

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE 457TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) USAAF

STATION 130 — GLATTON ORGANIZATION AND HISTORY PRIOR TO

COMBAT

The 457th Bombardment Group (H), consisting of the 748th, 749th, 750th and 751st Bombardment Squadrons, was activated on July 1st, 1943 under General Order 98. The initial cadre, from the 395th Bomb Group at Ephrata AAF in the state of Washington, was sent to Rapid City, South Dakota. After preparation for phase training at Rapid City the Group was transferred back to Ephrata for the first two phases of training, arriving Oct 28th, 1943. Colonel Herbert E. Rice was the first Group Commanding Officer.

For the final phase of training, the Group was transferred to Wendover, Utah, arriving on Dec 4th, 1943. The month of December 1943 was spent in final training in Preparation for Overseas Movement (POM), and then transferred to Grand Island, Nebraska for final POM inspection. On Jan 4th, 1944, Col. James R. Luper took over as Commanding Officer from Lt. Col. Hugh O. Wallace who had commanded the Group during phase training. The aircraft of the 457th Bomb Group left Grand Island, Nebraska on Jan 17th, 1944, flying individually to the British Isles and finally arriving at USAAF Station 130, Glatton, between 21 Jan. and 01 Feb., 1944. The new 457th airfield completely surrounded and included the village of Conington. Since there were already air fields at Honington and Coningsby, and in order to avoid confusion of names, the field was named after Glatton, a small village four miles west. The 457th would be part of the 94th Combat Wing, the other two groups of which were the 351st at Polebrook, about 8 miles west of Glatton, and the 401st at Deenethorpe, a bit farther west. February 1944 was spent in training for combat, with the air crews in ground school training and practice missions, including some diversionary missions out to the English coast, and with ground crews preparing for their roles in support. During this time, Col. Luper and several others flew on combat missions with other groups. Col. Lewis E. Lyle was sent by 1st Air Division to assist the Group in combat preparations. Finally, the Group was deemed ready, and alerted for their first mission, on 14 Feb. 1944. The mission, however, was scrubbed before takeoff.

The 457th Bomb Group in Combat

The First Mission

The 457th Bomb Group entered combat just in time for "Big Week". In this operation, the 8th Air Force bombers were going all out to knock out German facilities, and were escorted by great numbers of fighters to lure the Luftwaffe up to fight. On Feb 21st, 1944, the 457th dispatched two forces under the command of Lt. Col. Henry B. Wilson. The "A" Group, 19 aircraft, was to attack Gutersloh and the "B" Group of 17 aircraft was to hit Lippstadt. The bombing results were poor, and the Group sustained its first aircraft/crew loss, its first two fatalities, and its first Distinguished Flying Cross. The Gutersloh group found only light resistance, but the Lippstadt group came under fighter attack. Lt. Lewellyn Bredeson, in aircraft serial number 42-31596, was

shot down on the bomb run, with most of the crew surviving to become POW's. Their tail gunner, William H. Schenkel, was KIA, and became the Group's first fatality.

The aircraft of Lt. Edward Dozier, 42-31588, was extensively damaged in vicious fighter attacks, and remained under attack on the return. Despite these attacks and increasing damage, Lt. Dozier brought the riddled ship home to a safe landing. Sgts. Anderson and Kalb received credit for downing an FW 190, and Lt. Dozier received the DFC. Sadly, Lt Dozier's radio operator, Sgt. Seymour Pliss died that night of his wounds. He became the Group's second fatality. The reality of war had come to the 457th. **The Rest of "Big Week"** From then on, the 457th was in the thick of it, with missions to Oschersleben, Schweinfurt and Augsburg. During the week, three aircraft were lost to the enemy, another was lost on landing and three more aircraft made it back to England badly damaged. Following "Big Week", the March 6th, 1944 mission to Berlin saw the 8th Air Force's largest effort yet against the enemy capital, with 69 aircraft lost, out of over 800. Of the two crews lost by the 457th, only one crewman survived. During the rest of March 1944 the 8th Air Force continued to fly strategic missions deep into Germany, striking such targets as Oranienburg, Munster, Lechfeld, Frankfurt, Schweinfurt (again) and Waggum. **Getting Ready for the Invasion** Beginning in April, 1944, attention began to turn to preparation for the invasion of the

