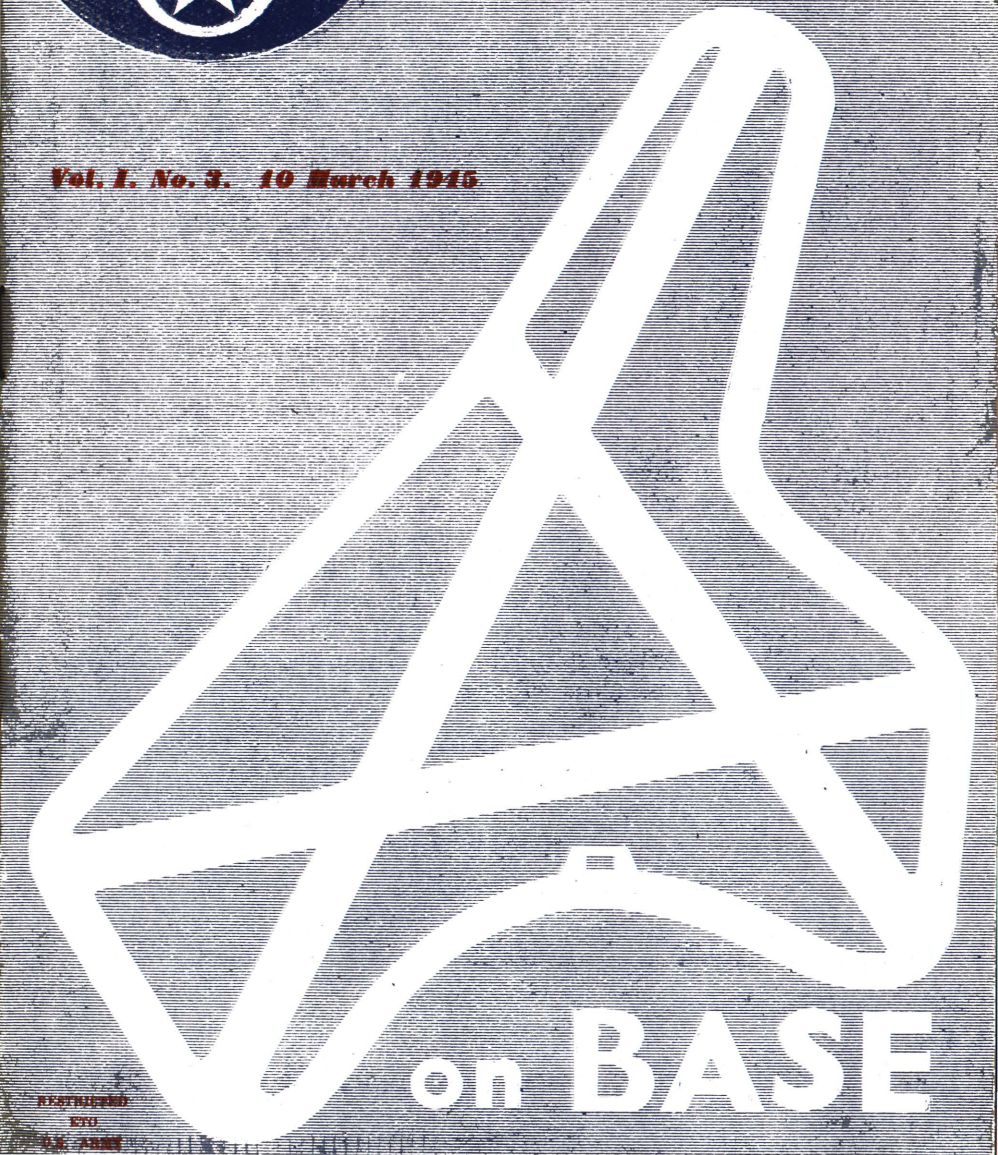
ARMY TALKS FOR THE

EIGHTH AIR FORCE

Vol. I. No. 3. 10 March 1945



HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH AIR FORCE

Office of the Commanding General

APO 634

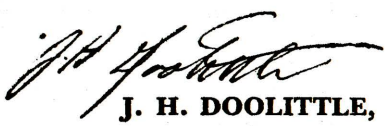
10 March, 1945.

Men and Women of the Eighth,

The first two issues of Eighth Air Force Army Talks have provided you with a clearer picture of who we are, what we have done, and—in the words of Sir Charles Portal, Marshal of the Royal Air Force—how the Eighth has grown to form with the RAF " a great two-handed sword cutting from the West at the German capacity to wage war."

This third issue, " On Base," is more than a true story. It is an account which typifies life and work as it exists on scores of American heavy bomber stations in England. Bases such as this one, and its fighter counterparts, working hand-in-hand with reconnaissance and service echelons, are the front lines of the strategic air war. Each one of you should derive deep satisfaction from the realization that the job you are doing, whatever it may be, is indispensable to successful operations against the enemy.

" On Base " could never have been written without the conscientious and continuing effort of the men and women of all echelons of a great air-ground team—the Eighth Air Force. You are doing a splendid job, and you may be justly proud of being members of one of our country's most formidable fighting forces.



J. H. DOOLITTLE,
Lieut. General USA Commanding.

ARMY TALKS

"The purpose of the program is to give the soldier psychological preparation for combat, and a better realization of the import of every phase of his military training. Emphasis will be placed on combat orientation. The mental and physical conditioning of the enemy, and a proper evaluation of the enemy's weapons and fighting qualities will be stressed. A better understanding of the background o the war, and the soldier's responsibilities in the post-war world will also be developed."

BY COMMAND OF GENERAL EISENHOWER.

(Extract from letter ETO. 1 August 1944, AG 352/2 OpSS, Subject : Combat Orientation Program.)

ON BASE

STRIKING ARM OF THE EIGHTH

The bomber base described in this edition is an actual base and the incidents recorded are part of its history. The editors wish to express their thanks for the wholehearted assistance which they received from its officers and men. Although each Group has its own special procedures, the spirit and life of this Group are symbolic of the traditions and achievements of every Eighth Air Force base.

"WHAT did you do over in Europe ?"

"I was in the Eighth Air Force."

