprise.

It was so terrific that you felt it couldn't be more than a block away. My first impression was of a shell lobbed in from the sea—it had such a powerful woosh to it. 'Judge' Horwich thought it was a 'sneak attack.' People on the streets at the time just seemed to lose the last covering of control and stand naked with emotion. One woman approached us wild-eyed and gestured again and again to the sky, all the time her whole body shivered convulsively. Some people darted madly for the shelters; others just milled about aimlessly. One woman pulled wildly at her long stringy hair, beat upon people and wailed softly. This wailing was far more pitiful than much of the screeching and crying for it seemed to have a sense of helpless doom about it. It seemed as though this was the straw that broke these people completely. Lulled into a sense of security, they couldn't comprehend the shattering return of death and destruction." . . . Over at the Officers' Bari apartment, those pilots in the mess hall at the time of the blast are spattered with flying glass; many are cut by these fragments. . . . Even three hours, after the great explosion, Italians mill aimlessly about the streets, walk up and down with babies clutched in their arms and their eyes red from crying and bulging with stark fear.

In the parks and in the open spaces by the waterfront, large masses of people huddle together—blankets, a loaf of bread, and sometimes a piece of furniture beside them. Some even head out into the country. Panic is written on every glass-littered, oil-spattered street. . . . Strange is the contrasting scene in camp this day. Far away from the danger of an expected second blast, soldiers who have not been in Bari cannot comprehend the terror which clutches a people but eight miles away. Those few who have been in the city repeat again and again, "it's a relief to get out of there; the people, though not accusing you, have such a doomed and helpless look written over their faces and in every uncertain action they say over 500 dead already." ... A touch of humor is injected into this grim scene when it is learned that "'Judge" Shirutis, in Bari on his day-off, has the filling shaken from one of his teeth by the blast!

Bari Airdrome, Italy—April 11 With 24 P-38's lined up on our section of the airfield and our pilot-officer strength well above the 50 mark and about to be further upped, Squadron members look around and comment, "this is getting to be like a Group; the Officers will soon outnumber the Enlisted Men!"

22 April 1944: All enjoy the USO show featuring Marlene Dietrich and comedian Danny Thomas.

Bari Airdrome, Italy—May 15 In this "let-down period" after the war is over, we continue to go through the motions of a one-hundred-hour-a-week training program. Alerts (0430 to 0730 hours in the morning) are still the order of the day as an average of eight P-38s take off on early morning navigational and general training flights. Come afternoon, the line is deserted by all except skeleton crews. Many men use the remainder of the day to stretch out on the "sack" and "catch up on all that sleep I lost in the past year!" Some swim off the rocky jetty at nearby San Spirito; others take out the kinks in inter-Squadron Softball games.

Reading and general bull sessions manage to fill up the remainder of the time. The news that the eleven men alerted to go home are not going after all is broken today and those men who

made extensive preparations, turned in their clothes, sewed on stripes for the first time, and made a general and critical survey of themselves before leaving for the U. S. are fatalistic in their reaction—"as long as I've been in the Army, I ought to know better than to put all my hopes on something like that!—I felt sure we were really going this time—damnit! All that sleep I lost by thinking about going home!"

12 & 13 June 1944: Experimenting in the Communications "Hut," Captain Albert Adell and S/Sgt. Forrest Clark have brought forth an aircraft radio installation which should solve a problem confronting this Squadron for some time: the transfer from Very-High-Frequency radio equipment to "Long range" Very-High-Frequency equipment. By finagling parts, re-making old ones, and modifying new ones, they have created a new transmitter. If a future test of equipment is successful, then some of our relay missions can be eliminated.

15 June 1944: Word is received that the Squadron has been re-designated the 154 Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium) on 12 May 1944. It should be noted that some published information about the Squadron states that effective with this designation, Squadron "operations were limited to weather reconnaissance." However, the record shows otherwise. From this time to the end of the war in Europe, weather missions preceded a group of bombers (typically B-24 Liberators and B-17 Flying Fortresses of the 15th AAF) by about 30 minutes, regularly reporting weather conditions to the bomb group(s). With this information, decisions were made as to whether to continue the mission. In many instances the P-38 reconnaissance aircraft remained over the target area and returned to base with photos of the bombing results. It is noted around this time that many of the men are feeling "stuck" at Bari, not too surprising as this has been (and will be) the longest assignment in one location.

4 July 1944: The day of the "154 O' July Banquet" has arrived and from the morning until early evening, Number Nine Via di Rossi, the scene of the event, is a place of uninterrupted activity and feverish preparation. The evening is highlighted with a dinner, wine, songs, and testimonials.

26 July 1944: Up on a mission to Vienna, Austria, Lt. Russell W. Field, Jr. successfully tests a VHF radio set modified by Capt. Albert L. Adell and S/Sgt. Forrest B. Clark and now yielding an increased range of 300 to 400 miles. The range previous to the modification was only 100 to 200 miles.