Continent by the Allies. Several missions were flown to French targets, notably airfields of the Luftwaffe interspersed with continuing missions to such targets in Germany as Schweinfurt, Oranienburg, Waggum/Brunswick and Berlin. On April 9th, the FW-190 fighter assembly factory complex in Gdynia, Poland was attacked at great expense to the 457th, but with excellent bombing results. The 457th lost four aircraft and eleven crewmembers killed. As D-Day neared, more and more missions to tactical targets in France and Belgium were mounted, along with continuing missions to Germany 2 Berlin (4th, 7th, 8th, 19th & 24th of May), Lutzkendorf, Ludwigshafen, Dessau and Oscherleben. Targets in France, mostly airfield and rail communications, were hit early in June, on D-Day, and all through the month of June. On June 14th, the 457th attacked Melun airfield in the Paris area with poor bombing results and the loss of 5 aircraft and 43 crewmembers killed or missing. By the end of June, the 457th had flown 79 missions against targets in Germany and France. **The Long Haul** From the end of June 1944, through the rest of 1944, the 457th flew 87 missions against opposition ranging from nil to terrifying. Some notably rugged missions were:

12 Jul. –	Munich –	3 A/C lost –	5 damaged –	27 crew KIA/MIA
19 Jul –	Augsburg –	3 A/C lost –	18 damaged –	30 crew KIA/MIA
10 Sept. –	Gaggenau –	3 A/C lost –	12 damaged –	27 crew KIA/MIA
12 Sept. –	Ruhland –	3 A/C lost –	0 damaged –	28 crew KIA/MIA
28 Sept –	Magdeburg –	7 A/C lost –	15 damaged –	63 crew KIA/MIA

7 Oct. –	Politz –	5 A/C lost –	38 damaged –	50 crew KIA/MIA
2 Nov. –	Merseberg –	9 A/C lost –	9 damaged –	82 crew KIA/MIA
30 Nov. –	Bohlen –	5 A/C lost =	24 damaged –	45 crew KIA/MIA

Note that four of the last five missions listed were against the fiercely defended oil refineries. Of the 352 persons listed in the eight missions above as KIA/MIA, 83 were killed or missing, and 269 survived to become POW's. One of the crews lost on the Oct 7th. Politz mission was that of Capt. Al Fischer, with the Group's Commanding Officer, Col. James R. Luper flying as Group Air Commander. Fischer and 5 others were KIA, but Luper and three others survived to become POW's. On October 8th, 1944, Col. Harris E. Rogner replaced Col. Luper as Group Commanding Officer. The Merseberg mission of Nov 2nd, 1944. was an especially harrowing experience for the crews and the Group as a whole. A gross navigation error put the 457th Bomb Group in the wrong place, and at the wrong time. About 10 minutes after dropping their bombs at Bernberg, instead of the intended Merseberg, about 40 of the estimated 500 defending German fighters attacked the 457th. On the first pass through the Group, enemy fighters knocked down seven B-17s, and in subsequent action downed two more. P-51 fighter escorts finally arrived to rescue the Group. Throughout the fall of 1944 German fighters continued to be active, but the 457th escaped with no more devastating losses.

A note on Group markings. The "Triangle U" was, of course, assigned when the Group came to Glatton in Jan. 1944. In August 1944, a diagonal blue stripe was added to the vertical stabilizer/rudders of the Group's aircraft. The 351st Group at Polebrook drew a red stripe and the 401st at Deenethorpe was assigned a yellow stripe with black edging.

The Beginning of the End.