"Oh, how exciting ! What did it feel like, flying over Germany ?"

"Ma'am, I didn't fly over Germany, or anywhere else. I stuck around our base in England."

"Do tell me what it was like."

Well, what is it like ? You could tell them about your job, about the guys in the outfit, and chow and so on. But when you come to think of it, life on a bomber base is hard to describe. It's hard to give the feeling of being tucked away in the peaceful English countryside and yet living at the heart of the aerial assault on Germany. That is perhaps the strangest thing about a bomber base—its contrasts. For a week straight you may be sweating your guts out day and night, and then for several days you are sitting around wondering when the weather will clear. In most jobs everything happens at once and then you're waiting for the next piece of trouble to come up.

There are plenty of other contrasts on the base. Your jeep may be held up by a lumbering wagon on its way to a three hundred year old farmhouse just off the perimeter track, and surrounded by the newly erected temporary

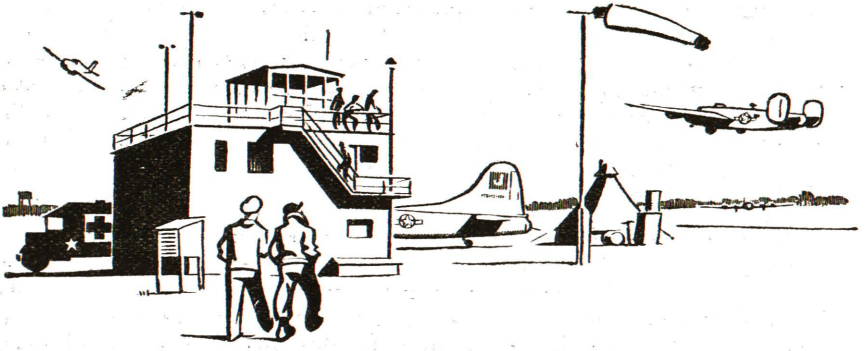
buildings of war ; there is a haphazard air about the winding roads, the clusters of huts, the parked planes, and yet they form a careful and economical pattern. The Nissen huts, hangars and tents give the impression of a western mining camp, yet they house precision instruments whose details are still secret, equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Strangest of all is the contrast between the sleepy countryside and the vast machine of destruction which reaches out day after day to the heart of enemy territory.

The bomber base is the striking arm of the Eighth. Although less than a third of its men fly the planes, everyone on the field, whatever his job, shares in the victories and losses of heavy bombardment. Everyone hears the earth-shaking roar of the planes as they thunder into the sky in the morning. Where are the boys headed for this time ? A quick job on the Rhine to help out the Ground Forces ? A long zig-zag course to an East German aircraft plant ? The synthetic oil plants at Merseberg—one of the toughest flak belts in Europe ? When the heavies touch down again in the afternoon more than three thousand minds frame the same questions again—how did they make out ? Could they see the target ? Is everyone back safely ?

The tough jobs which didn't work out so well disappoint the men on the line and the office workers as well as the combat crews. When the returning fliers grin from ear to ear as the planes taxi to the hardstands, everyone brightens up. The ground crews swell with pride at a bull's eye job and the Group, from the control tower to the bomb dump, catches the spirit. At times like that you know that your part in this war counts for something.

UNSEEN ARMY

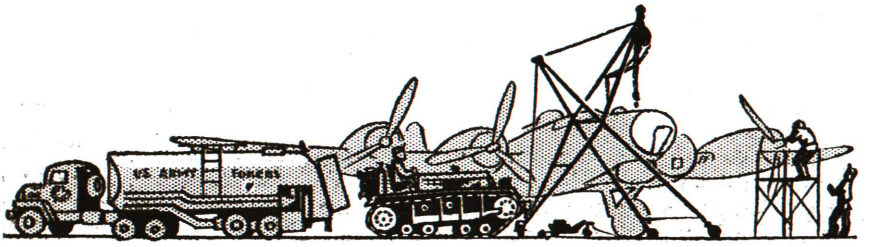
A bomber base is something like a little mining town back home. Each day a large part of its population sets out on the one big and dangerous job for which it exists. The rhythm of its life, like that of the mining town, follows the pace of the one industry. But there are many on the base who don't set off each day into the air, just as there are many in the town who don't go down into the earth. They are an unseen army at work on a hundred different jobs. For every bomber there are thirty or so men on the base who never fly. Some of them handle the planes on the ground, some handle the bombs, bombsights, guns, or the ever-growing battery of flying equipment. Some clothe or drive or feed the combat crews. There are many again who have less direct contact with planes or flying, but who are essential to the life of the base and therefore to the success of a mission.



The difference between a Group with an outstanding operational record and a run-of-the-mill outfit is as often as not the work of this unseen army and the smoothness of their teamwork with the fliers.

As a Fort or a Lib thunders down the runway in the early morning and heaves its thirty tons into the air, it carries with it the hopes and anxieties, the sweat and cursing, the patience and ingenuity of hundreds of men. It is the streamlined spearhead of months of training and experience, weeks of preparation, hours of planning. Every mission is a campaign, worked out to the last second, to the last man and to the last pound. Every mission is different, with its own problems of weather and target, route and procedure. And yet every mission follows a general pattern from the first stand-by warning to the repair of battle damage.

"Stick your nose out the door, Mac, and see if the flag's changed." Before Mac summons up the energy to roll off his bunk, Tex comes in. Yes, the blue flag in now flying, the stand-by has become an alert. "What's the time, Joe?" Joe grunts what sounds like ten-thirty. "They'll probably scrub it as soon as we get through," says Tex, "looks like rain." Tex is an armorer and a pessimist. It's nothing new to him to bomb up and unload three times in one night. Mac says nothing. He's asleep again. Why worry? They'll be routed out when they're needed. Sleep while you can, is his motto. Two weeks ago they ran eight missions in



eight days and Mac, an air mechanic, averaged four-and-a-half hours sleep a night, keeping two planes flying.

While Mac and plenty of others are hitting the sack, the Operations men are just settling into their stride. Operations at headquarters gradually works up steam, until, about 4.15 in the morning, it will rival Grand Central. Right now everyone is waiting for the orders to come through from Division. As soon as the teletype ticks out the details of the mission, the ops phones will start ringing all over the base, bodies will jerk out of bed, jeeps and trucks will roar as the first preparations are made.