28 July 1944: Major Schwab heads for home, and Captain James H. Fuller takes over as C.O.

17 Aug. 1944: Inaugurating the first phase of a "special assignment" over the Ploesti oil refineries, Squadron weather P-38s provide continuous cover over the five distinct targets in the specified area, radio information directly to the approaching bombers, and name the position of those targets not obscured by smoke screens.

30 Aug. 1944: Coming back from Wright Field (Dayton, OH) Testing Station with nineteen endorsements, the VHF radio modification (increasing radio range from 100 to 400 miles) which Capt. Albert Adell and T/Sgt. Forrest Clark recently worked out returns to Italy and is marked "Approved." Tacked on to the back of this approval is the memo – "the War Department is to be informed when all such modifications have been made in this Theatre."

12 Sept. 1944: M/Sgt. Dick Red is recognized for his work on the installation of the K-24 aerial camera in P-38 aircraft when Major General Nathan Twining, Commanding General, Fifteenth Air Force, pins a Legion of Merit medal on him. The award is for "his exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service rendered in the modification and installation of aerial camera equipment in weather-reconnaissance type aircraft." In October General Twining returns and awards another Legion of Merit to Captain Francis S. Kalinowski, Engineering Officer, for "his exceptional and untiring work for modification and installation of K-24 aerial cameras in weather-reconnaissance P-38."

Sept. 44: By this time 23 British and Canadian crewmen are assigned to the Squadron with "Mosquito" aircraft.

22 Sept. 1944: The "lead mission" becomes a Squadron-formulated operations procedure. Under this procedure weather-recon ships precede bombers by 50-75 miles to the target and/or on return from the target, all the time sending radio weather data to the trailing bombers. During the latter half of 1944 the Squadron is assigned increasing numbers of "Droop Snoop" (radar equipped) P-38 and the crews to maintain a radar shop.

7 Oct. 1944: 15th Air Force bombing (928 bombers, 1627 tons) is directly supported by ten 154 planes which precede the "heavies" over Vienna, Lake Balaton, and the Zagreb area at spaced intervals throughout the day.

25 Oct 1944: The first enlisted man to be so honored in the 154, S/Sgt. William E. Roseberry, Photo Section, is awarded the Bronze Star, for "meritorious achievement during March 1944 when his Squadron experienced crippling problems with newly installed aerial camera equipment – (at that time) he undertook the task of effecting a solution to the technical difficulties and perfected innovations of aerial camera usage which proved highly successful under combat conditions imposed upon them by operational activity of (high flying) weather aircraft."

28 Oct. 1944: Briefed for a mission to Klagenfurt, Austria, Lts. Blaine Murry, Jr. and Wesley B. Meeter are told that although the weather is known to be bad all along the way to the target, a comparatively small number of bombers is to take part in this operation and that their job (the weather aircraft) will not be, as in previous missions, to seek a route void of clouds, but this time to help the bombers stay in the clouds. A few hours later, the bombers, preceded by the 154s P-38s, are brought over the Klagenfurt aircraft factory. Thus the planes and pilots inaugurate another technique – "180 degrees different" from all previous experience.

9 Nov. 1944: Another change in Commanding Officers as Major William R. Dinker takes over.

30 Nov. 1944: General Eisenhower's Chief Air Deputy, Sir Arthur Teeder visits the base.

28 Nov. 1944: The radar section tests the addition of a tail-warning device (to warn of possible rear attacks). During a practice mission the installed device is deemed to "work O.K."

20 Dec. 1944: For the fifth consecutive day, 154 planes lead the Fifteenth Air Forces "heavies" to and from the Brux, Germany oil refineries. As a result of these highly coordinated operations, an "all-units" message is received from General Eaker, Commander in Chief of the MAAF (Mediterranean Allied Air Force): The past six days successive days operations of the 15th Air Force against most distant, difficult, and important targets have been observed by me with great admiration. I appreciate the great strain such sustained operations place upon all elements, including servicing and maintenance personnel, planning and operating staffs, and the combat crews. My congratulations to all of you.

25 Dec. 1944: The first radar equipped P-38 ("Droop Snoop") is dispatched on an operational flight. Shortly after takeoff the delicate equipment becomes "ineffective."

25 Jan. 1945: The Squadron's 1000th weather mission since beginning operations in Bari is completed by 1st Lt. Robert V. Clifford.

21 Feb. 1945: For five days planes and pilots continue to fly in close coordination with 15th Air Force bombers attacking communications points just ahead of the onrushing Soviet armies.

