

1 June 1945 to Inactivation

The movement of the 461st Bombardment Group from Italy to the United States was begun less than a week after the conclusion of war in Europe. On 17 May 1945, a phone call was received from Headquarters of the 49th Bombardment Wing ordering the 461st Bomb Group to prepare for movement on 4 June.

Work was immediately begun to clear the area, and put all records, equipment, and personnel in condition for immediate shipment. Three days before moving time, however, the order was cancelled for the ground personnel and the men sat around with nothing to do since all the physical equipment was already prepared for shipping. The air crews which had begun moving up to the air depot at Gioia as early as 25 May were all out of the group and on their way to the Zone of Interior by 20 June.

Ground Personnel continued their idle waiting at Torretta until 28 June when the Fifteenth Air Force scheduled their movement to PDS Staging Area #1 at Naples. The letter containing these orders, 370, (25), Headquarters, Fifteenth Air Force, APO 520, US Army, 28 June 1945, Subject: "Movement of Troops," set their time of arrival at Naples at 7 July. On the day following issuance of these orders, the travel schedule was moved up so as to insure the group's arrival at Naples Staging Area on 1 July. This shift in plans gave rise to no new problems since the men had been physically prepared to move for over a month. As for being psychologically prepared, that readiness to return home has existed for a much longer period.

Although the original movement orders for the group called for the shipment of some 1,300 men and officers, only about 1,000 remained together in the group. First, the enlisted men with over 100 points, and later those with over 85 points were transferred from the group before it boarded transport for the United States. These measures were taken because the group was committed to redeployment at that time, and these high-point men were to wait discharge.

The 8th of July saw embarkation of the group. In the morning the personnel began boarding the transport, USS Mount Vernon, and by 1800 were under way for home. Ten days later the transport docked at Hampton Roads. Entertainment and excellently prepared food made the return boat trip a much more enjoyable affair than the original month-long trip to Italy.

On 19 July, the day after arriving at Hampton Roads, the officers and men in the group went out to various reception centers where they were quickly processed and sent on 30-day furloughs and leaves.

On 25 August the first of the 461st personnel began arriving at Sioux Falls Army Air Field. Here the group was inactivated per GO 116, Section II, paragraph 1, Headquarters, Second Air Force, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 27 August 1945. The personnel were sent either to separation centers or to other bases, mostly in the Second Air Force.

Epilogue

Upon transfer to the 456th Bomb Group, it was nothing but wait-wait-wait, and plenty of boredom. The monotony was occasionally broken by an occasional 3-day pass by air to Rome, Florence, Venice or Genoa. Italian communists in most cities were causing disturbances and sometimes riots. Personnel going to town were advised to go in groups and go armed. It was ironic that the war was over and this was the only time we wore sidearms.

In July, orders came and we were off by truck to Naples, where we were quartered in a former German POW camp.

In early August 1945, finally we embarked by ship and arrived in Fort Patrick Henry a day before Japan surrendered.

Leave and discharge followed.

About a year ago (in the Fall of 1985), I was having breakfast with a friend of mine named Adam Reish. The conversation drifted to his boyhood in Hungary. Adam said he was ten years old in Hungary in 1945 when the war was over. Adam collected our peace pamphlets and hid them. I asked him why he hid the pamphlets, and Adam said if the Russians found anyone with any pamphlets, they went to prison as a capitalist sympathizer.

Adam went on to observe (he is an American citizen) being in this country for twenty six years, peace pamphlets were much better than bombs, being an American is no comparison to living under the communists. He walked to freedom across the Iron Curtain. Finally he said, "May no one ever again drop any bombs on anyone."

And may it be forever thus.

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