PICKING THE TEAM

Ops and Intelligence each work out their problems of crews and planes, routes and target identification, flak evasion and navigation. No football coach ever sized up the capabilities of his team more carefully than do the Group Commander and his staff. He has to know who is capable of what. The lead ships carry a heavy responsibility these days. If they do their stuff everyone plasters the target. The substitute lead ships must be well manned, too—just in case. All the essential information for pilots, navigators and bombardiers is assembled in orderly form for the briefings. The data on the teletype sheet is the subject of lively discussion and careful study as it is plotted on giant wall maps and charts.

While all this is going on things are stirring on the line. One of the first calls from Ops goes to Ordnance. Ordnance must have information on the bomb loads, which are the lead planes, which is to carry propaganda leaflets, and any special loads—today, for example, plane 338 is to drop delayed-action bombs. Across the field the bomb dump revetments echo with the rumble of the trucks, and the shouts of the bomb handlers and chemical warfare personnel. Tonight the orders call for 500-pounders and incendiaries. The men swing their bombs on to the trailers as though they were half the weight ; then the clusters of incendiaries, almost as heavy. The fins and fuses are placed on the trailers, and they head for the hardstands.

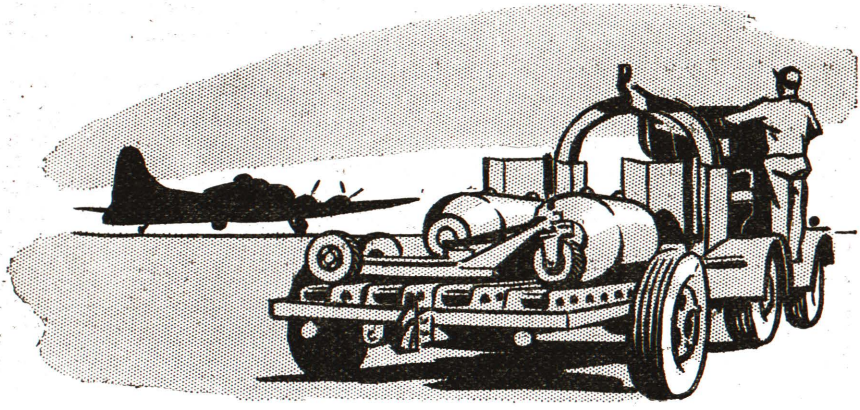
TENSE SITUATION

There the armorers have already been at work setting up the bomb bays for the bomb load. They have checked the bomb releases, set up the racks and tested the bomb bay doors. The loaded trailer is backed directly under the bomb bay and two armorers and one or two ordnance men set to work as a team. The fins are screwed on, the shackles adjusted, and, by an ingenious arrangement devised on this base, two bombs are hauled up at the same time and secured in the racks. While the next pair is being loaded the fusing is begun on the first two. As you watch these experts on the job you don't need to be told that they have been at it for months.

It has started to drizzle, and the bombs are wet and slippery. " They say if you drop one of these babies from four feet she'll go up, fuse or no fuse," says Steve chattily, as he pushes at one end, which has caught on a projection. " So far we haven't dropped any," he adds, " so I wouldn't

know." In addition to the routine hazards of their occupation, the bomb handlers are sometimes called upon to face unusual risks : A bomber caught fire as it was circling to land, exploded and fell on the outskirts of a village near the field. Bombs were strewed among the cottages and farms, half buried in the gas-soaked ground. It was a tense situation. The British bomb disposal units had priority jobs on hand, so an Ordnance officer, with three volunteer enlisted men, set to work, praying no spark would touch the whole thing off, and safely removed the bombs. Needless to say, the action was warmly appreciated in the village.

The ordnance-armorer team is responsible for bombing up two ships. By the time they are through it's 4.15, and seems darker than ever as you move away from the lighted bomb bay. The drizzle has become a steady rain. Steve shrugs his shoulders and hopes they won't have to change the bomb load this time. The ordnance men stagger off to bed and an armorer remains on duty with each plane until take-off time. A group of armorers head for the tent just as the gas truck and the oxygen truck arrive, driven by men of the engineering section. The planes already have most of their



gas load, delivered just after the ships came in from yesterday's mission. Sometimes they have to remove a few hundred gallons, but today it will be a long haul, and they pump more into the wings. If the ground crew chief has his way it's always a hundred gallons more than the amount prescribed, as the hundred disappears in the taxiing and take-off.

The tanker trundles away, followed by the oxygen truck, after correct pressure has been checked in the bottles on the plane. While this is happening the rest of the ground crew arrives. The night line chief had routed them out of their barracks an hour ago, and now they have eaten their breakfast and are more or less awake. There are a hundred last-minute jobs to be done while the briefing is going on and until take-off time, which is scheduled today for 0645.

There was a time when each ground crew—crew chief, chief assistant and three assistant air-mechanics—serviced one plane, at least in theory. Now they take care of two ships, and the reason that they are able to do twice the amount of work is because they have steadily stepped up their efficiency as they added to their experience. They have worked out all kinds of short cuts and new procedures until now they are handling two to three times as many ships on the base without any increase of personnel. Working with them, under the control of the engineering section, are six instrument specialists, assigned to each of the four squadrons of the Group. They repair and maintain the electrical installations, and the maze of wiring on the planes.

PROUDEST CHIEF

The engineering ground crew, like the hundreds of other technicians on the field, are craftsmen. Nobody needs to tell them that they carry the lives of their combat crews in their hands. They sweat out each mission until their ships are safe on the hardstands again. The crew chief knows the tricks of his plane, its temperamental weaknesses and the history of its ailments. Joe is one of the proudest chiefs as he hits the line this morning. One of his two planes, the " Barbara Bee," is to be refitted with a new tail, and will have a crack at her hundred missions. Right now she has 83, and the 83rd was almost her last. She finished a straight run of 78 missions without an abort with a crash landing in Belgium. During that time she brought back one dead and three seriously injured crewmen, and many were her battle scars, feverishly repaired to put her back in the air for the next mission. Joe says she's a great ship, and he should know. He has coached more than one new crew about her peculiarities.

