Achtung Jabos!

THE STORY OF
THE IX TAC

Name .....

Date Enlisted .....

Attached to IX TAC .....

Training .....

.....

Battle Actions .....

.....

Citations .....

.....

The purpose of this booklet is not only to record the history of IX TAC, but to give everyone in this organization an idea of what kind of a fighting team we are, and what an important part everyone on the team plays, even though he may not fly a Thunderbolt, a Lightning, or a Mustang.

IX TAC still has a big job to do, but I am confident that every man will give more than that extra "10 per cent" of his energies which puts more planes in the air, and will, in the final analysis, hasten the day when the German doughboy will cry "Achtung, Jabos" for the last time.

Pete Quesada

The Story Of The IX Tactical Air Command

JABOS: "MOST TERRIFYING WEAPON"

THE red tile building at the intersection of two dusty roads near Putanges looked like an ordinary house in the hot August sunlight, but Maj. Randall W. Hendricks and the four Thunderbolts hovering above the tank column saw it as a death trap for Americans. The U.S. tank commander on the ground couldn't know that two Tiger

tanks had their muzzles trained at right angles to the road, all set to knock off the Shermans as they went by.

" Couple of tanks ahead of you ," Maj. Hendricks radio-telephoned the tank commander. " How about us bombing them? "

" You're too close. You might knock us out, too, " was the reply.

" Then swing your guns about 45 degrees left because those tanks are set to come out shooting. "

Sherman guns swung around. A few moments later, the ugly snouts of the Tiger 88s nosed out from behind the building. The American tanks fired immediately, but were not in range. The Tigers, however, scurried back to shelter.

" Put some bombs on them ," said the tank commander.

" Achtung, Jabos. " There was no escape for the Tigers.

Maj. Hendricks' flight peeled off in a steep dive. Bombs dropped. Tanks were knocked out.

Meanwhile near Looges, German troops were holding up another tank column. The tank commander radioed to Thunderbolt Flight Leader Lt. Col. John D. Haesler of Loop City, Neb. Because the road ahead led through the trees, the tanker didn't think pilots could bomb without hitting his tanks.

For 25 minutes, pilot and tank CO discussed the situation. The pilot won out. Two flights of Thunderbolts swooped to within 250 yards of the tanks and strafed the German position.

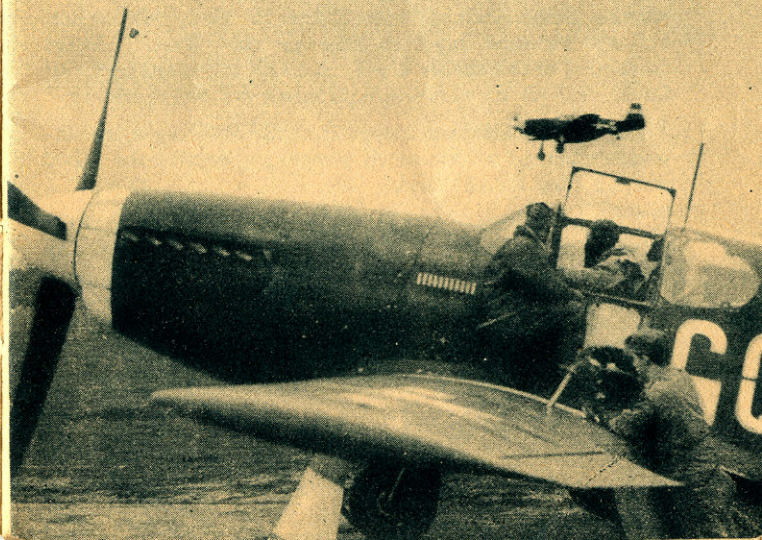
" How's that? " the Colonel called to the Shermans.

" Great. With support like that we can go all the way to Berlin ! "

The two tank columns didn't get to Berlin that day, but they made so much distance with the Thunderbolts that the Commanding General of the German Army phoned Field Marshal von Kluge to report " considerable tank losses and terrific fighter-bomber attacks. "

THE previous week, Col. Helmdach, German G-3, phoned his Chief of Staff. " G-3 reports enemy penetrated into Laval. Our troops showed signs of rout after strong fighter-bomber attacks. "

Commanding General of the German Seventh Army also called Field Marshal von Kluge. " ...We were



unsuccessful, mainly because of the sizable fighter-bomber activity... "

Col. Reinhard of the XLVII Panzer Corps called the Chief of Staff. " The activities of the fighter-bombers are said to be unbearable. *Liebstandarte* also reports that fighter-bomber attacks of such caliber have never before been experienced. The attack of the *Liebstandarte* has been stopped. Five of their tanks are out of action. "

The Chief of Staff got still another call from the Commanding General of the enemy Army Group, West. " ...The actual attack has not made any progress since 1300 because of the large number of enemy fighter-bombers and the absence of our own... "

The climax came with U.S. tanks advancing towards Granchiel and Avranches. " The enemy air superiority is terrific and smothers almost everyone of our movements, " phoned Field Marshal von Kluge to Gen. Warlimont, Hitler's personal representative in the West. " Every movement of the enemy is prepared and protected by its air force. Losses in men and equipment are extraordinary. "

Meanwhile, German troops in U.S. PW cages unconsciously coined a new catch phrase to describe the Allied weapon they feared most.

" Jagdebombers " (Jabos for short), they said, from privates to generals. " The most terrifying weapon on the Western Front. "

BECAUSE it was born of this war, IX Tactical Air Command lacks the history of an old Army outfit, but it has covered a lot of territory since activation.