22 Feb. 1945: 154 planes supply pre-raid and target reconnaissance for "the greatest mass bombing of the war."

28 Feb. 1945: In recognition for the past 11 days (13-25 Feb. 1945) of concentrated effort the Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force, Major General Nathan Twining, writes to all 15th Air Force Units.

I have noted with feelings of pride and satisfaction that large scale effort of the 15th Air Force during the last 11 days. Of particular note is the excellence of the maintenance organization which sustains our continued high rate of aircraft operational.

During February and months following there is much concern among enlisted personnel about being transferred to the infantry. As the next months pass those concerns also include the possibility of being sent to the Pacific Theatre.

12 March 1945: Flying ahead of and in general support of 15th Air Force bombers striking at the Florisdorf (Vienna) oil refineries, 154 planes take part in the heaviest single attack (1667 tons) by the Air Force on a single target.

15 March 1945: Lts. Albin R. Wenzel, Roy A. Herres, and Gordon E. Hackbarth fly 700 miles northwards to Dresden, Germany, thus completing the longest Squadron mission on record.

18 March 1945: Stars and Stripes magazine ("Lead Out For Weather," by Sgt. Allan Palmer) says of the 154s airplanes: "These P-38s have cut six months off the war by their snooping."

11 April 1945: The 154 achieves the high strength of having 24 P-38s.

4 May 1945: Word is received that all Nazi troops have surrendered. There is increasing concern and rumors about being shipped to the Pacific Theatre.

29 May 1945: Major Dinker reads a notice to the Squadron that they will be redeployed to the U. S. in June.

7 June 1945: The Squadron starts packing up, this time for good.

10 July 1945: Some of the Squadron leaves from Naples and arrives in Hampton Roads Virginia on 19 July 1945.

And then, for most of us, the first weeks in July brought definite hope. Men in the Bomber Units were shifted to a Naples Staging area. Men from the Naples "Repple Depple" were being flown home one by one and there was a rumor of a "big boat shipment coming up." On the 19th of July, the "USS ARGENTINA," loaded 30% over capacity, pulled out of Naples Harbor and headed westwards. On board this ship was most of the "old 154" which had left the Squadron a month and a half before. At last, we were on our way! At sea, the days seemed to creep by. On a map posted below decks, we noted the daily progress of the ship.

During the entire voyage, many men slept on deck; others alternated "in and out." On the fair nights, every inch of the decks was covered with sleeping forms. On bad-weather nights, we lined the hallways, corridors and step ways. There was little complaining, however, for we were going home! Ten days later, on Sunday morning, July 29, we rose to a day of grey, creeping mist. Even before dawn, the sound of harbor buoys clanged out eerily and was mixed with the lapping waters below. With the appearance of each new buoy, we craned more intensely to catch sight of land.

As a bright grey fused the western sky, someone above decks called out, "there's the land!" Up ahead, a hazy silhouette waved in and out of a grey mist-wall. Farther along, a small fishing craft passed us and its sole occupant waved wildly and we gestured even more wildly in return. Now on both sides of us was the land of the U. S. Cars threaded casually along a ribbon of road and seemed strange to our sight. Soon, "Miss Liberty" herself appeared and then the looming skyline of New York. Not one of us cared what was said or done around him; this was a private moment for all aboard.

On the way into the inner harbor, we were met by many small boats whose decks were covered

with cheering forms, brassy bands and "welcome home!" signs. Many soldiers dashed from one side of the ship to the other so that they would not miss a thing. For each one of us felt that, despite the many thousands on board, this welcome was for HIM PERSONALLY! By mid-morning and amid cheering, waving, and music furnished by a nattily-dressed colored Army band, we had docked at an uptown New York wharf. The sight of American women and WAC's brought forth the usual cat-calls and whistling. All was as it should be! For most of us, however, it was not until late afternoon that we left the ship, gulped down bottles of milk and a handful of doughnuts offered by Red Cross women, and then hustled onto a ferry which was waiting to take us to the train yards at the far end of the harbor.

Many stood on the cool top deck of the ferry as it pushed silently on past the finger-like piers and under the grey-concrete gaze of the skyscrapers fronting on the harbor. All along the way, the ferry whistle would sound out with three hoarse blasts and then from all sides would come three answering blasts. On and on slid our craft, and the whistles mounted in number and intensity. It was as if a strong, warm hand were reaching out and clasping ours in its grip.

All of a sudden, here on this open deck, under the pallid grey sky of a July Sunday afternoon, and with the body-chilling tug whistles blaring forth a welcome from all sides, came the flesh-pimpling thought, "WE ARE TRULY HOME!!" At that moment of full realization, a thousand hoarse whistle-blastings seemed to fill the air. The ferry slipped almost reverently over the lapping harbor waters and turned in toward its pier.