Methodically Joe checks over the preflight schedule while his men go to work. Everything is checked and double checked. The defrosting is finished. Three armament specialists arrive at intervals. The turret man power-checks the three turrets and sees that the solenoids are properly adjusted. He stays around the three ships for which he is responsible until take-off. The bombsight man arrives with the sight from the vault and installs it on Joe's plane, which is flying lead today. He is followed by the auto-pilot expert, who gives the delicate equipment another last ground check. Joe has a few stern words with the turret man on the subject of the belly turret solenoid. This time it must be fixed so it stays fixed ! They'll probably stir up some enemy fighters today. Joe takes a careful look around to make sure there has been no " midnight requisitioning " by any of his colleagues on the line, and then waits for the co-pilot so they can go over the last preflighting together.

"BIG B"

The co-pilot is just jumping a weapons carrier outside the briefing room. It's nearly five o'clock—there was a lot to pack into today's briefing. It's funny, he thinks, however many briefings you go to—and he must have sat through close to 50—that moment when the curtain is pulled back and

you see the mission's route on the map always gives you a thrill. Today it's Berlin—a long time since they hit it last. There was the usual chorus of whistles and oh-oh's. "Big B" is no one's first choice; plenty of flak on the way in and out, usually fighters, and hell is sure to break loose over the target area. But it's a big day and the way things are going there may not be many more missions needed to Berlin. Maybe he'll be in on the last great crack at it. Something to tell his great-grandchildren about. He grins. Not even married yet! He grins again and tries to cheer up his tail gunner, who doesn't look happy despite a stomach loaded with two very well-fried eggs, and the encouraging remarks of the Old Man at the end of the briefing. It's only his third mission and he's heard a lot of stories about Berlin.

While they head for their ship the pilots, navigators and bombardiers are sitting in on their separate briefings. The pilots are given further details of their formation and route. The biggest problem today is the weather. The Weather Officer tells them that with luck their target should be visual by the time they hit it, but he can't promise good weather for the return. It will soon be clear at the base but it will probably be raining by six o'clock this evening. The sooner they get back the better.

Today the bombardiers have a comparatively easy target—communications bottlenecks in Berlin. But the leaders have to be ready for ten-tenths overcast. They study the data which will help them identify their target area by instruments if it is invisible to the eye. The navigators have a big job—straying from the route today will take them over additional flak areas. There is a big force of heavies aimed at one target and the split second timing must be perfect if the Group and the squadrons are to be in the right place in the procession.

By the time the navigator gets to the ship, it's nearly take-off time. Joe's armorer has checked the installation of the guns with each member of the combat crew. He takes care of the navigator's, who won't have time to

see to it himself. All the guns are loaded and safetied. Joe has finished the preflighting. Fliers and groundmen wander in and out of the tent where a stove and a pot of boiling coffee give warmth in the chill morning wind. Then one by one the crew climbs aboard.

TAKE-OFF

This is one of the Control Tower's big moments. The first planes are lumbering around the perimeter to the far end of the 2,000 yard runway. It is still nearly dark and the planes' lights shine brightly. The last few seconds are checked off on the pilots' watches, synchronized at the briefing, then it's zero hour—0645. Two flares break from the roof of the tower and the rumble of the taxiing planes is submerged in the roar of the first ship as she gains speed on the runway and takes to the air as she passes the tower. The mission has begun. The procession of 38 planes starts its methodical climb to the first assembly point. With the planes go 342 men and nearly 100 tons of explosives.

Some of the men on the line go back to their barracks to sleep, but during the hours of waiting for the planes' return the business of the base goes on. The day shift takes over on many kinds of essential routine work—repair, maintenance, administration, supply, training and other services. Even the runways do not remain idle long. There are always new combat crews to be trained on practice missions, new and repaired planes to be flown for tests. The combat crews spend much of their time on the ground in intensive training. New crews receive an intensive eight-day course, dealing with all aspects of combat work. The gunnery school is a hot spot. The bombardiers, pilots and navigators have never learned all that there is to know, and the training centers, with their array of mechanical flying aids, test the accuracy as well as increase the skill of the fledglings. The radio operators spend even more time on refresher courses, and in keeping abreast of their ever-increasing collection of radio equipment. The instructors at all these schools are mostly composed of veteran combat men who have completed their tour. They have gained their knowledge the hard way, and know what they are talking about.

TECHNICAL TRIUMPHS

Out on the hardstands the ground crews and armament workers pitch in on the new ships and grounded planes. There are the usual headaches over malfunctions and the never-ending maintenance jobs. Most of the mechanisms they handle are so complicated that the work is slow and tedious. The new planes have to be attended to—serviced, loaded with ammunition, turrets and guns harmonized, and modifications made. Routine inspections of bombardment equipment must be carried out.

Daytime usually finds the Engineering Sub Depot going full blast, especially when a series of missions has piled up the battle damage. There is nothing on the outside to indicate the triumphs of ingenuity housed in the huts and shacks which cluster around the big hangar. Most of the huts have no sign on the door. You push in and find what looks like Mike's Garage back home, only a little grander.

Four men at various benches all look busy. One of them admits he's the boss, and he's happy to take you around. This Master Sergeant may appear casual, but as he warms to his subject you realize how much he and his men have achieved. They have created out of almost nothing what would be an impressively equipped business in civilian life. This is the Instrument Shop. It's open day and night. There are twelve men in the shop and three out on the line. It's their job to test and repair flying instruments—indicators, pressure gauges, electrical instruments. They even repair the fliers' watches, and it takes less than the customary two months !

