



*Army Engineers clearing rubble at Istres, France, June 1945.*

across the Atlantic with full crews and varying numbers of passengers who were scheduled for discharge upon reaching home. In its five months of existence, Project White transported 33,850 high-point passengers as well as 50,764 crew members back to the United States.(9)

Project Green proved to be equally successful. The 40th Bombardment Wing moved the 92nd Bombardment Group (H) and the 384th Bombardment Group (H) from their home stations at Podington and Grafton Underwood respectively to Istres, France, in June 1945. The base at Istres was located near Marseilles, in the south of France. (10) Prior to conducting the airlift of high pointers from Istres to the ATC embarkation point at Casablanca, 850 miles distant, the 92nd and 384th Groups' B-17s were stripped of all armament, modified, and refitted as passenger aircraft. Each Fortress was altered to accommodate 30 passengers. In addition, the experienced, mission-weary pilots of the two groups, despite their proven skills in bombing raids, were subjected to a brief training period designed to convert them into transport pilots. (11)

The officers and men of the 92nd and 384th Groups were advised that they were to be an important part of the massive redeployment of troops from Europe. Project Green, they were told, called for round-the-clock airlifts of high-pointers from Istres to Casablanca. There, it was added, the Air Transport Command would continue the airlift to the United States. An ancillary responsibility for the two groups' air crews was to return from Morocco with French citizens who had been in exile during the war. (12)

General Eisenhower's selection of the 40th Bombardment

Wing's units made sense. The 92nd and 384th Groups' war records were impressively identical, and the "can-do" attitude of the personnel in both groups revealed the highest level of dedication and commitment needed for the task at hand in Project Green. Highly decorated as units, with a great record of individual acts of heroism, the two groups, Eisenhower's staff believed, would carry out their duties with precision and the highest measure of safety. (13)

The advanced parties of the two groups arrived at Istres, a former Luftwaffe base, in early June. They found a depressing scene of destruction and chaos. The Germans, who had occupied the base during the war, had destroyed everything in sight, and had thoroughly mined the area. By the time of the arrival of the advance parties, the engineers were in the process of cleaning up the rubble and most of the mines had been swept. German prisoners of war were everywhere, assisting the engineers in their task of rebuilding the base. (14)

It was acknowledged among the men of the 92nd and 384th Bombardment Groups that no French travel folders described the region around Istres, for it was an arid, dusty wasteland that, upon first view, shocked the new inhabitants. Thirty-five miles north of Marseilles, the town of Istres sits in the middle of a desolate, flat desert that is exposed to the miserable weather phenomenon known as the Mistral. The Mistral, a northerly wind that blows an average of 110 days a year, causes the air to be filled with a fine brown dust that penetrates everything. It not only caused great discomfort for the residents of Istres, but the Mistral was a menace to the B-17 engines and vehicles on the base. (15)

The logistical problem of moving the two bomb groups from England to Istres in June 1945 was a challenge of endurance and commitment. The air base at Podington and Grafton Underwood were, the wartime homes of the 40th Bombardment Wing, was literally stripped of all its men and equipment and they were transferred to their new home in southern France. The vehicles packed with crates and personal belongings, crossed the English Channel in LCTs from Southampton to Le Havre. From Le Havre, it was a 710-mile cross-country journey to Istres. Because of the maximum effort emphasis placed on Project Green by General Eisenhower's staff, the convoy wasted no time in reaching its destination. The caravan of trucks averaged 10 hour days on the road, with the men sleeping in the open along the route and eating C Rations. (16)

The first convoy arrived at Istres on 5 June after eight days of steady driving. Over 500 vehicles from both groups reached the base by 17 June, and in the midst of those arrivals, an average of 40 aircraft were landing each day. The 92nd Bombardment Group's B-17s experienced an average of 40 flat tires per day as a consequence of the rough runway not yet repaired by the engineers. (17)

Once the transfer of the units and their planes and equipment was complete, their problems at Istres were threefold: sanitation, dust, and a lack of suitable quarters. The Germans had been typically thorough in their destructive exit from Istres. They had blown up all buildings, poured concrete into the drainage systems and wells, and the runway was pockmarked with holes caused by explosive charges. During Germany's occupation of Vichy France from 1940 to 1945, the field had been a major Luftwaffe headquarters for fighter and reconnaissance units in southern France. When they were forced to evacuate the area, the Germans were determined to render Istres useless to the Allies. As a consequence of the destruction, the engineers were faced with enormous sanita-