Under the provisions of Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943, and Circular No. 89, Headquarters NATOUSA, 10 July 1944, the following unit is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy: 154 WEATHER RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON. For outstanding performance of duty in support of strategic bombing operations against the enemy. On 17, 18 and 19 August 1944, during a period of concentrated bombing attacks against the huge Ploesti oil refinery in Rumania, the aircraft of the 154 Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, preceding the bombers over this vital target, conducted an extensive pre-attack reconnaissance of the target's defensive system.

Prior to the attack the ground personnel worked tirelessly to have their aircraft at the peak of mechanical condition to insure the success of this maximum effort of the squadron. Facing defending enemy fighters and intense barrages of anti-aircraft fire with supreme courage and utter disregard of the extreme hazards confronting them, the pilots of these lightly armed, unescorted reconnaissance aircraft circled, crossed and recrossed the heavily defended target area while procuring target defense data.

The weather aircraft pilots, following the initial transmission of the assembled detailed data, continued to traverse the target area, photographing the progress and results of the attack and maintaining a flow of target information to the successive waves of bomber aircraft. Utilizing the vital data furnished by the 154 Weather Reconnaissance Squadron's pilots, the bomber forces carried out highly successful attacks, destroying large areas of vitally important refinery installations and supplies. The aggressiveness, daring and high tactical efficiency, together with

the outstanding teamwork displayed in the execution of these missions, while inaugurating new tactics against heavily defended targets is an outstanding example of efficiency and versatility.

By the untiring efforts and devotion to duty of the ground crews, together with the aggressiveness, courage and professional skill of the pilots, this mission, executed in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the United States of America, has contributed greatly to the hastening of the defeat of the enemy.

The squadron was ordered to active duty in October 1950 for the Korean conflict, flying combat missions out of Itazuke Air Base, Japan, and Taegu, Korea, as part of the 136th Fighter Group. The squadron returned to inactive status in the spring of 1952

10 Oct 1950: Called to active duty, redesignated 154 FBS, and moved to Langley AFB, VA, within two weeks.

Jul 1951: Moved to Itazuke AB, Japan.

Aug 1951-Jul 1952: Combat operations with F-84Es from Itazuke AB and Taegu AB (K-2), Korea.

10 Jul 1952: Returned to state control to be reorganized as 154 TRS and equipped with RF-51Ds at Adams Field.

26 Jan 1968: Called to active duty and soon moved to Richards-Gebaur AFB, MO. TDY deployments to Howard AFB, Panama, and deployment to Itazuke AB, Japan (24 Jul - 18 Nov 1968).

The 189 Tac Recon Group based at Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas was ordered to extended active duty on 26 Jan 1968 for a period of twenty four n-months, unless sooner relieved. In spite of the many difficulties and hardships encountered Col Drew F. Holbrook, the Group Commander was able to report a 100% response to the 24 hour notice. On the 26th of January all 630 personnel had reported for duty. To some this meant returning from as far away as California and Michigan.

To most it was barely enough time to wrap up their civilian affairs, and put on the uniform. The first few weeks following the Pueblo incident were tense days - the officers and enlisted of the 189 were busy preparing for any eventuality - but it was generally believed that the unit was going to deploy to the far east. Tensions eased somewhat when it was learned that the 189 was scheduled for a mission capability evaluation on the 5th of February. After the completion of the MCE the unit settled down to intensive training and mobility preparations. At the time of recall the unit was C-4 due to lack of camera equipment which in turn prevented the tactical pilots from completing Phase II requirements.

These equipment shortages were rapidly relieved, and by 1 Mar 1968 25 tactical pilots had completed Phase II qualifications. During the months of March and April each air crew

members attended the rigorous Tac Sea Survival School at Homestead AFB, Fla. At the same time a mobility package consisting of 6 aircraft, 9 Air Crews and approximately 50 support personnel from other squadrons within the group, deployed to Bergstrom AFB, Tex for the purpose of concentrated combat crew training. Remaining in place for two weeks and working in the 4th Tac Recon Sqdn area, the 154 Det 1 was rotated until three such detachments had completed a training program flying 280 sorties logging 343 flying hours flying missions assigned by personnel of the 75 Tac Recon Wing. Approximately 58,000 feet of aerial film was processed by our photo lab personnel working in a WS-430B photo processing cell. This deployment was excellent training for the 154 and was a preview of things to come.

By the end of April 1968 having concentrated on training of aircrews and maintenance personnel, the 189 TRG was combat ready. During the first week of June, a unit mobility exercise was conducted to test the unit's readiness. The results were satisfactory. On the 10th thru the 14th of June an Operational Readiness Inspection and a Prior to Overseas Movement Inspection was conducted by the Tactical Air Command.