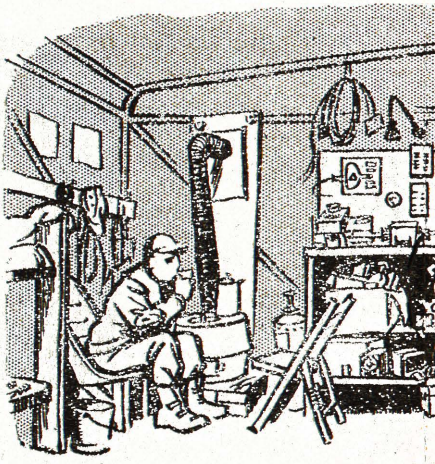
Tony points to an insignificant-looking gadget on a bench. It's a new idea he and a colleague are working on for testing a navigation instrument. They are continually improving the design. Where do they get the equipment from ? Some of it is GI, but most of their elaborate testing panels and machines are pieced together from salvaged material painstakingly gathered here and there.

" You should see what the boys have done with their electronic supercharger tester," says Tony. The inventor of this machine is run to earth in another similar home-made Lab. Here is an instrument which is unique. The enlisted man who designed and built it has been able to diagnose and cure troubles in the very temperamental supercharger which have baffled technicians all the way up to the Depot which handles the fourth echelon jobs. It is the same story in the welding and machine shops, in the generator and fabric shops, in the prop shop and the engine build-up shop. Extra hours, limited T/Os, shortage of equipment, have never been allowed to stand in the way of first-class workmanship and ingenuity,

any more than have the pressure of the technical problems of the work. It is the proud boast of each department that *they* have never been a bottleneck which has grounded the ships unnecessarily. If they have to telescope repair, testing or servicing into a less than reasonable time, they stay on the work through nights and days so that the bombers can take off when needed, and in first-class shape. Theirs is the same spirit of pride in work well done that keeps the crew chiefs and their assistants on the line awake at nights, thinking out the answers on some tough job.

KEEN BUSINESS

The sheet metal shop is a model of speed and efficiency. As in most of the sections of the sub depot, few of the personnel have had civilian experience. They started from scratch and learned fast. Where a man had already proved himself in a civilian career in the same sphere of work, the Group's policy has been to encourage him to use all that experience. The Master Sergeant who runs the sheet metal shop is such a man. He runs his business as though he were fighting to lead his industry back home. A work progress chart keeps tabs on all items of flak damage repair—which is 80 per cent. of his business. He takes pride, too, in his modification schedule. Orders for all kinds of modifications are received from higher headquarters, and in addition, his shop thinks up a number more, to add to the comfort of the combat crews and the efficiency of the planes. All these modifications are carefully planned and executed at night so that no flying time is ever lost by the ships on their account. The same number of men now handle nearly three times the original number of planes.

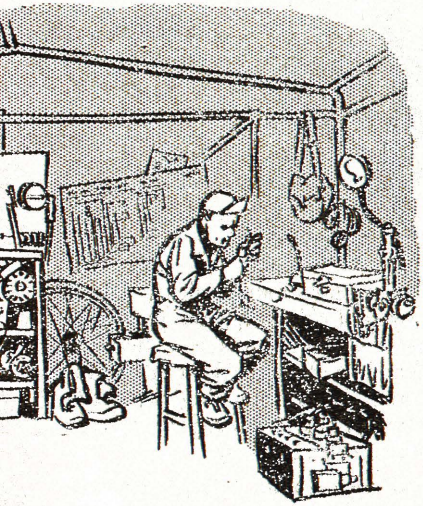


Office, Workshop, L

The chief delight of the shop is to accomplish the really big jobs which normally would only be undertaken at a depot, if at all. The sergeant's eyes gleam as he recalls the job they did on one plane which nosed over in the mud and smashed just about everything forward of the wings. They gave her a new nose and she went on to fly more than thirty more missions. There is an equal stepping up of performance in the hangar where engine

build-up and wing repair is accomplished and where the badly beaten up ships are brought. One repair unit works in the hangar and two mobile units go out to the hardstands or to nearby places in case of emergency landings. This work and that of the whole sub depot is co-ordinated by aircraft maintenance technicians who move around checking the work and allocating priorities.

Even the pressure of the regular work does not prevent the shops from handling pathetic pleas from fliers for special work on flak suits, or cries of distress from the kitchens to fix their ice-cream freezer, or other urgent appeals for domestic jobs which Utilities are too busy to handle. And more than that; if you see a British disabled war veteran propelling himself around a village near the base in his wheel chair, you can think of the boys at the sub depot. The grapevine informed them that the chair was grounded through extensive damage, due chiefly to old age. Without the veteran knowing what was going on, they got ahold of the war-weary vehicle and completely made it over, down to a two-tone upholstery job. When the owner was presented with his chair, as good as new, he was so moved he had no words, and the villagers around were equally delighted. The gesture meant more for Anglo-American relations in that neck of the woods than fifty formal speeches.



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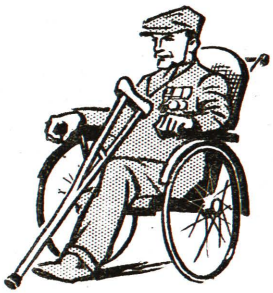
DARK MYSTERIES

In separate organisations, the radio and radar maintenance men carry on work similar to that of the men in the sub depot. The volume of their business mushrooms continuously. The radio men are now accomplishing approximately three times as much routine work as they did when they first hit the base. They, too, have designed and built much of their testing equipment. As soon as the planes come in from the missions they check the sets and go over any reported malfunctions. They spend much of their time in the tents and shacks out by the hardstands, where they work on the spot. These line shops are now almost as well equipped as the headquarters, through the ingenuity of the men, who know their work so well that each unit can be relied on to run itself unless a big job comes up.

The radar section didn't exist when the base was established, and even now it is a place of dark mysteries where only the few experts know their way around. They have had to keep abreast of the tremendous development of radar in the past year, and at the same time train a growing staff. Like the radio workers, they operate day and night, and owing to the complexity and delicacy of the instruments, their maintenance headaches are many and large.

It is easy to estimate the achievements of repair, but not so easy to evaluate the equally important jobs of maintenance and testing which permit



accurate operations, prevent accidents and prepare for emergencies. Small failures in bombsight, navigational instruments and other flying equipment will ruin a mission. The same accuracy and thoroughness is called for in such places as the Dinghy Shop or the Parachute Shop. In the former the one-man dinghies are tested every week and the 5-man dinghies every month. In the history of the Group's operations only three planes have ditched, but in each case all equipment has worked perfectly.

