

FINAL PHASE OF STATESIDE TRAINING

2 December, 1943 the 409th moved from Woodward Air Base. Two of the squadrons, the 642nd and 643rd, moved to Pounds Field, Tyler, Texas to take part in the maneuvers of the II Tactical Air Division - Group Headquarters and the other two squadrons, the 640th and 641st, moved to the DeRidder Army Air Base and were also to participate in the same maneuvers. Following the maneuvers, the 642nd and 643rd squadrons rejoined the Group at DeRidder on 15 December, 1943. This experience was valuable. The Squadrons which were separated, met and overcame problems which they would not have encountered otherwise. The group was presented also with problems concerning the separated squadrons which assisted in the overall training of the headquarters personnel.

The Headquarters personnel moved from Woodward AAB directly to DeRidder AAB.. Personnel consisted of the following:

OFFICERS

Lt. Col. Preston P. Pender Lt. Col. Martin P. Crabtree

Lt. Col. Edward H. Blake Lt. Col. Roy W. Yearwood

Major Samuel J. Davis Major Carl W. Faust

Capt. Erwin R. Fosse Capt. Louis F. Marr

Capt. Robert M. Kinnard Capt. Franklin L. Moore

Capt. Yerby R. Holman Capt. Robert P. Goynes

Capt. Louis Milstein Capt. Samuel L. Wolf

1st Lt. Frank H. Donnelly 1st Lt. Lester E. Heath

1st Lt. Paul E. McMasters 1st Lt. Glen D. Commons

1st Lt. Ralph W. Hand, Jr. 2nd Lt. Burton Epstein

2nd Lt. Richard T. Davies 2nd Lt. J. Harold Owens

2nd Lt. Jerome H. Perlmuter 2nd Lt. Glen G. Nolte

ARC Inslee M. Johnson

ENLISTED MEN

T/SERGEANTS

Charles M. Breen Robert H. Donahue

Gerald R. Sheets Robert C. Young

S/SERGEANTS

Wyley H. Denton Lloyd O. Lane

Floyd M. Gorgen Paul E. Kessler

Edward J. Peters

CORPORAL Albert L. Kampshaefer PRIVATE Hosa W. Brown

Now in the final stages of training before going overseas, crews were taught the importance of team work. Things were accomplished under rather primitive working conditions. The gunners received final check out on the targets towed by Martin B-26s on the gunnery range south of Lake Charles.

DeRidder Army Air Base was a temporary base. The barracks were cheaply constructed with tar paper roofs. We shared the base with an L-5 Liaison outfit who parked their planes on the opposite side of the field, They were also participating in the training exercises in the area.

As the months passed, tensions mounted. A six day furlough was given. It was a short stay at home for those living on the west coast. Especially with the time lost getting from DeRidder to Shreveport. Every one was aware that we would be going overseas soon. At one beer party it was about face with the officers serving the enlisted men and pulling their duty that night.

As the final stages of training had been completed, the Group received Warning and Movement orders. The 409th Bombardment Group (L), born 12th day of June 1943 had grown to maturity and was ready and prepared to uphold the fine tradition of Army Air Force units.

PREPARING TO DEPART THE U. S. A.

The 10th of February, 1944, a train pulled out of DeRidder Army Air Base carrying the 409th Bombardment Group to its next station, Camp Shanks, Orangeburg, New Jersey which was quite close to New York city The following two weeks were spent with final preparations including boat drills, training films, security lectures and clothing checks. The nights were free time for the men with fifty percent (50%) of the personnel getting passes each night. This would be the men's last opportunity before returning to the States for a fling in a major American city.

On the 25th of February, 1944, the Group was alerted, no passes were given out that night. On the 26th, notice was given that they were moving out. At 7:00 P.M. the men fell out with full equipment, lugging heavy duffel bags and although the men were ready to move, they had to 'cool their heels' for an hour. They occupied this time by talking and singing. They then received a brief talk by Chaplain Hand followed by the call to "Attention!" by Colonel Blake. The men then

moved quickly and with little noise to the train that awaited them. Silently they boarded it and were seated, three men to a seat, very efficiently and with no confusion. Slowly the train began to move and gradually increased its speed. They were on their way.

After about a half hour run to the New York harbor, the train stopped, the men departed and boarded a nearby ferry. Every eye watched as the ferry silently slipped away from its mooring. Soon the ferry docked, the men picked up their heavy duffel bags, adjusted field packs and moved off into what seemed to be a large warehouse. A band played the Beer Barrel Polka as the men trudged by with duffel bags scraping the ground. The Red Cross was there with coffee and the inevitable doughnuts.

Almost immediately a man in a booth called out each man's last name and received a response of first name and middle initial followed by a walk up the gang plank to home for the next seven days.

The walk up the gang plank gave the men their first glimpse of the ship which was officially known as NY160 a former luxury liner from Great Britain known as the Mauritania.