The overall results of both were satisfactory. This had been accomplished even though the 189 TRG was operating with only 67% of its authorized personnel assigned. In early June the 189 TRG was notified that the 154 TRS would deploy to Itazuke AB Japan as a fully augmented squadron. Augmenting the 154 increased its strength from 52 to 388 personnel by adding 250 from other units within the 189 TRG, 14 from the 123rd Reconnaissance Tactical Squadron and 72 filler personnel from other units throughout the Air Force. On 24 June, an advance party was sent to Itazuke AB Japan to prepare for the arrival of the 154. On the 20th of July, USAF C-141 aircraft began airlift operations to move the 154 personnel and equipment from Little Rock AFB to Itazuke AB Japan.

Approximately 316 personnel and 200 tons of cargo were deployed and in place prior to the arrival of the UE aircraft. The units aircraft, 20 RF-101s, departed LRAFB on 23 July 1968 in cells of 6 aircraft spaced in 30 minute intervals with LT COL Joe A. Caple, Commander of the 154 TRS in the lead aircraft. The first leg of the long trip was to Hickam AFB Hawaii, 3,647 nautical miles requiring 8 hours of flying time and a total 32,000 lbs of fuel per aircraft taken on during 4 in-flight refueling. The departure from Hickam was delayed 24 hours due to a typhoon. The second leg of the trans-Pacific flight to Andersen AB Guam was 3,312 nautical miles requiring 7 hrs 20 min and 26,000lbs of fuel per aircraft during three in-flight refuelings. The third leg and shortest leg of the deployment from Andersen AB to Itazuke AB, was 1,738 N.M. required 4 hrs 15 min and 8,000lbs of fuel per aircraft during 2 in-flight refuelings. and it was launched on 27 July 1968.

The entire final leg and recovery was accomplished in adverse weather conditions without incident. Itazuke AB Japan had changed a great deal since the 154 last used it as a main support base in 1951 during the Korean Conflict. Living conditions were generally good. Transportation was somewhat of a problem since most of the personnel lived on the base annex and worked on the airbase. This required a 30 minute bus ride each morning and evening. Working conditions were mostly good, but the hours were long, particularly for aircraft maintenance

personnel. As long as an aircraft was out of commission, there were maintenance personnel working on it. It required around-the-clock work to maintain the aircraft in an operationally ready status.

On November 16, Master Sergeant Roger F. Taylor of the 189's 154 TRS was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal for advancing a camera modification for the RB-57 Canberra during "Common Cause." Taylor's scheme called for replacing the bulky cameras normally carried by the reconnaissance bomber with smaller 70 mm high resolution cameras like the ones used by the U-2. The resulting arrangement allowed for more film to be carried by the mission and saved an average of \$214.50 per reconnaissance flight.

189 TAW Captain Jess Hackney was killed June 9, in a midair collision with another RB-57 piloted by 2nd Lieutenant Donald Dalton. Flying in formation with a third Canberra over Lonoke County, the planes collided and fell to earth a few hundred yards south of Highway 70 near the Anderson Minnow Farms. Dalton survived the incident by ejecting from his damaged aircraft.

The mission of the 154 was to provide tactical reconnaissance and training missions as directed by 5th ADVON. Missions were flown in South Korea and Japan. The 154 TRS flew 1,219 Sorties logging 2,474.4 flying hours including the 373 hours flown during the crossing. A total of 240,249 feet of aerial film was utilized on reconnaissance missions launched from Itazuke AB. The advance detachment of the 192nd TRS arrived on 4 Nov 68 and preparations were begun to turn the mission over to the follow-on unit. The main body of the 154 TRS began redeploying on 12 Nov. All UE aircraft and equipment was left at Itazuke for the follow-on Squadron. An RF-101G of the 154 TRS crashed into a rice paddy south of Itazuke Air Base on 14 November.

The event added fuel to the controversy over the use of the base, and was strongly protested by the local populace. 1968. Operational control was turned over to the 192nd on 16 Nov and by 20 Nov all of the 154 Personnel had returned to their home station, LRAFB. Almost immediately upon return, the news of an early release date of 20 December 1968 was received and the process of deactivation and return to civilian life began. Demobilization of the 189 was recognized in a ceremony held at LRAFB theater on 20 Dec 68.

The year 1976 started off well when the 189 was the first ANG fighter unit to assume a Strategic Air Command tanker alert mission as the 189 Air Refueling Group with its KC-135A. One year of transitional training by the Air Refueling Group ended at 7 p.m. Dec. 31 when the first 5 member crew went on SAC alert status. They took their positions in the 'Hidden Hilton alert facility on Little Rock Air Force Base; ready for immediate take-off on a refueling mission.

Another important event in the unit's history also occurred in January with the last flight of the RF-101 by the Arkansas Air National Guard. The 189 Tactical Reconnaissance Group had flown the Voodoo since 1965. The last three RF-101s were flown for storage to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, AZ, by group commander Col. Joe A. Caple, and Lt. Cols. Robert L. Byrd and Herbert L. Wassell. Caple made the last landing for the unit in a 101 Voodoo at Davis-Monthan AFB.