With one officer and one enlisted man as a start, IX TAC was on the way to becoming an outfit at Drew Field, Fla., in March 1942. Of the personnel, 65 per cent were selectees, 15 per cent volunteers and 20 per cent regular Army. It was the first XII Fighter Command, later swapping names with the IX Fighter Command.

Initial stop for the command after it left the States was Africa. Commanding was Brig. Gen. A. C. Strickland, who also was Commanding General, Desert Air Task Force, headquarters in Tripoli. This became Advanced Headquarters, Ninth Air Force, later inactivated to become the Tripoli Base Command.

Then, after going to India, Suez and Egypt, the command arrived in England Nov. 5, 1943. Maj. Gen. E. R. " Pete " Quesada, (then Brig. Gen.) had been appointed CG Oct. 18. Two days later he was decorated with the Order of Commander of the British Empire, for work in Africa.

In practice, IX Fighter Command became IX Air Support Command. Fighter Command assumed control of all operations for IX and XIX Tactical Air Command in March 1944. On April 20, IX Air Support Command was officially changed to IX TAC.

The American doughfoot on the ground was enthusiastic about fighter-bombers. When Thunderbolts and Lightnings came over he waved to them. One day near Mons, Belgium, he and his buddies sat down on the roadside and watched IX TAC pilots come in to strafe a convoy, confi-

dent that the pilots would pinpoint targets and not hit U.S. troops.

When a war correspondent searched for boys from Philadelphia wanting to send Christmas messages home to the folks through the newspaper's columns, one GI gave him a piece of paper which said, " For Christmas I want some good weather so the fighter-bombers can come over and give us a hand. "

Pilots are just as enthusiastic about air-ground teamwork, especially those who have served as ground controllers in tanks. They think the doughfoot is a great guy, and they're not reticent about saying so.

But it wasn't always as slick. Like any football team, air and ground had a long period of practice before they worked as smoothly as they do now. Some of the experimenting even had to take place in battle, not in a laboratory.

BEFORE D-Day, there weren't any tech manuals on "How to Dive-Bomb a Bridge " or " How to Pinpoint an 88. " Pilots learned the hard way. Some of them, in their anxiety to make good, went down so low that they were caught in the blast of their own bombs. Others came back from deck-strafing with everything from branches to nuts and bolts caught in the undercarriage. At first many of them came in at the wrong angles. But at last dive-bombing was broken up into skip-bombing, glide-bombing and buzz-bombing — each for a specific type of target. Then results of experience and practice began to show.

Toughest problem was working with the man on the ground. At St. Lo, ground officers directed fighter-bombers. They didn't know how close a P-47 or a P-38

could come to the line without hitting U. S. troops. They didn't know whether to strafe or bomb a position. But they did know that they had a tremendous striking force at their disposal.

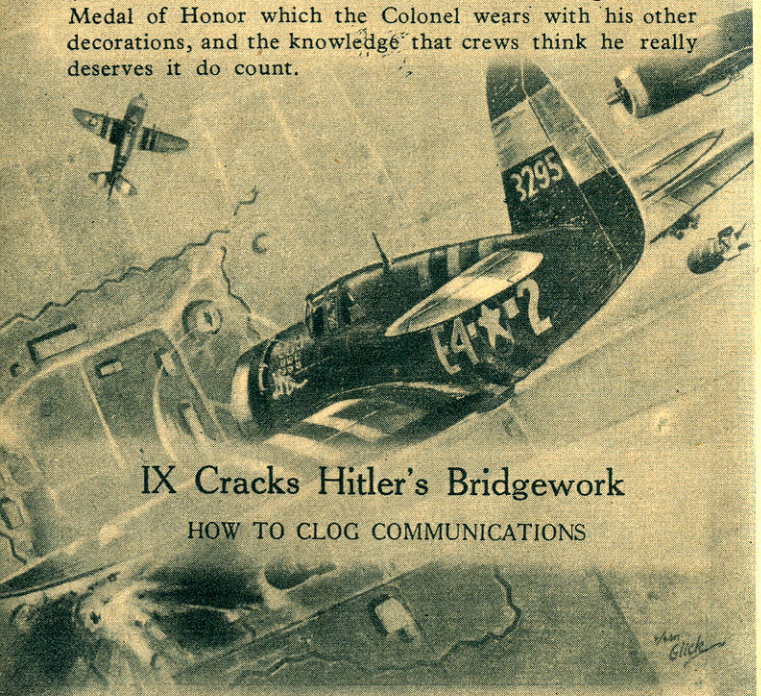
St. Lo was a good job, but more teamwork was required: a man to direct the planes, and a man to know where they were most needed on the ground. Pilots as ground controllers in tanks worked with ground officers to pick targets. This team has proven to be one of the most successful innovations of this war.

Prior to the invasion, IX TAC did escort work for the 8th Air Force. When heavies went to bomb Hanover, Dusseldorf, Cologne and the long list of strategic targets, Thunderbolts and Lightnings shepherded them to and from their objectives. On Jan. 11, near Oschersleben, Germany, Mustangs from the Pioneer Group, led by Col. James H. Howard (then Maj.) were protecting a group of Fortresses. When they were attacked by a large number of enemy aircraft, the Colonel shot down an ME-110, and became separated from his group.

Returning to the heavies, he ran into 30 FW 190s attacking the bombers. Col. Howard could have waited for his group to assemble, but he chose to attack by himself. He lit into the German formation despite tremendous odds against him and shot down three (bringing his total to four). The Nazis fled. Then out of ammunition and gas dangerously low, Col. Howard headed for home.

As soon as the bombers rolled to a stop at British bases, crews were babbling excitedly over the daredevil pilot who had saved them. They claimed Col. Howard knocked out six planes. Ninth Air Force gave credit for four.

