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**HEADQUARTERS
40TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (VH)
Army Air Field
Pratt, Kansas**

6 January 1944

GROUP HISTORY

28 Nov 1943 to 31 Dec 1943

Organization

The 40th Group, having undergone a radical metamorphosis, is beginning to recover from the activation of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th Bombardment Maintenance Squadrons (VH) on 4 December 1943. (See History and supporting documents for November 1943) Actually the last four squadrons named belong to the 497th Bombardment Group (VH) at Clovis, New Mexico, but inasmuch as they were activated at this Base, made up in part of 40th Group personnel (1), and attached to the 40th Group for administration, duty, rations, and quarters the problems involved were peculiarly our own. However there have been no great changes in administrative procedures; the same channels of command and the same policies that existed in the old 40th Bomb Group have been maintained and are still in effect for all units including those attached.

The great difference is the way in which the Group will function. The Maintenance Squadrons constitute a ground echelon which will leave in advance of the "Tactical" squadrons, and will be prepared to furnish 1st and 2nd echelon maintenance and provide housing and massing facilities for the air echelon when it arrives at its designated base in the theater of operations. *This is a system which has been used very successfully by the German Air Force for a number of years.

Warning orders for the 2nd and 4th Maintenance Squadrons were received 18 Dec giving a readiness date of 15 Jan. Effective this date the two squadrons will be restricted to Post pending Port call.

The 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th Squadrons, at present working with the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively, will assume their responsibilities entirely as the latter move out. When Headquarters and the Bombardment Squadrons of the 40th Group leave, the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th will, presumably, either join or be joined by their parent Group.

The problems resulting from this unprecedented (in the Army Air Forces) change in organization have been primarily in personnel and maintenances. (See Below)

*Tentative T/O and E, Bombardment Squadron Very Heavy, Special and Bombardment Maintenance Squadron, Very Heavy, Special, no date.

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Personnel

There has been a steady increase in the number of Group personnel due to the necessity of filling existing shortages in the present T/O. As of 2400 31 Dec 1943 the actual strength of the Group was 428 officers and 1,414 enlisted men as compared to the authorized strength of 381 officers and 1,855 enlisted men. The overages in officers can be explained by the fact that, as new B-29 organizations are activated, cadres are split off from those at present in training. Very probably overages existing when a group received movement orders will be left behind to form the nucleus of an incoming group.

The only change in Key personnel during December occurred when Capt Louis E. Scherck, formerly an assistant S-2, replaced Capt Paul L. Frey as Group Intelligence Officer. Capt Frey, who had been in the 40th Group since October 1941 and had served as Group S-2 since September 1942, is now assigned to the A-2 Section of the 58th Bombardment Wing (VH), Salina, Kansas. Capt Scherck, a graduate of Harrisburg, has been in intelligence work since July 1942. He served as Assistant S-2 at the VI Bomber Command in Panama, S-2 of the 25th Bombardment Squadron in Ecuador and later in Kansas, and Assistant S-2 at the 40th Group.

The Group Executive Officer and Squadron Commanders of the 25th, 44th, 45th, and 395th all were promoted to Lieutenant Colonel this month.

As a result of on-the-job training, misclassification and reorganization an average of ten reclassifications have been made every day.

Manning eight maintenance Squadrons to full authorized strength and grade per MOS, and screening eligibility of personnel for overseas movement have constituted the principle problems. In addition a considerable number of filler replacements are being received from the Army Ground Force. A large number of these hold technician grades which must be converted to grades authorized for an Air Corps unit. A small number of the men received are illiterate and some are permanently disqualified for oversea service. These men are immediately transferred to Base.

Supply and Equipment

An important shortage of Regulator Assemblies, Oil Temperature, for B-17F aircraft was eliminated upon receipt of 18 of these items early in the month.

Group S-4 together with Sub Depot Liaison has successfully initiated an emergency supply procedure for essential airplane part. This procedure has cut the delivery time from three days by routine methods to one and one half days or less.

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Maintenance

During December the Group had a cumulative total of 54.6% of its airplanes in commission. Airplane Maintenance during December was hampered considerably by cold weather, by the reorganization of the Group, and by a shortage of qualified engineering personnel. Nothing could be done about the weather, only time could iron out the problems of reorganization, and additional personnel are expected in January.

The greatest number of part failures during the month involved Exhaust Collector Rings and valve trouble. Unsatisfactory Reports on these have been sent forward. The outstanding maintenance jobs accomplished in December were 14 engine changes.

Training

Combat crews received 39,738 man hours of ground training during the period 28 November to 3 January (only weekly figures available). Training was also given to ground personnel on the squadrons but complete records are not compiled on this.

A three weeks B-29 specialist course was conducted primarily for the left, right, and tail gunners, i.e. the tail gunner who is the power plant specialist received training in his specialty, etc. Most of the training conducted in this period consisted of makeup work for replacements of combat crews and review for those who had not attained the desired proficiency.