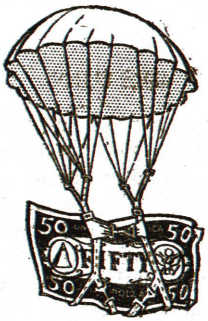
The flying man may raise hell from time to time about defective instruments or temperamental machinery, but the service work that is put into their ships and equipment is perhaps the most important single morale factor during their missions. They *know* the boys back at the base have done a good job. Drop in on the Parachute Shop and you get the point. You can meet Al, who was given fifty bucks by the Chaplain last week. The money reached the Chaplain from a gunner, by way of the boy's mother in the States. The gunner is now a prisoner of war in Germany. He had to bail out and the 'chute did all that it should. He sent the 'chute's number back with the request that his gratitude be expressed in that way. Records showed that it was Al who packed that particular 'chute.

EARS AND EYES

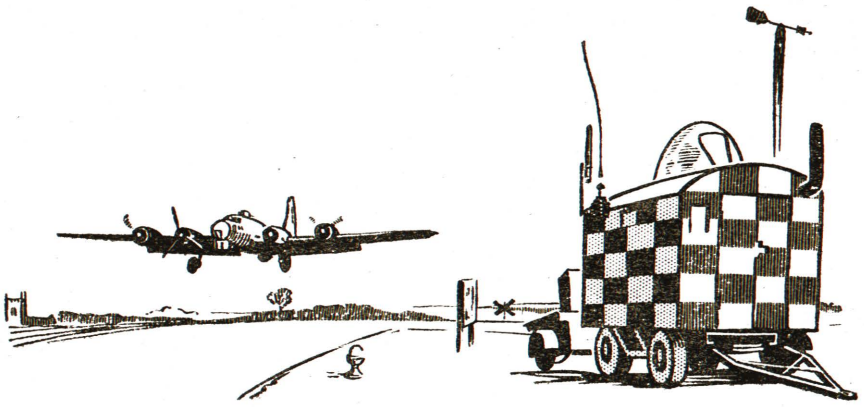
The control tower reaches the peak of its activity at take-off and landing-time on each mission, but flying control is a 24-hour-a-day job. The tower is the ears and eyes of the base. Liaison must be maintained with ops. and with other fields. Planes must be " talked " in and out. There is a constant babble of messages between air and ground, to be picked up

and sorted out. The runways must be policed, kept clear of vehicles and other planes when a ship is taking off or landing. Pilots are informed of their allotted parking places on arrival. All itineraries must be checked and cleared in the back room, and in the big front room a giant blackboard across one wall is marked with current information on the whereabouts of the Group's planes. The tower alerts the ambulances and crash trucks before take-off and return of a mission and at any other time of emergency. Flying control is responsible, too, for the lighting of the runways to guide returning ships.

The base is built on the curve of a hill, and the end of the runway, half a mile away, is invisible from the tower. So a " caravan "—a black and white checkered truck—is stationed there and a constant watch is kept to aid returning planes in difficulty. Sometimes the weather closes in so fast that the pilots are more than grateful for the yellow flares fired through the fog by the caravan watcher to mark the end of the runway. Sometimes the watcher catches a craft about to land with damaged landing gear or flak punctured tire. He flashes a radio message to the pilot, telling him of the trouble. He will also warn the incoming plane if there is an unexpected obstruction on the runway which cannot be seen from the tower. Sometimes, too, the RAF bombers have to be diverted from their own bases which are weathered in, on their return from a night mission. Then the caravan does its stuff in a big way, guiding them in to the strange field in the darkness, while the tower makes hasty arrangements for their parking.



Jim looks out from his caravan this afternoon on a peaceful enough scene—a farm dotted hillside, a wood nestling on the right and a church tower breaking the skyline on his left. Ahead, the pale blue eastern sky will soon frame tiny specks—the homing planes. " Yes, peaceful-looking," says Jim, " but you never can tell. It looked just about this way one evening, only it was a lot darker. The first planes had come in and another was approaching the field when a ship went by with its lights on and the engines sounding as if something was wrong. So I called the tower and reported. The tower saw it wink its lights—it was too dark to make the ship out clearly. It circled and came in low behind one of our bombers that was just letting down. Suddenly the latter seemed to catch fire and swung off the field to the right and the next thing I saw was incendiary



shells bouncing on the edge of the runway. I hit the ground faster than a V-2. The strange plane was a German JU-88, which sneaked in with our bombers and was shooting up the place. Yes, you never quite know what may happen. The other day one of our planes missed the runway in the fog and chopped off our little radio antenna. It all makes life interesting."

RETURN

Just before 1630 the first squadron appears back from Berlin. Eyes strain to count the planes. One ship asks to come in ahead. It makes direct for the runway, with a feathered prop. The ambulances and crash trucks are at their stations, but as the formations fly in over the field and circle before peeling off there are no red flares—no signal that there are wounded aboard. One ship is missing, but earlier it was reported making for the RAF emergency landing field with engine trouble. A ship taxis past the tower in the procession to the hardstands with a chunk missing from one wing and a deep furrow carved just back of the top turret. There are other evidences of flak as the planes lurch by, but everyone looks happy—over Berlin and back with so little damage! Several planes slow down at the runway intersection and each time a figure leaps from the waiting jeep and climbs aboard as the ship taxis on, with the jeep running behind, its canopy billowing in the prop wash. These are the planes equipped with automatic cameras. Their contents will tell the story of the strikes if the bombing was visual. As the bombs fall the cameras make their exposure every six seconds until they have a sequence of 25 shots. These films are rushed to the lab. and processed with lightning speed. The photo section works like lightning—less than fifteen minutes elapses from the receipt of the film to the dispatching of a finished set of prints. The first set from squadron "A" are on their way to S-2 before squadron "B"

has landed. With the films comes a copy of the navigator's log, which gives all the necessary information about the position of the plane and time of shooting.