But the scorebook doesn't count. The Congressional Medal of Honor which the Colonel wears with his other decorations, and the knowledge that crews think he really deserves it do count.



IX Cracks Hitler's Bridgework

HOW TO CLOG COMMUNICATIONS

TO IX TAC fell the important task of knocking out bridges and communications on the continent. In addition to enemy aircraft, the pilots now had to worry about flak.

Dive-bombing by IX TAC fighters actually began March 15, 1944, when a group attacked St. Valery Airdrome. There were eight Thunderbolts, each with a 250-pound bomb. Hits were scored on runway and airfield.

Targets were bridges, railroads, trucks, troops. The Army asked IX TAC to help smash the Seine bridges, so that when the invasion began the Germans would find it difficult to reinforce their armies, or to retreat into Belgium. Gen. Quesada's pilots did such a good job that when the German was pushed out of France far ahead of schedule, U. S. troops grumbled because so few bridges were left behind.

While the Thunderbolts and Lightnings were catching Germans with their Panthers down, the unsung recce pilots were swooping down on Hitler's Atlantic Wall, photographing the beaches that on June 6 became famous in history as "Omaha," "Victor," and "Utah." One of these pilots, a captain, flew so low that his pictures showed startled workers putting in the iron stakes which failed to stem the tide of men and machines which later poured in. He got a DFC for the job.

Before D-Day, IX TAC's primary job was to isolate the battlefield — Normandy. It was broken up into two phases: paralyzing the railroads, and cutting the bridges. Both of these objectives required new tactics. When enemy aircraft appeared fighter-bombers jettisoned their bombs and engaged the Nazis. But these were merely interludes in the big job which continued day after day without letup.

Following March 15, the Germans constantly were harassed. Bridges across the Seine were so badly

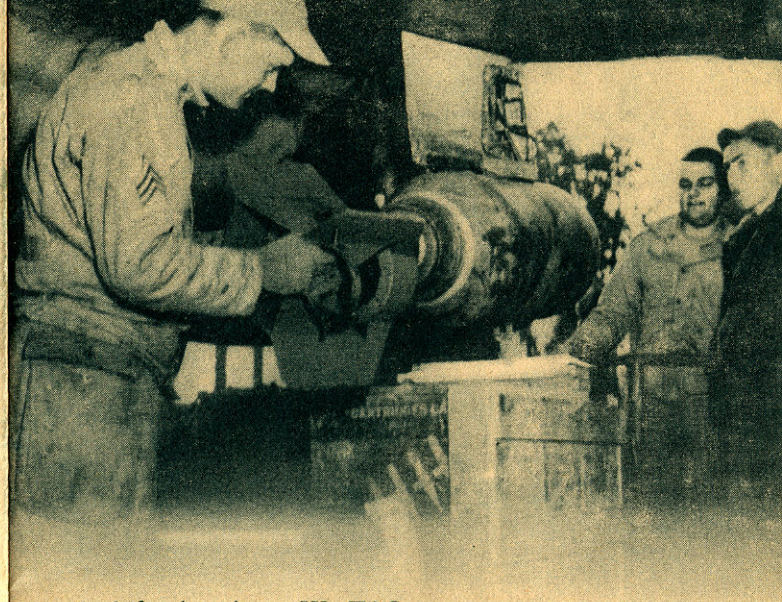
shattered that during the retreat from Normandy, the Krauts were forced to build ponton bridges or to use small river boats and barges. Marshalling yards filled with priceless rolling stock were bombed and strafed unmercifully. Tunnel-busting became a fine art. When pilots spotted a train entering a tunnel they skipped bombs into both ends to seal the train inside, then bombed the tunnel itself. Near Canisy a locomotive was shredded until it looked like a steel broom.

It wasn't as easy as it sounds. Germans got tired of having their trains shot up. They ran flak trains with ack-ack guns mounted on alternate cars. Box cars often hid camouflaged ack-ack guns.

New pilots were profiting from the lessons of Africa. As fighter-bombers turned more attention to ground targets and less to escorting medium and heavy bombers into Germany and France, the chances of becoming an " Ace " dropped to almost nothing. But compensation came later when the doughfoot, who used to regard the pilot as a glamor boy who flew up high where the going looked easy, came to love him like a brother and missed him when he wasn't there.

As operations changed, so did the planes. No longer painted olive drab, fighter-bombers went out as " silvery shapes " flashing in the sun. Although supremacy over the continent had been established, speed was more important than camouflage. The Luftwaffe still came out, but not in too great strength, not with any regularity.

The AEAF (Allied Expeditionary Air Force) had five major targets in the month preceding D-Day to prepare the



ground for invasion. IX TAC concentrated on three: marshalling yards, airfields and bridges. Hitting the first would delay movement of supplies and reinforcements; smashing the second was to prevent the Germans from having fighter and bomber bases near assault areas; attacks against the third were to delay movements of supplies and reinforcements to invasion areas once the battle had begun.

During May, IX TAC planes flew 14,000 sorties, used more than 5,000,000 gallons of gasoline, dropped over 2500 tons of bombs, fired more than 800,000 rounds of ammunition. This was the preview to the big show.

Opportunity Knocks on D-Day

IX TAC TOPS ITS OWN SORTIE RECORD

IF they had known that an Air Combat Control squadron was sitting out in the Channel only seven miles from Isigny on D-Day, ground troops would have been the most surprised men in the world. They were astonished to find IX TAC personnel on Omaha Beach on D plus 2.