The main factors which delayed training were lack of adequate facilities. The new school building which has helped considerably was put into use the last week in December. A Central Fire Control mock-up and other gunnery training aids have recently been placed in operation but bad weather has hindered use of gunnery ranges and caused an outbreak of respiratory diseases which, of course, decreased attendance. Radar equipment was set up during the latter part of this period and an intensive course for radar operators was started.

The Aero-Medical Training in the Group has been particularly outstanding. Of the four courses given, One and Two cover: Your Body in Flight, Physiological Aspects of Flying, and Pressures and Oxygen Systems in the B-29; Course Three covers Survival in Desert, Sea and Jungle; and Course Four includes First Aid, Battle Emergencies, First Aid Kits, and Plasma Shock and Treatment. Emphasis is placed on Visual Aids and numerous Rube Goldberg contraptions have been constructed by the versatile medics. (Photographs enclosed (2) are identified on backs of the prints.

During December the individual squadrons participated in three 40th Group missions, three 58th Wing missions, and one 2nd Air Force mission, in addition to numerous squadron missions (3) (4)

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(5). The Group and Wing missions combined navigation, assembly, camera bombing, practice bombing, and in one instance fighter interception. Combat crews are briefed prior to take-off and interrogated on return.

The 2nd Air Force mission involved assembly with the formations of other units, navigation, and a camera bomb attack on Headquarters of the 2nd Air Force at Colorado Springs. Approximately 210 four engined bombers participated. Numerous fighters (50 estimated) intercepted and attacked our planes in the vicinity of the target. The combat crews were unanimous in stating that fighter interception is of great value and aids inestimably to interest in a mission.

On 17 December a B-17F airplane belonging to the 395th Squadron was destroyed by fire. (6) No personnel were injured. As the plane was approaching the field at about 9:20 a master rod in #1 cylinder of #4 engine failed causing #2 and #9 master rods to fail also. The engine caught fire and the pilot made an emergency landing, wheels down, off the runway. Approximately 100 yards before coming to a stop #4 engine fell off. Determined efforts to extinguish the fire were to no avail and the plane was completely destroyed.

Facilities

Building facilities have been inadequate. However, the completion of the new school building has eased the situation somewhat and eliminated to some extent the necessity for using the War Room for classes.

The lack of a sufficient number of barracks for enlisted personnel has resulted in the taking over of the empty WAC barracks which have never been occupied. As more personnel are to be expected it is anticipated that a number of hutments will be erected.

Special Projects

Aircraft and naval recognition contests conducted by the individual squadrons were begun in December. Each contest lasts for two weeks; models, photographs, and slides are used and all flying personnel must participate. In order to be excused from recognition classes a man must average 90% or better in each contest. In order to add interest squadron Intelligence Officers were authorized to announce that in each squadron the 2 officers and 2 enlisted men with the best scores in the first contest would be given a three day pass and flown (on a navigation mission) to any point they should choose within our radius. The contests have been very successful, the only difficulty encountered to date being an inability to reward the winners as announced, due to shortage of airplanes and intensified mission training.

Morale

It is difficult to comment on or judge with any degree of accuracy the status of morale in an

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organization as large as the 40th Group. Generally speaking it may be said that morale at present is good despite Kansas, cold weather, uncomfortable quarters, long hours and lack of recreational facilities. The last is probably most important, ultimately and inevitably it boils down to the fact that there exists a deplorable shortage of young ladies in Pratt (This is a matter of concern only for the unmarried personnel, of course). The local cinemas are very popular, but fail to satisfy one indefinitely; the PX and Service Club are adequate but so crowded with civilian employees at certain hours of the day that little room is left for soldier; and the Officers' Club still resembles a remodeled barn in atmosphere and appearance despite its recent enlargement and the addition of new furniture. This last is worthy of note in that it ranges from bright green chairs to a bright red couch and from small tables constructed entirely of mirrors to table lamps too spindly to withstand the draft caused by a medium sized hiccup. It is regretted that the most profound and searching description made of the club in its present state cannot be included here.

Christmas and New Year's were holidays for the first time the 40th Group was activated. No Group or Squadron activity was required with the exception of necessary guard and fatigue details. In addition the squadrons were permitted to use all available planes for navigation flights to designations of their own choosing. It is doubtful if the Group has ever had so large a percentage of its aircraft in commission at one time. The planes left early on the day before Christmas and were due to return on the day after, but due to engine trouble or weather all were delayed from 1 to 3 days a circumstance not too greatly regretted by those who made the trips.

Miscellaneous

Photographs enclosed (7) show an aerial view of Pratt Army Air Base, the types of airplanes which the 40th Group has had at this Field (with the exception of the B-29) and various structures on the Base.

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