

The Supply Mission of 11 September 1944



RAF Personnel unloading munitions and gasoline drums at Bron, France September 1944.

In the Story Teamwork we learned how the Tactical Air Force (XIX TAC) fighter-bombers assisted the ground forces in their advance toward Germany. We learned in General Patton's headlong race across France in the month of August 1944, the supporting fighter-bombers were using up supplies of gasoline, bombs, and ammunition faster than could be supplied through normal channels. The 484th Bomb Group was asked to ferry supplies to Lyon and Bron, France the following month of September.

On September 11, 1944, the first flight took place. Thirty Six B-24s from the 484th BG set out for France flying via Lido De Roma (41-44N, 12-14E) to Bron, France airdrome (45-45N, 04.55E). Two attack units were used, the first led by Col. Keese in Able 11, seconded by Maj. Brennan and Maj. Dufour in Able 12. The second attack unit was led by Maj. Paine in Dog 11, seconded by Maj. Lollar in Dog 12. Aircraft were ordered to take off at one and a half minute intervals. After landing, the aircraft were parked nose to tail, five feet apart on the taxi strip to enhance unloading. The bombs were lowered by hoist instead of toggling them one at a time. The bomb fuses were packed separately making the bombs safe. However for anyone ever hearing the dull thud of bombs falling to the ground it is disheartening at best and for the inexperienced the sound could cause feelings of great panic. The work force had to unload the aircraft quickly and without stress. Raw gasoline not handled properly can lead to sudden conflagration as happened on one occasion to the 461st Bomb Group. A picture of the fire was published in *Torretta Flyer* No# 7 in Spring 1983.

In order to conserve fuel the flight was flown at 9000 ft. Power settings for climb were: 45 inches of mercury at 2550 RPM, Cruise at 32 inches of mercury and RPM adjusted to maintain cruise speed 160 MPH. Settings for return to *Torretta* were lowered to Climb at 35 inches, 2400 RPM, Cruise at 31 inches, and RPM to fly at 155

indicated. This mission was flown in formation for mutual protection as no fighter escort was provided. The groups, 451st, 461st and 484th Bomb Groups flew the mission with a separation of 30 minutes between them, with the 484th in the lead. Loose column of waves were to be flown without the usual Air Force formations.

Arrangements were made to provide emergency landing at Istres Le Tube (43-31-30N, 6-41-50E) and St. Raphael (43-25-50N, 6-41-10E). Both fields had a 150 foot wide runway of 6000 feet in length.

50 gallon drums were carried also to off load the gasoline. The outboard tanks (Tokyo) were drained first into the drums using refueling units carried to France by the first wave, The second wave were to return the refueling units back to base. The airplane commander kept a record of off loaded stores and fuel. Each aircraft carried 12 each 500 lb. bombs, 18 each 50 gallon drums, 2 boxes of belted 50 calibre ammunition. In addition the 18 aircraft of the 451st and 36 B-24s of the 461st carried 450 gallon bomb bay tanks,

All aircraft carried complete combat crews with the exception of the bombardiers, and one crew chief and one armament specialist. To carry this load the ball turrets and the tail and waste guns were removed. Weight and balance was maintained by putting the crews forward. Crews were advised to carry bedding rolls, mess kits, lunches and warm clothes. The climate was expected to be cold.

Pilots were advised to land and brake on the concrete runway at Bron and reduce speed before reaching the overrun. The paved runway was 3500 feet in length with a gravel overrun of 2500 feet. Aircraft commanders were advised to go west of Marseilles and follow the briefed route exactly. Aircraft that could not return to base before dark were advised to stay in France. The mission was planned for nine hours.