Sitting out in the Channel on the *USS Ancon*, the combat control squadron broke its radio and radar silence at 0611 June 6. From then on, it directed fighter-bombers in the air and helped detect enemy planes. IX TAC flew more than 1400 sorties, a record in its history up to that time. TAC recce planes flew back and forth giving information on targets. Planes reported the success of prearranged missions. Planes on patrol were told to stand by for targets of opportunity.

There were so many Allied planes in the air that almost every returning pilot said he had to put his hand out to make a turn. D plus 1 was worse. IX Fighter Command flew 1594 sorties.

Three groups flew 36 armed recce missions. Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton, then Commanding General of the Ninth, commended them in a letter to Gen. Quesada: "On June 7, groups of your command furnished close continuous support to the Omaha Beachhead area. The situation there was critical, and by the excellent attacks and continuous support rendered by you, restored a delicate situation." Gen. Quesada added his own message to Gen. Brereton's: "It is possible, if not probable, that their efforts were in a large part responsible for the attack on Omaha Beach continuing. History may show they saved the day."

Non-flying personnel plunged ashore on D plus 2 when they stepped off into what they thought was shallow water off Omaha Beach and had to swim for shore. Life-belts didn't help much. Three headquarters squadron sergeants shuttled back and forth like lifeguards. Finally everyone landed, wet and miserable — no pup tents, no blankets.

There was fighting on the beaches, and it was more important to find a foxhole than to worry over the comforts of life. When the rest of the squadron arrived, there were enough gruesome tales ready to keep them gaping for a long time. "The Veterans" had established

themselves, and the unsung hero was a private named "Jake," who still claims he dug the first latrine in Normandy. No one has ever contested his claim.

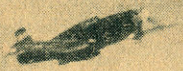
The German lines weren't too far away, and the Hun had minelaying planes darting across the area. Danger, however, was in falling fragments of Allied ack-ack. Helmets which had been shoved away under bunks in England now were treated with respect.

The Engineering Command did a bang-up job of building strips under fire. Even on D-Day an emergency landing strip was carved out of Normandy fields. Within the next week, squadrons were landing and taking off on longer strips. On June 15, planes were landing on A-1. Col. Gilbert L. Meyers' Thunderbolt group was the first to have a squadron based in Normandy on June 19.

The remainder of the command trickled over on a C-47; the plane carried everything from guns to bicycles. Once established on the continent, IX TAC moved into tents. Then came the long trek across France in the wake of advancing armies to smear the Wehrmacht's railroads and trucks. Nazi supermen had to fall back on horse-drawn vehicles.

PAYOFF was St. Lo. This sleepy, unknown little French town turned out to be the Allies' 20-yard line and called for a razzle-dazzle play to shake things loose. The High Command had the play. IX TAC took a big part in the blocking for ground troops.

Altogether, about 3000 planes set to smash German lines and break the ground forces into the clear. The area in which the fighter-bombers were to operate was



7000 yards long, 250 yards wide. In short, fighters worked closer to ground troops than ever before. St. Lo was not only the turning point in the battle for France — it was the proving ground for air support. It was the first time fighter-bombers really had a chance to clear the path to let doughfeet and tanks through.

First more than 1500 heavies of the 8th Air Force came to blanket the St. Lo-Perriers area. Then 300 mediums of IX Bomber Command attacked three areas west of the heavies. Three thousand tons of bombs were dropped with good results. Then fighter-bombers came in—15 groups divided into two wings. (At that time, Fighter Command included XIX and IX TAC.)

Groups met over strip A-10, checked in with flying control, flew directly to St. Lo. The target area was divided into the Eastern and Western Fighter Bomber areas—and they alternated between the two. The first group in each wing attacked the Eastern area, the second group the Western. At three-minute intervals groups appeared

over the target. Five hundred planes dropped 200 tons of bombs in the initial attack. When it was over, one of the pilots described the area as " covered with a pall of smoke up to 2000 feet as far north as Carentan, where it was about 8 miles wide. " The area was badly chewed up. Most of the ack-ack was silenced, because either barrels were burned out shooting at the heavies, or the Krauts were out of ammunition.

AFTER the initial breakthrough, doughfeet and tanks really began to roll. Fighter-bombers flew almost 10,000 sorties and dropped more than 2000 tons of bombs between July 25 and July 31. The mission also included direct support. Flights of four would fly half-hour shifts over the head of a tank column, and lead it down the road.

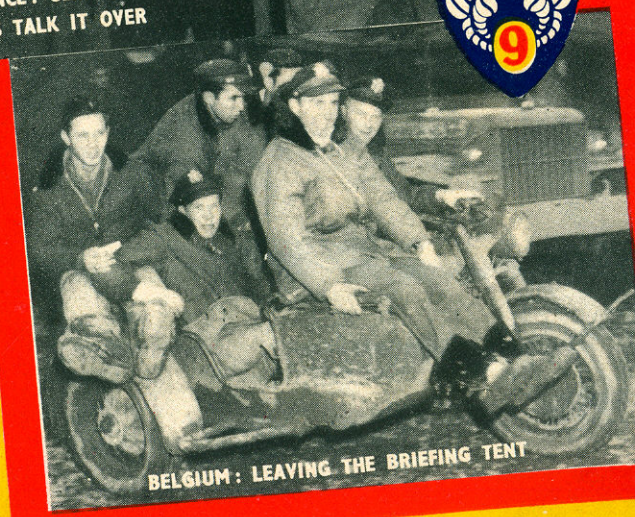
The support worked in two ways. Tank commanders either asked the planes to scout the road ahead to see if there was any opposition, or they called on planes for help when opposition was encountered.

When a single Sherman was surrounded by 13 Panzers, a flight of fighter-bombers dispersed the Panzers and saved the M-4. When a fighter-bomber swooped down on enemy half-tracks near Canisy, Krauts jumped out and began waving a white flag. The pilot radioed Army to pick up prisoners.