In February, the 189 pilots and co-pilots began to train using the KC-135 simulator. The pilots learned procedures for preflight checklists, engine starts, taxi, takeoffs, flying to rendezvous points, inflight refueling, landing and shutdown. Everything for emergency operation could be set up in the simulator from engine fires to inflight refueling emergencies, even the flashing of lightning that accompanies flight through a thunderstorm. In May, the 189 received its eighth KC-135.

In the summer of 1976, the United States Coast Guard changed its search and rescue aircraft from the SA-16 to the C-131A, due to a change in the fishing boundary to 200 miles. The 189 had been chosen to train the Coast Guard for the C-131A. Those chosen to conduct the training were Lt. Cols. Charles R. Linz, and Dean Wilkerson, Senior Master Sgt. James Martin, and Tech Sgt. Ronnie W. Holden.

In Feb 1978, the 189 participated in a "mercy mission". A KC-135 assigned to the 189 Air Refueling Group aided in the transportation of cardiac equipment and personnel to save the life of a 55-year-old Alexandria, La. woman.

In Mar 1982, a 189 aircrew assisted in a presidential movement. The National Airborne Command Post E-4, traveling in support of Air Force One enroute from California to Washington D.C., was in need of 50,000 pounds of fuel to complete its mission. President Ronald Reagan changed his itinerary to stop in Fort Wayne, Ind. for inspection of heavy flooding. That's when the 189 KC-135 aircraft, loaded with 110,000 lbs of fuel, was called in to provide support for the 308th and SAC command posts.

With the crew formed, the preflight conducted, and an estimated 45 minutes needed before aircraft launch, they were off to fly a mission that would last 1.5 hours. With 60,000 pounds of fuel to offload to the E-4, the crew had its work cut out for them. A telephone message from the crew aboard the E-4 expressed their appreciation and thanks for the support provided by the 189 tanker. Members who gave support were Maj. Shelby G. Bryant, aircraft commander; Bobby L. Brittain, co-pilot; LT COL Jacob L. VanPelt, navigator; and Master Sgt. John S. Marshall, boom operator.

The 189 AREFG deployed six KC-135s to March AFB, CA, providing refueling support for the Air Force's Red Flag 82-4 exercise. Joining them was a tanker and crew from the 151st AREFG, Salt Lake City, Utah, supporting the extra load. This two-week deployment also involved the Rapid Deployment Force. LT COL Robert Byrd, deputy commander for operations of the 189, leading the deployment of over 130 people, said, "It proved extremely fruitful in training, morale, and esprit de corps. The deployment was a fine example of a unified effort." According to Maj McAllester, "all 62 sorties scheduled were flown, with some aircraft flying two missions per day. One aircraft had an engine changed overnight to make the mission the following day." A record was set by the crew of Maj. Ron Strickland, Capt. Dennis Wigley, Fred Smith and Tech Sgt. W.P. Johnson. They offloaded 100,000 pounds of fuel to a group of Navy F-4Ns.

One-hundred forty members of the 189 Air Refueling Group deployed to Guam in March for

Team Spirit '83, the largest exercise of its kind in the Pacific. For the first time the Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron had the opportunity to work on B-52s and C-141s. Four planes were sent on to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa to fly in support of the exercise. The 189 crews flew in four-ship cells with Air Force planes during four days of missions from Kadena. General Wassell said " experience gained from such a deployment is as close to the way it would be if we ever have to mobilize. The experience we gained was invaluable. The training was excellent because it went far beyond the routine with expanded responsibilities. Advance planning and the advance team deserved the credit for much of our success. Our deployment to Guam and Okinawa proves that Total Force is more than just an idea, it is a reality."

Its 11 p.m. in July and the sun's rays are pouring through the car window. As you drive along the winding 50-mile highway, a glacier meets you head on. These unusual conditions are what awaited the 120 members of the 189 Air Refueling Group who deployed to Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska. The group took three KC-135E to join the Alaska tanker task force at Anchorage. The newly re-engined 'E' models proved particularly valuable lifting heavy payload off the 10,000-foot runway at Elmendorf.

January 6, 1984 the 189 Air Refueling Group welcomed the first KC-135E. Local media, distinguished guests and members attended the brief ceremony. The aircraft was the first of eight conversions to the 'E' model which includes the installation of larger more powerful provided considerable performance over the late 1950 'A' model KC-135s. The aircraft was flown to Little Rock Air Force Base from the Boeing Military Airplane Company plant in Wichita, Kan., by a crew led by LT COL Robert Byrd, Deputy Commander of 189 Operations. The 189 Air Refueling Group flew the KC-135 from 1975 until 1986, supporting the Strategic Air Command's air refueling mission. The unit maintained a tanker on standby alert 365 days a year beginning in early 1976 until the conversion to C-130's in 1986.

