

ended upon whether or not the 3rd Bombardment Wing successfully completed the mission assigned to it for "D" day. Under extremely adverse weather conditions and against intense flak conditions, you did successfully complete the missions assigned to you. I have just been informed that the coastal defense guns, which were your targets this morning, did not fire a single round at our ships in the Channel. That our losses were nil is a fine tribute to the skill and courage of all combat crew members, to the skill and devotion to duty of all maintenance crews and to the devotion to duty of all other members of each crew who have trained, briefed, interrogated and fed the combat crews to the end that they were ready and able to undertake and successfully complete today's operations. We will end this war soon if everyone matches your superb display of hard work, courage, skill and fine bombing.¹¹

The poor weather of the 9th continued through the next day but, with the clouds clearing and visibility lifting on the 11th, the 323rd Group was able to celebrate its first anniversary as an organization by sending its Marauders against the Beaumont Le Roger Airdrome in France. It was the Group's 28th mission (30th by some counts). Unfortunately, while the formation suffered neither battle damage nor personnel injury on this mission, on return to England extremely poor weather had set in with Earls Colne fogged in and visibility down to under one-half a mile with "ceilings dragging on the ground." As a result, the formation's aircraft had to get into whatever airdrome they could find. With aircraft scattered over the country side trying to find an open airdrome, the aircraft piloted by 1st Lt. Arnold Stern crashed while attempting to land at Bury St. Edmonds. To the sadness of all, Lt. Stern, his bombardier, 2nd Lt. Joel F. Grubb, Jr., and his Radio-Operator, S/Sgt David Natis were killed. Subsequently, Engineer, S/Sgt William F. Archer also died from injuries. Tail Gunner, S/Sgt Kenneth A. Class, although seriously injured, survived.¹²

In consideration both of the 323rd Group's rate of activity and its operational successes, particularly that

¹¹While Operation STARKEY was a success in that it served to help convince the Germans that the eventual invasion of the Continent would be in the Pas de Calais area, it also was a disappointment in that the Germans refused to commit their fighter defenses on a large scale, thereby limiting the destruction of that force as contemplated. On this latter point, there was a strong indication that Goering had decided to shift a good part of his fighter defenses from the forward areas to the defense of the German homeland.

¹²Lt. Stern had inherited Capt. Roy B. Pratt's aircrew when Capt. Pratt was moved up to command the 453BS on the loss of its previous commander, Capt. Lipscomb.

in Operation STARKEY, Col. Thatcher ordered a two day operational holiday. Bad weather increased that holiday to four days. For the men partaking of this holiday in London and other places the loss of Lt. Stern's crew went with them and, for many, it was viewed as, potentially, their last big time on the town and they performed accordingly.

Returning from their operational holiday, the 323rd Group's aircrews flew five more combat missions in September, all against enemy airdromes: Tricqueville, Everux/Fauville,¹³ Beauvais/Tille (two missions) and Conches.¹⁴ While various levels of battle damage were suffered on these attacks, no additional personnel casualty resulted.¹⁵

Internationally, events were favoring the Allies. To the south, Gen. Eisenhower and the Italian Delegation Badoglio had signed a full armistice and the Italians were rising up against the Germans. On the Eastern Front, the Russians were advancing towards Kiev. In the Pacific, the island campaign was moving forward with determination in spite of violent Japanese counter-attacks. In China, Gen. Stilwell was asking for an increased effort by the Nationalist Chinese.

In overview, the September books were closed on what, in war, could be termed a good month. The 323rd Group had 33 missions under its belt, the Marauder was turning out an increasingly excellent performance,¹⁶ and morale was not only good but everyone was ready and eager to continue hitting the Germans as hard and as frequent as the weather, logistics and higher command would allow. Observing

¹³In the attack on the Everux-Fauville Airdrome, the FW-190s of the Hermann Goering Squadron plus some ME-109s came up in defense. Engaged by Spitfires, P-47 Thunderbolts and the Marauders, the Luftwaffe Pilots had one hell of a time. As Capt. Earl J. Garvin would report, "we had a warm reception from Goering's boyfriends but the ever-ready Spits, Thunderbolts and our Tail Gunners drove them off."

¹⁴Capt. Womeldorff, now flying his second mission on the Conches Airdrome attack, had a good taste of the German flak—on landing, the aircraft in which he was riding (1st Lt. Luther J. Hargroves of the 456BS) had 28 flak holes to attest to the enemy's anti-aircraft accuracy. One B-26 in another formation was seen to go down in flames.

¹⁵In the non-battle area, however, six men of the 454BS were lost in an aircraft crash: T/Sgt Charles A. Brecker, T/Sgt Leonard K. Hardy, 1st Lt. Frank L. Hawkins, 1st Lt. Burl L. Lukenbill, S/Sgt Joseph W. Maxwell and 2nd Lt. Willard L. Watson.

¹⁶By mid-month, Col. Anderson was bragging that in two months of operations the Marauders had delivered a continuous assault on the German fighter forces with the result that the Nazi fighters had been forced to withdraw from front line airfields. "In this two-month period, we have carried out fifty-eight raids on airdromes, marshalling yards and industrial targets. . . . We have made more than 2,500 sorties with the loss of only eleven aircraft to enemy action."