" Achtung, Jabos ! " was already a standard alert for the Germans. Telephone conversations between members of the Nazi High Command began blaming fighter-bomber attacks for inability to advance, or to stop the U. S. attacks.

After the initial breakthrough, fighter-bombers held a field day. First they bombed crossroads. Then they

FRANCE: GEN. QUESADA AND HIS THUNDERBOLT PILOTS TALK IT OVER



BELGIUM: LEAVING THE BRIEFING TENT


CHERBOURG
GO
STOP
GO
STOP
ST. LO
CLABBER 'EM BOYS!
ACHTUNG!
OOPS! WONDER HOW MUCH THIS WILL COST ME! HA, AT LEAST I WON'T BE LOSING A JEEP!
WOW! THERE GOES MY AERIAL!
JABOS!
MONS
BANDITS OVER YOUR AREA!
ACHTUNG JABOS!
SIZO

AIR AND GROUND COORDINATION : DOUBLE-TROUBLE FOR THE ENEMY

knocked out bridges. They smacked Panzer tanks, left them burning. When tanks took off cross-country, planes swooped down on them like vultures. On July 29, pilots hung up the scalps of 37 tanks, damaged 42 and knocked out more than 200 trucks.

Nazi Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel sent out a warning to his commanders about the effectiveness of what he called the "Anglo-Saxon air force." He didn't have to—they were well aware of it.

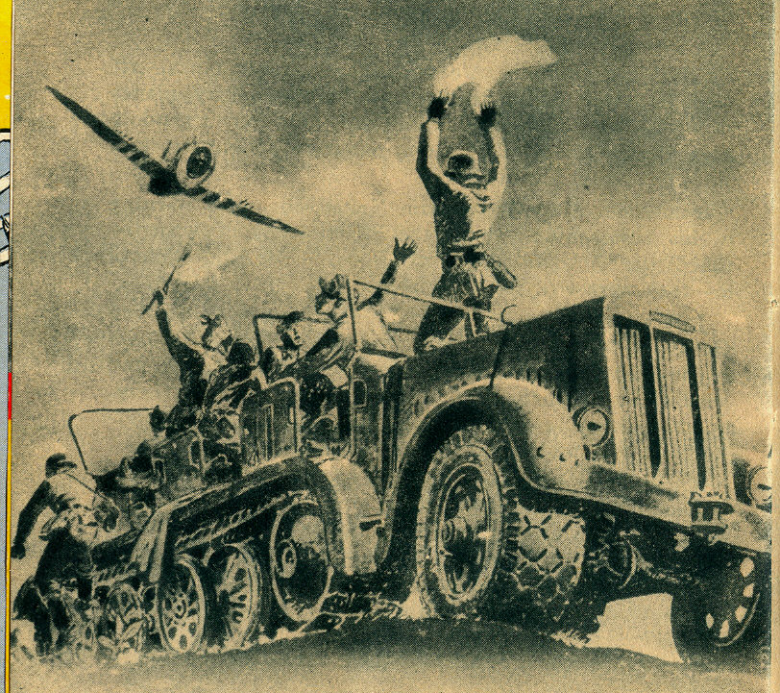
July 31 was another field day. Pilots in the air between Granville, Gravery and Avranches threw Sunday punches at the Wehrmacht. They added to their totals of ground targets, hit railroads and bridges behind German lines, knocked down 14 enemy planes, and broke up a counter-attack in the middle of the U. S. lines.

They blocked the roads. They chased Nazi convoys unmercifully up and down the highways and left so many shattered, burning and crippled vehicles that fleeing Krauts had trouble weaving in and out of the wreckage. Trucks were parked bumper to bumper like a Saturday afternoon crowd leaving a football game at the Polo Grounds. Even attempts to hide behind the hedgerows proved futile. Pilots swept down to 35 feet from the ground, smacking everything they could see.

Meanwhile German high commanders screamed at each other over field telephones. One Nazi corps commander called frantically for Luftwaffe air cover.

"It should be there any minute," he was told. "According to Col. Blowius, planes have taken off."

"I've seen only one all day," the corps general complained.



"That's one more than I have," snapped his superior.

To pilots who participated, the St. Lo operation represented an opportunity to show ground troops what fighter-bombers could do. To Germans it was a headache. Planes crippled them, snarled their supply network, smeared their plan of attack. Planes and tanks had become an unbeatable team.

DURING early August, the Germans started backing up towards their own goal line. It wasn't orderly like Rommel's retreat in Africa, but a confused series of routs. Large enemy units became isolated from one another. A few made stands, falling back slowly.

As headquarters and groups pitched tents across France, fighter-bombers kept slashing unmercifully at German communications. Through the long summer days they prowled the countryside, beating convoys and railroad trains into twisted and charred debris.

German prisoners related that they spent a lot of time digging-in to escape these attacks. Vehicles moved in groups of three or four at night, with 500-yard intervals. Then they began to fall back on horse-drawn equipment.

Aerial battles were eclipsed by pinpoint bombing, which developed into a science. First Lt. Walter J. Ozment, Jr., of Cannelton, W. Va., was west of Mortain one afternoon when he saw a Nazi tank with the hatch open. He came down to 1000 feet and planted a bomb right through the opening. Maj. Robert C. "Buck" Rogers, on a mission with some Lightnings, skipped two 1000-pound bombs into the mouth of a railroad tunnel. Col. Howard F. Nichols and a squadron of his Lightnings blasted von Kluge's headquarters; the Colonel skipped a bomb right through the front door.