In the summer of 1984, 87 members of the 189 Air Refueling Group deployed for annual training to the Gulfport, Miss. Air National Guard Training Site for a tanker-fighter training exercise. Two KC-135Es from the 189 provided daily inflight refueling for 12 F-4 Phantom fighters from the 181st Tactical Fighter Group, Indiana Air National Guard at Terre Haute, Ind. An average of two KC-135 flying sorties per day were conducted by the 189.

The 189 was once home to the KC-135 55-3141, nicknamed "Vintage 1". It was the oldest tanker in the United States and the fourth oldest KC-135 serving as a refueler in the Air Force. It was built by Boeing Military Aircraft Corporation and was first accepted into service on Oct. 17 1957 by the 93rd Bombardment Wing at Castle Air Force Base, Wichita, Kansas on Jan. 16 1976. The aircraft had logged a total of 7,833.9 flying hours. She had also flown an additional 2,926 accident-free hours since being assigned to the 189. Training flights have taken 'Vintage 1' to England, Japan, Spain, Alaska, Guam, Hawaii, the Azore Islands and many other locations. The crew assigned to her were Crew Chief Master Sgt. Tommy R. Welch, Master Sgt Robert A. McKown, Assistant Crew Chief, and five traditional guardsmen, Tech. Sgt. Donald L. Hester.

The 189 TRG suffered a loss on February 27, when 2nd Lieutenant Donald E. Clark joined the list

of the 189's Voodoo casualties. Clark was conducting an instrumental navigation training flight over Lonoke County when things went terribly wrong. Clark's apparent attempt to eject from the Voodoo was unsuccessful. Rescuers found his canopy some distance from the planes remains, which were discovered burning one and a half miles east of Cabot, just off Highway 38.

The 189 Air National Guard Airlift Wing received notice in October that they would receive eight KC-135 Stratotankers from the Air Force. The first of the jet-powered tankers, later christened "Spirit of the Militia," landed at the base on November 10. Then, on October 26, the 189's 154 TRS of the Arkansas Air National Guard celebrated its 50th birthday. A "Jennies to Jets" theme was adapted, showcasing the evolution of military aviation in the region.

The 189 ARG received their first KC-135E Stratotanker on January 6.

Later that month, the 189 ARG was awarded the Air Force's Outstanding Unit Award for 1983. During that year, the 189 flew 1,579 sorties over 6,216 flight hours and delivered 10,095,200 pounds of fuel to thirsty aircraft the world over.

At home, the 189 ARG was re-designated as a Tactical Airlift Group on October 1, and the unit's 154 TATS began taking on 24% of Phase I C-130 training for new Air Force flight crews at Little Rock Air Force Base. The remainder would still be trained by the 16th Tactical Airlift Training Squadron of the 314th. Along with the re-designation, the 189 switched affiliations from SAC to MAC. The last KC-135 sortie was flown September 26, and the last Stratotanker departed the base on October 1.

One of the biggest events to occur in 1986 was the conversion of the 189 to C-130s from KC-135s and the unit's redesignation from the 189 Air Refueling Group to the 189 Tactical Airlift Group effective Oct. 1 1986. Col. Charles R. Linz announced that the 189 AREFG has been selected to convert from its Tanker mission to take on a portion of the C-130 Phase I training mission conducted by the 16th Tactical Airlift Training Squadron at Little Rock AFB. The 189 AREFG took on the responsibility for 28 percent of the basic qualification mission of the C-130 formal school.

Six basic mission types were assigned to the 189: initial qualification, re-qualification, aircraft commander upgrade, local proficiency, NGB-directed missions, and MAC-directed missions. The purpose of the conversion stemmed from the Air Reserve Forces having grown to a point that they owned 54 percent of all airlift aircraft. In order to achieve 'across the board' participation by the Air Reserve Forces, the Air Staff directed that the Air National Guard take a portion of the Phase I C-130 training mission at Little Rock Air Force Base. To meet the Air Staff requirement the 189 Air Refueling Group officially converted from KC-135E aircraft to C-130Es on Oct. 1 1986.

The first of nine C-130Es arrived at the 189 Air Refueling Group on July 1, 1986 from Charleston, W. VA. The plane and crew were greeted by Col. Linz and LT COL Bryant. The commanders accepted the plane after inspecting it. It appeared to be in excellent shape and the

maintenance members eagerly went aboard to familiarize themselves with their new plane and to unload the equipment that was sent with it. This was the start of a new mission and era for the 189, which had been through many mission changes in its illustrious history.