The prints have arrived in the hands of S-2 and S-3 in the briefing room by the time interrogation is starting. Then the lab. settles down to the job of rushing out 14 sets of prints to Command, Division and the other headquarters and sections concerned. This lab. work is only part of the photo section's job. It is their responsibility to service and repair the delicate airplane cameras. The apparatus is checked after each mission and again when the cameras are installed in the planes before the mission. Eighteen months of experiment and modifications by the section have greatly improved performance, and the camera now looks entirely different from the early models. Now the new cameras which arrive from the States embody some of the modifications made on this base. There is a constant exchange of new ideas, too, between the Groups in the Division, through the medium of a monthly bulletin.

BATTLE DAMAGE

The interrogation today is a lively affair. It seems that they flew all the way above ten-tenths cloud, but as they neared Berlin the clouds broke and over the target area visibility was excellent. Flak was heavy, as usual, but although they saw other heavies fall, their own group came through with only minor injuries. There was almost no fighter opposition. Berlin communications took a terrific beating. All around the base the news gives a lift.

Out on the line right now there is plenty cooking. The first big job is the checking of the battle damage. The crew chief and his gang are clambering over the ships, tracing the flak holes and the path of the fragments. Sometime the flak comes in from one angle, bounces around fantastically, finally taking off in a different direction. Quickly the chief must size up the amount of sheet metal repair, fabric repair, and any major damage to an engine, or any of the instruments and equipment. Soon the procession of inquirers streams by the hardstand. A jeep growls by and a head sticks out: "Any holes?" shouts the Engineering Inspector. "Just four small ones." They'll probably have to wait until after the next mission, if there are several bigger jobs. The bombsight is taken off to its vaults; it's O.K. Radio and Radar maintenance men check on their installations. The gas truck, oil truck, and oxygen truck come around again, replenishing supplies unless the tanks or containers are damaged.

READY FOR ANYTHING

Operations is awaiting the availability report. It must know which planes will be ready for the next mission, maybe to-morrow morning. It must know which planes will be grounded, and why. The Duty Sergeant at Group Engineering is waiting to phone in his report. There is still a heated discussion going on between a crew chief and the sheet metal chief. "That's one hell of a big job," says the latter. "Maybe I could fix it,

and maybe I couldn't, to-night. But I'd have to let everything else go if I tackled it. You'll have to let me have her to-morrow." The crew-chief glumly yields the point.

Meanwhile the ground crews start in on the preflighting again. The pilot has complained that No. 4 engine is throwing oil again, and there's a carburetor needing attention. The radio operator has had trouble with his VHF — tells the radio man when he comes around. Armorers work on the turrets and guns. Some of the crews will be at work all night if it will make the difference between the planes being grounded or flying tomorrow. One ship is hauled into the hangar. An unexploded flak shell came through the floor of the radio room, ripped the guts out of the radio sets and took off through the roof. It will be a big job for the sub depot. Things quiet down a little on the hardstands. Those whose jobs are done take off for the barracks. They may be alerted a few hours from now. One mission is over and preparations for the next are already being made. A bomber base of the Eighth has to be ready for anything, anytime, and somehow, it always is.

BEHIND THE SCENES

There are many on the base who have no direct part in a mission. They are like the stage managers, the scene shifters and the rest who never take a curtain call. Yet business would soon stop if they weren't around. The Air Corps, as much as the rest of the Army, moves on its stomach—and its jeeps and trucks. Mess and transportation have to be on the beam all the time, and on a bomber base they have many additional calls made on them. Combat Crew Mess, for example, must check its menus regularly with the medics. Some foods do not digest at twenty thousand feet. Times of meals change from day to day, according to operational requirements. Fliers can get something to eat, if they need it, at any hour of the day or night, and any of them will tell you how much a hot breakfast, with fresh eggs cooked to individual taste, and good coffee, mean at four in the morning, before a mission.

Transportation, primarily designed for operational requirements, is called on for help in all manner of jobs, since a dispersed bomber base involves big distances. Five thousand miles is a fair average for the general purpose vehicles of one base to cover in a day. The servicing of this fleet

is a big undertaking, and many a motor pool has to do business with a sadly shrinking staff. On this field, for example, there are now sixty men instead of the original ninety, yet somehow they keep the motors humming and vehicles in serviceable condition.

A group or squadron or other headquarters on a field is no different from any other insofar as paper work is concerned. There is alway a seemingly endless stream of reports and other documents to be prepared. The clerks have a big job to do. Through their hands pass much of the material which shapes policy at higher headquarters, for the base is the place where theories are tested and facts come to light. The stat control clerks must

maintain an hourly check of the status of planes and crews, of supplies of bombs and gas. The S-1 section employs 30 officers and 50 enlisted men to take care of the intricate personnel records. One of the biggest jobs is done by the stock record section of the sub depot, in maintaining a tally of the innumerable items that pass through their hands.

A very different type of service is given by the fire-fighting platoon. They have to deal with fires in the field's installations and with crash fires. The first part of their job is like that of any town fire department, though they have additional chores, such as servicing 1,500 fire extinguishers every month. Eighteen of their twenty-one men are on call at all times. They spend a lot of their spare time just sitting. When they move in an emergency they have to move fast ; nothing burns quicker than a crashed plane. The tower alerts them before take-off and return, and they send a crash truck there and to the end of the runway. On this base they have had to tackle several domestic fires, and put out the flames on defective plane engines, but as yet none of the planes have burst into flames in a crack-up on the field.

CARE AND COMFORT

There are plenty of critical items of supply on the base and for some time the flying equipment section has had more than its share of headaches. Every important piece of personal flying equipment must be checked out and in, before and after every mission. It must be dried in the large drying rooms and all items must have a periodic check. At the interrogation the crew members mention any failure of heated suits, gloves or shoes, and these complaints are picked up by the section and the

malfunctions remedied. The comfort of the fliers is their full time job, and it keeps them busy.

The base has its own well-equipped hospital, but in addition the medics reach closer into the heart of each unit through the squadron dispensaries. Instead of having a morning sick call in the combat squadrons, the sergeant at the dispensary is on hand all day until about 2300, and of course on call at night in case of emergency. Fliers drop in and air their problems. Nine to ten in the evening is the peak time for business. It is essential not only that the fliers are in good physical shape, but that they *feel* that way. All colds, by far the most common trouble, are carefully treated, so that they don't develop into ear trouble through high altitude pressure. Don, the staff sergeant, says he's gotten them in the habit of taking precautions, and adequate treatment, with the result that the flying time lost through respiratory troubles in his squadron is now less than one-sixth of what it was before the dispensary started work.