One dramatic incident turned out to be an errand of mercy. A tank column was trapped between the burning village of Ranes, which it had just captured, and enemy lines. A seriously injured tanker of the column was too far away from the medical station to receive help in time to save his life.

It was 1900 hours when Capt. James A. Mullen, flight leader of a Thunderbolt formation protecting another column, got the radio message. " Please have air controller send up blood plasma in a hurry. "

Less than two hours after the appeal, lst Lt. Willard R. Haines, Atlanta, Ga., roared down below tree-top level into a hail of intense small arms fire to drop a specially packed belly tank containing plasma, morphine and sulfa drugs. Lt. Haines' flap machinery was smashed, but he managed to get back safely. While Thunderbolts bombed and strafed the enemy a short distance away, the wounded tanker got a new lease on life.

"Milk Run" Over Falaise

JABOS SLASH OPEN A POCKET

COMMUNICATIONS along the Loire had been ground down. Bridges were out. Railroads were paralyzed. At Falaise the Germans huddled together on their own 15-yard line. What happened is called the " Falaise Pocket, " but IX TAC fighter-bombers borrowed a phrase from the 8th to describe it—the " milk run. "

Maj. Joseph L. McCloskey, St. Louis, Mo., flew over the area one afternoon and came home biting his lips. There were 1000 uncamouflaged vehicles along a series of roads, but infantry had moved so fast the pilots were told to lay off. The U. S. could use the vehicles.

IX TAC pilots caught Germans trying to escape towards the Seine on Aug. 24 and knocked out more than 400 trucks,

armored vehicles and horse-drawn equipment. Next day Lightnings from two of the groups shot down 41 of the Luftwaffe but lost only nine.

In the four days from Aug. 24 to 28, Col. Gilbert L. Meyers' Thunderbolt group destroyed 426 vehicles, damaged 125. On the 25th, between Soissons and Laon, they knocked out 213, damaged 46.

But the big day was Sept. 3. Roads over the Mons-Bavai canal in southern Belgium were choked with men in green. Trucks, armored cars, staff cars, wagons and horses were all drawn up, bumper to bumper. Col. Ray J. Stecker came back from a mission to report 1000 vehicles stalled in and around Mons. The Luftwaffe was nowhere in sight. It was cold turkey.

Pilots reported the confusion as indescribable. Ground troops moved in so quickly that U. S. vehicles merged into enemy convoys. Thunderbolts and Lightnings had to be careful not to hit friendly troops.

Lt. Col. Louis T. Houck of Todd, N.C., reported at least 1000 vehicles burning and mangled along the roads and hedgerows.

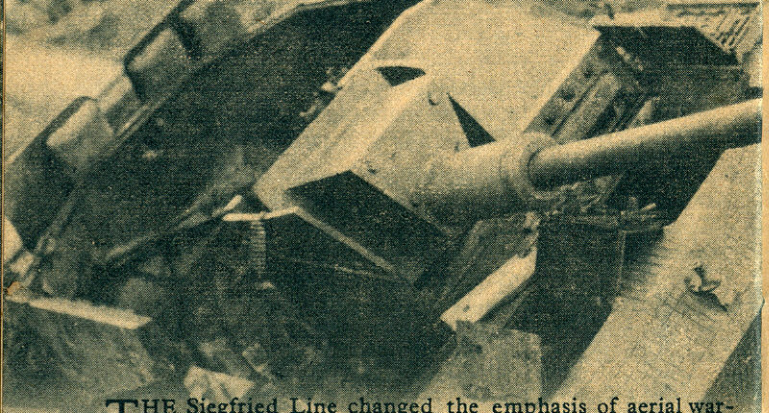
Climax of the day was the show put on by Thunderbolt pilot Lt. Zell Smith of Monroe, La. On the outskirts of Enghien, he spotted U. S. troops just about to enter a town, waggled his wings at the doughfeet below along a railroad track. Lt. Smith then put on a demonstration of pinpoint strafing, laying a gun pattern over a column of Nazi trucks. He came back for another pass at the convoy. When he waved a final farewell, the troops moved in to mop up what was left.

TAC pilots had destroyed 919 trucks and 775 horse-drawn vehicles. In a little more than 30 days, 9000 pieces of enemy transportation had been marked off the books.

To make all this possible, Signal Corps had strung enough wire to stretch from New York to Berlin. Reconnaissance pilots who flew through flak continued to be the unsung heroes, snapping pictures ahead of the Army to provide the pilots with new targets, and checking the extent of the damage. Photo recce boys took most of the pictures. TAC/R boys had to go down and look for themselves.

Paris was liberated and it was fun for a change to buzz the Eiffel Tower. The GI perched on top to record every plane that buzzed the famous landmark reported that every type of aircraft had made a pass except a Fortress. When that happened he said he would be ready for a transfer.

Meanwhile, the Germans were almost back on their own goal line, and the Aachen show began.



THE Siegfried Line changed the emphasis of aerial warfare back to close support. The concrete-studded belt was backed up by heavy pillboxes, underground concrete fortresses and minefields. No longer fleeing, German troops were dug-in on the hillsides, entrenched in cellars, well camouflaged and tough.

Ground controllers in tanks and at CPs picked out targets in front of ground troops to prevent Germans from bringing up supplies. As always they chewed up any of the Luftwaffe that put in an appearance.

Days shortened and the weather became spotty. IX TAC couldn't get planes into the air as early as formerly. Doughfeet missed them and said so.

Near Diekirch, on Sept. 19, Maj. William D. Ritchie of Pine Bluff, Ark., and Maj. John R. Murphy of McAllen, Tex., received letters of commendation from Gen. Quesada for leading squadrons which knocked out tanks and stopped a counter-attack against First Army troops cut off on the German side of a river.