By the end of 1944, the Group had flown 166 missions (the Group's 100th mission was flown on Aug. 3, 1944 to Strausburg, France). Weather at the turn of the year was abysmal, but with improved bombing radar, the 8th Air Force stepped up its missions against oil, transport and industrial targets. In January 1945, the 457th flew 14 missions, 18 in February, 24 in March, and 14 in April. (The Group's 200th mission was flown on March 2, 1945 to Chemnitz, Germany). From March 1st, 1945 to the last of the Group's missions on April 20th (its 236th), there were only 13 days when the 457th did not fly a mission to Germany. On March 18, the 457th was attacked by Me262 jet fighters over Berlin, some directly over the target, coming through their own flak! One 457th B-17 was shot down, one landed with the crew safe in Russian occupied Poland, and one made it home though severely damaged. 457th gunners were awarded two enemy fighters destroyed, one probable and one damaged. Fortunately, P-51 fighters showed up to chase the Me262s away. In March 1945, the 8th Air Force dropped a greater tonnage of bombs on Germany than it had in several months before combined. In all, the 457th flew 236 missions, dropped 16,916 tons of bombs, and destroyed 33 enemy fighters (with 12 probables and 50 damaged). The 457th lost 83 aircraft to enemy action, not counting several that ultimately were scrapped rather than repaired.

The End of the War, and the end of the 457th Bomb Group.

The 457th Bomb Group flew its last mission on 20 April 1945. After V-E Day, many crews of the group flew low-level missions to Germany with members of the ground crews as passengers to observe the results of the 8th Air Force's bombing of Germany. Some aircraft of the 457th also flew to Austria to shuttle repatriated prisoners of war back to France. Recently acquired data show that the 457th Bomb Group had an exemplary bombing accuracy record for visual bombing in the period from August 1944 through April 1945. Based on percent of bombs in a given circle about the aiming point, the 457th placed fourth among the 38 Groups in the 8th Air Force at placing their bombs within a 500 foot radius, and placed second in bombs dropped within a 1000 foot radius. On June 4th, 1945, with their objective completed, aircraft of the 457th began flying back to the United States. In addition to the flying crews, most of the planes carried an additional 12 to 18 other personnel. Several days after the aircraft had left Glatton, the ground personnel were on their way home by train to Glasgow, Scotland and then by way of the luxury liner *The Queen Elizabeth* to New York City. After furloughs, personnel of the Group gathered at Sioux Falls, SD Army Air Base to await further orders. At Sioux Falls, several 457th officers and crews volunteered to go to B-29 transition training and then to Okinawa to be part of the "New 8th Air Force". Two days after they made their decision a nuclear weapon was dropped on a place in Japan called Hiroshima. The next day, the volunteers "un-volunteered". A few days later, on 28 Aug. 1945, the 457th Bombardment Group (H) was disbanded.

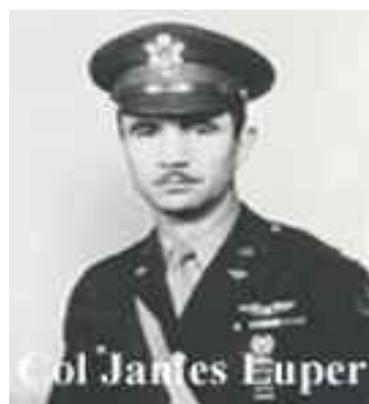
Epilogue Tragedy seemed to stalk the end of the 457th Bomb Group. On 29 July 1945, Lt. Col. William F. Smith, Jr., second in command of the 457th Group, became lost in a fog over New York City on a flight from Boston to Newark on Jul 28th, 1945. He flew his B-25 into the 79th floor of the Empire State Building in New York City. Col Smith and two others aboard the plane were killed and 11 civilian workers in the building were killed as well. One

passenger aboard the ill-fated plane was a Navy person who was bumming a ride to the

midwest. Later, in late 1951, Col. Harris E. Rogner, the last Commanding Officer of the 457th, served with NATO. He commanded B-29's in Korea and it was while returning to the USA on leave that he lost his life when the B-29 in which he was flying crashed in bad weather at Barksdale Field, Louisiana. Col. James R.

Luper, the Group's first Commanding Officer, survived

POW camp, and returned to the USA. He was later assigned as chief of security for the Strategic Air Command. While returning from an inspection trip in 1953, his Douglas B-26 crashed in icing weather conditions at Omaha Nebraska, killing all aboard..



Today's survivors of the Second World War wish to honor the memory of these men....the 336 men of the 457th Bomb Group killed or missing in action. In addition we honor the many others who were killed in non-combat service, those 99 who suffered combat injuries but survived, and that large group of men who suffered as Prisoners of War.

Suggested *reading list* of books about the 457th Bomb Group
C. Craig Harris, *President of the 457th Bomb Group Association - 2001*