BIG OPERATIONS

Perhaps the most forgotten outfit on the base is one that has no T/O of its own and lives by the consent of other outfits. But there would be plenty of screams from these outfits if it folded up. On paper, most construction and maintenance on an airfield is accomplished with British labor. In practice, British labor is so short that a thousand jobs have to be undertaken by US personnel. Hence, Base Utilities came into being. Right now it has one officer and twenty-one enlisted men, borrowed from the squadrons. You get a glimpse of the size of their operations when you realize that the base was built to accommodate 1,500 men—less than half its present number; the section has done all the construction of living quarters and other facilities required for the expansion. Their biggest job was the erection of 35 Nissen huts by 20 men in 30 days. None of these men had ever seen a Nissen hut built, when they began! They have also widened all the roads on the base from sixteen to twenty feet. Their electricians, plumbers and carpenters are always in demand for minor maintenance and construction jobs, and now it is the responsibility of Utilities to keep the runways clear of snow and sanded, if they freeze. Perhaps the greatest single morale-lifting job was the remodelling and heating of the shower rooms on the base, providing plenty of hot water and cutting the pneumonia rate.

TELLING THE NEWS

Most bomber bases are not located on the edge of any town with vast recreation facilities for an evening or off-duty pass. This base is no exception. So the social life and recreation on a base really means something. Special Services is the moving spirit behind the shows, dances, athletic program and many special functions. It provides material for discussions, lectures and reading, through the Information-Education officers. On this base no less than 250 officers and men are studying the

USAFI correspondence courses. Special Services and Public Relations work together on many projects, such as the visits of noted speakers. The main job of PRO is to tell the people at home the news which individuals and subunits cannot write themselves. News is made in a Group every day, on the missions and on the ground, and thanks to PRO the people at home have a chance to hear about it.

No base would be complete without its MPs. In the days when there was a considerable threat of enemy parachute or landing raids, the MPs headed up the training of the ground defense force charged with the protection of the field, planes and installations. Now that the threat is greatly lessened, and the numbers of the MPs are reduced, they are kept fully occupied on their regular police duties around the field.

The runways on the base take a pounding such as no highway gets, and the maintenance and repair is the responsibility of an engineer aviation company attached to the base. It is a negro outfit and its southern fried chicken feasts once a week are something to talk about. Their work is heavy and often humdrum, but they really roll out the concrete and make the dirt fly. The company, as a matter of fact, is one of the organizations in which the base takes most pride. They have earned a Divisional Citation, and this is how it happened : Late one evening two bombers

broke through the surface of the runway at an intersection, threatening to delay or scrub the take off of a mission, scheduled in 36 hours' time. The whole company turned out—first sergeant, clerks, bugler, cooks—tore up 400 feet of faulty runway during the night, and twelve hours later 400 feet of concrete, 15 feet wide, was already hardening. They finished the job in less than half the normal time required.

Their job symbolizes, as well as anything could, the fighting spirit and teamwork of the base. It isn't easy for most men to stand back from their work and see its significance in a global war. But when you stop to think of it, anyone who helps in any way to " keep 'em flying " is doing a job which will go down in history. Every time those Forts and Libs thunder from the field on a mission they carry more than deadly explosives, intensively trained crews and almost magical instruments. They carry the punch of a united team of more than two thousand men and they deliver it right where it hits the enemy hardest.

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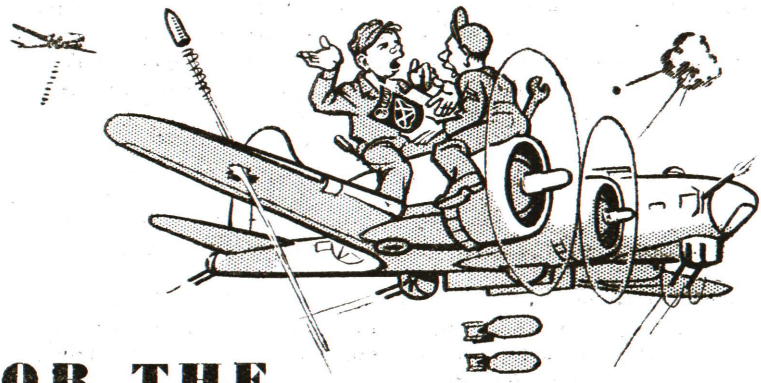

FOR THE BULL SESSION

THE idea back of this number of "Army Talks for the Eighth Air Force" is simple—to stand back from your job and take a look at it as it really is. They say the best way to get to know your home town is to take a visitor around it. That's what you're doing in this issue. You sometimes see familiar things in a new light. And maybe you see new things that you missed before, because it's easy to live and work on an airfield for months and still find plenty to learn about its operations.

It's even easier to sweat it out on some job and miss the real point of what you are doing in the war. This account of life on a base isn't complete. But it may be enough to show that *your* job, whatever it is, makes sense and that your base is a front line in the pattern of air warfare.

No two bomber bases are exactly alike. What are the differences on your field from the one described here? Do you find ways of passing on to other units the improvements and discoveries you make? How does a fighter base differ from a bomber base? How would you describe the work of a depot?

And how much do you know about your own base? Which are the six most important missions flown by your Group? Which ship has the most missions to its credit? What is the longest series of missions any of your ships has flown without an abort? Do you know of any outstanding maintenance or repair jobs? What instruments, machines or tools have been invented on your field? Can you think of any ways in which teamwork between your air and ground personnel can be further improved?

PASS IT ON!

Enough copies of "Army Talks for the Eighth Air Force" are being printed for every one to see it—if it gets around. But a neat stack of copies sitting in some quiet corner of your base doesn't help anybody. They leave *us* with a bang, but if they're not hitting the barracks, the chow line, the offices, the Aero Club —they're missing the target.

And if *you* are interested in reading this copy, try it on Jim. Maybe he's not as dumb as he acts.