U. S. fighters had the measure of the Luftwaffe. The bugaboo was flak. It still is. Pilots found it at every altitude, from 88mm to small arms fire. It became one of a long list of targets. Flak is a belt along the entire front, extending in depth behind the German line. Light stuff, small arms and 20mm, is the pilot's greatest worry.

One of the weirdest aerial battles on record took place just south of Arnheim Sept. 28. Late that afternoon the Thunderbolt group led by Col. Carroll W. McColpin of Buffalo, N. Y., nosed into about 20 ME 109s and FW 190s.

Within 15 minutes, 2nd Lt. John W. Wainwright of Marshall, Tex., who had never seen a German plane was an ace — and then some. Turning towards a group of Thunderbolts, an ME 109 slid down in front of him. He gave it a burst and it exploded. Next he caught an ME 109 in a flat spin, threw it a burst and that one blew up. What happened next made history. Two ME 109s were directly behind him. He went into a spin to escape. As he came out, he began shooting at them. They collided in front of him. The German leader, attempting a tight turn, had run into his own wing man. Lt. Wainwright ducked into a cloud, headed home, but as he poked his nose out of the cloud, two ME 109s began firing at him. Ducking back, he reappeared a moment later, in time to see them collide and burn. He got credit for six planes — with plenty of help from the Luftwaffe.

AACHEN was the five-yard line. The world was watching. Not too concerned with the town itself, the fighter bombers wanted to snag the troops and equipment coming up to defend it. As a result, 50 per cent of the missions were direct support, with planes turned over to

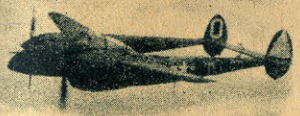
the ground controller for bombing and strafing ahead of first line troops.

During early October, every little town and village within 15 miles of Aachen was hit. The attack against railroads bringing up supplies from the rear also continued. Maj. Gen. Edward R. Brooks, commanding general of the First Army's V Corps, sent a letter of commendation to Gen. Quesada, praising IX TAC for its work " in repelling vicious German counter-attacks and in accounting for an appreciable number of enemy personnel and vehicles, including tanks and artillery." To his pilots, Gen. Quesada wrote: " It is a pleasure to have your exceptional performance recognized by the ground forces. "

The Aachen sector was plastered for 20 long days. Surrounding towns were strafed daily. Pilots swooped low to knock out strongpoints and observation posts for artillery batteries. One afternoon the doughfeet were so grateful for this bull's-eye bombing which wiped out two dug-in mortar and gun positions outside of Aachen that by the time pilots returned an informal telephone commendation was relayed from the front to the base.

Aachen finally fell, but there was no lull for pilots. Every position in surrounding areas had to be blasted and cleaned out. Rail lines had to be cut and the enemy kept from bringing up supplies. After the city's official demise, fighter-bombers started hacking away again at German lines of communication.

The Luftwaffe came back sporadically. During the latter part of October as many as 100 a day would appear on various sections of the First Army front. Some were aggressive, but the majority fled.



When jet-propelled ME 163s made their first appearance, Capt. Valmore J. Beaudreault of New York was credited with the first, which he drove into the ground.

NOV. 16 dawned cold and clear, almost a month after the taking of Aachen. It was another D-Day. Eleven hundred hours was another H-Hour. The Army had waited six days for good flying weather over Eschweiler, for a play through the line with air running interference.

First heavies from the 8th came in to blanket Eschweiler itself, about 30 square miles. Mediums hit nearby towns. The RAF took objectives farther to the rear. IX TAC did the close-up blocking.

IX TAC flew more than 200 sorties that day, despite a low ceiling that made close work hazardous. Almost as many planes jammed the air as at St. Lo. Bomb holes every 25 feet were outlined by the first snowfall.

Here, near the goal line, yardage gained wasn't big. But it represented perfect teamwork.

" Langerwehe is badly beaten up, " reported a major

" The center of Duren is flat, " said a recce pilot. Pictures proved it. Little towns whose names were only on large scale maps took the spotlight. They were hit until cleaned out, often continuously for three and four days.

American infantrymen on Nov. 18 found themselves pinned downed by artillery fire a few miles southeast of Eschweiler. Thunderbolts strafed and bombed positions not more than 200 yards in front of the line. They were so close, the ground controller said he was able to describe the entire action in detail.

Near Stolberg, Capt. Robert M. Fry, Erie, Pa., led his Thunderbolts only 20 feet off the ground to attack German artillery firing at U. S. tanks.

" I could see the muzzle blast from the lead tank flatten the grass in front as the gun went off, " the Captain said.

Meanwhile the Black Widow night-fighters took on a new job. In addition to patrolling and watching for enemy aircraft, they began to beat up the German railroads trying to transport troops and supplies at night. IX TAC now hits the Germans around the clock.

HEAVY fog lay on the ground, seeped into the valleys, and veiled the low, steep hills flanking the Ambleve River and the villages of Stavelot, La Gleize and Stoumont Dec. 18 as a column of 200 grey-green German tanks and armored cars moved up towards vital American oil stores and communications. It was noon, and U. S. infantry divisions covering the northern flank of the German counter-offensive, which had started the day before, were not certain they could contain this spearhead as it turned north.

The Germans had counted on fog to veil their movements, hoping that it would throttle their deadliest enemy—fighter-bombers.

In close contact with First Army Headquarters, Gen. Quesada knew that the Germans had driven through the Losheim Gap and were hurrying towards Stavelot. He phoned Col. George W. Pack of Detroit, commander of the tactical reconnaissance group, for volunteers to fly through the 10/10 fog and bring back much-needed information about the German movement.