During the summer of 1988 the 189 was given another formal school tasking. The Basic Flight Engineer and Basic Loadmaster schools, which moved from Minneapolis, Minn., officially opened here in June. The main task of the school is to teach Air National Guard flight engineers and loadmasters the basics of their Air Force Specialty. Upon completion of the course, students are awarded their 3-level Air Force Specialty and enlisted aircrew qualification badges.

In the wake of hurricane Gilbert, February 1989, one of the most fierce tropical storms on record, the 189 TAG was called on to provide dispatched to the scene, leaving LRAFB on December 4th and returning on December 7th according to Maj. Fred Smith. The Arkansas C-130's participated in a "Guard Lift" mission to transport civil engineer teams from Montgomery, AL, and Des Moines, IA Air Guard units. The Iowa unit sent 26 people along with tents, a two and a half ton truck and a water trailer, while the Alabama unit sent 25 people with a field kitchen and a six-passenger pickup truck. The units were taken to Norman Manley Airport at Kingston, Jamaica.

In addition to participating in earthquake disaster exercises, the 189 TAG became involved in the Persian Gulf. State Rep. Doug Wood of Sherwood submitted House Concurrent Resolution 1003 to the Arkansas House of Representatives in support of all active duty and reserve forces from Arkansas called to duty in the Middle East crisis. The resolution easily passed with the strong endorsement of the members present. This was the fourth time our unit had been activated since 1925. The first activation of the 189 was January, 1968; sending the entire unit in support of the Pueblo Crisis.

On Saturday, May 4, the 189 received a call from Assistant Adjutant General Lomer Chambers stating that there were 118 members of the 148th Evacuation Hospital, Arkansas Army National Guard, stranded at Fort Polk, La., with no way to return home from their months of duty in Saudi Arabia as General Ryan was asking if the 189 could help out by flying to nearby England AFB to pick up the Arkansas troops and fly them home to their eagerly awaiting families. The 189 TAG commander, Col. Shelby G. Bryant gladly accepted the mission and dispatched two C-130s to Louisiana to bring the troops home. Upon arriving back at Little Rock AFB late that afternoon, the first sergeant told Bryant as he stepped off the plane, "I knew the Arkansas Air Guard would not let us down and would see that we got home." The other members of the 148th Evac Hospital who got off the planes that afternoon were equally happy to be back home. Once the troops and their baggage were loaded onto several busses, a convoy was formed, led by Jacksonville and North Little Rock police cars and the Army Guard troops motored the last few miles to Camp Robinson for their long-awaited homecoming with their families.

The "Can Do" spirit of the 189 TAG was very much in evidence July 3 and 4 when an aircrew was mustered on short notice to help get some fellow Arkansas guardsmen back home from Saudi

Arabia in time for the Fourth of July holiday. Members of the 188th CES from Fort Smith were on their way home from several months of duty in Saudi Arabia and arrived in Philadelphia, Pa. via a chartered 747 jetliner. According to LT COL Gordon Bailey, 154 Tactical Airlift Training Squadron, the 49 members of the 188th CES were unable to secure transportation for the final leg of the trip home. Enter the 189 TAG! Bailey said a request for assistance came down from the Adjutant General's office seeking transportation in the form of a C-130. After a few phone calls, an aircrew was quickly assembled for the July overnight trip from Philly.

Nearly six months after its successful conclusion, Operation Desert Storm still affected the 189 Airlift Group. Airlift requirements in the Middle East had strained active duty units to the point that "Volant Pine", the continuing commitment to provide intertheater airlift to NATO, was in jeopardy, therefore a second contingent from the 189 departed Little Rock Aug. 9 enroute to provide assistance in the Middle East. By operating the C-130 in the demanding European environment, hauling passengers and cargo, and adhering to a rigorous schedule, Volant Pine provided aircrews the opportunity to refresh (or in some cases, establish) connections to the "real world." Operational experience gained was then transferred to the students the wing trained every day.

The 189 AW continued to airlift food and supplies to Honduras in the wake of Hurricane Mitch during 1999. Two aircraft departed Dec. 12, loaded with more than 27 tons of food, supplies and medicines. Arkansas Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Don Morrow and Janet Huckabee, Arkansas first lady were on hand at Little Rock Air Force Base to observe the loading of the 189 AW aircraft. These two flights totaled eight trips made by the 189 Airlift Wing aircrews to Honduras in the relief effort, six of which included loads collected in Arkansas. Two flights carried supplies from Louisiana. The latest flights were part of a collection spearheaded in the Northwest Arkansas area by members of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Fayetteville during the previous six weeks. A variety of items, ranging from tortillas to disposable wipes were transported 1,300 miles to Coronel Enrique Soto Cano Air Base where they were prioritized and dispensed to outlying areas of the hurricane-stricken country.

The 189's C-130's can be distinguished by a red band on their tails bearing the words "THE ROCK," in honor of their home base.

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