On the field phone, Gen. Quesada briefed his two volunteers, Mustang pilots Capt. Richard Cassady of Nashville, Ark., and 2nd Lt. Abraham Jaffe of the Bronx, N. Y. He told them where to go, what to look for.

The two-man team flew

in valleys, sometimes less than 100 feet off the ground in order to see below and still miss the hills. Near Stavelot, they spotted 60 Nazi tanks and armored vehicles moving through the mist.

" We made three runs over that column, and the Germans were so surprised to see us they didn't fire until the last run, " said Capt. Cassady, who wears the DFC, the Purple Heart and the Air Medal with 13 clusters. " We could see their faces as they threw everything they had at us, from rifles to 20mm stuff. "

The two pilots radioed their findings to Col. Meyers, 27-year-old combat operations chief. Col. Meyers already had organized a fighter-bomber mission using the " Hell Hawks " of Col. Ray J. Stecker's Thunderbolt group. The " Panzer Dusters, " led by Lt. Col. Frank S. Perego of Canandaigua, N. Y., likewise were alerted.

Four-plane flights took off for the target area, each carrying two 500-pound bombs. Twisting through the fog between 450-foot hills over winding backgrounds, the first flight caught more than 60 tanks and 200 trucks. They bombed 30 tanks, strafed 20 trucks. Three planes were hit by flak. One didn't come back.

Col. Meyers continued to send four-plane flights shuttling over the area until 1700 hours that afternoon, seven missions in all. At the end of the day, pilots reported 126 armored vehicles and trucks destroyed, 34 damaged. The crack Adolph Hitler Division had been stopped short of its objective. A lightly armed airborne division was assembled to finish the job. On Dec. 20, a U. S. armored division locked around the column, and the threat was ended.

Air and Ground Make a Team

QUOTE : OH, HOW WE LOVE YOU GUYS

OFFICERS and GIs behind the scenes may never rate an Air Medal, but the pilot depends on their work. Some are in fighter control, the heart of IX TAC.

In a high-ceilinged dark-paneled room are officers and EM at telephones. Below is a board showing the First Army front. The men are seated in tiers. As reports come in, GIs move little standards from one grid square to another. If the colored square on the standard is yellow, it denotes enemy planes. If green, the aircraft is friendly. Those numbered designate IX TAC squadrons or groups.

The men with the phones talk with the pilots. When a man gets lost, fighter control tells him where he is and gives him a fix. If he cannot contact the ground controller, it will take him to his target and bring him back. Many a time an officer with conviction in his voice has brought a pilot home by telephone.

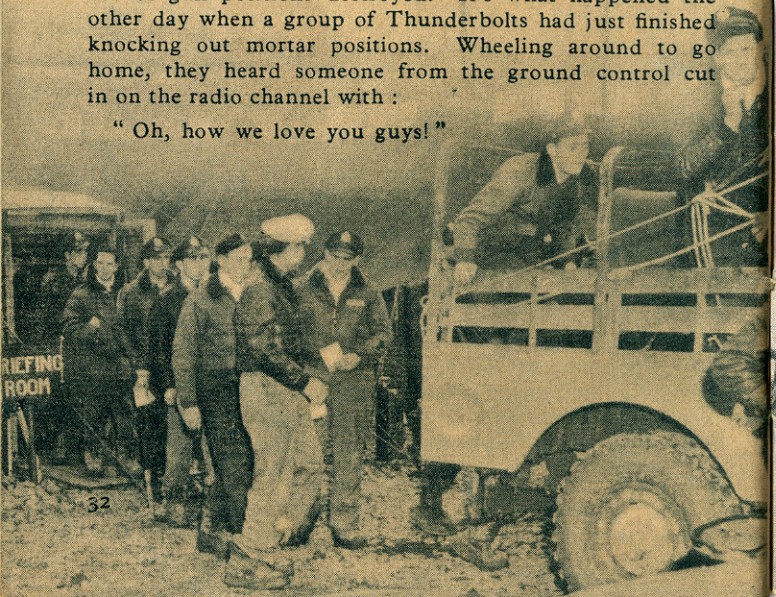
One pilot, whose plane was hit by flak, prepared to bail out. The controller talked him out of it, led him home for a belly landing. Pilot and ship sustained only minor damage. A few days later, the appreciative airman came to headquarters to thank the man who had brought him in.

Because of its fluid nature, TAC has had almost every group in 9th Air Force under its command at one time or another. At present all three types of fighter planes, Thunderbolts, Lightnings and Mustangs, are represented. All groups have done praiseworthy jobs.

TAC had its best day in North Africa during the rout of Rommel, when the Nazis were making a desperate effort to supply their forces by air. A group engaged 130 enemy aircraft off the coast of Cape Bon, Tunisia and destroyed 58 JU 52s, 17 ME 109s, probably destroyed one ME 109, 10 damaged. Six American planes were lost.

In the final analysis, it isn't the number of planes knocked out, nor the number of pillboxes cracked, nor the number of gun positions destroyed. It's what happened the other day when a group of Thunderbolts had just finished knocking out mortar positions. Wheeling around to go home, they heard someone from the ground control cut in on the radio channel with :

" Oh, how we love you guys! "



The Team —

AUTOGRAPHS

This is one of a series of G. I. Stories of the Ground, Air and Service Forces in the European Theater of Operations, to be issued by the Stars and Stripes, a publication of the Information and Education Division, Special and Information Services, ETOUSA... Major General E. R. Quesada, commanding the IX Tactical Air Command, lent his cooperation to the preparation of the pamphlet and basic material was supplied to the editors by his personnel.

Photos: 9th U. S. Air Force

Printed by Curial-Archereau, Paris.