



Harry Oglesby photo 767 sq.

Among proposals made after the successful occupation of southern France was one to move Fifteenth Air Force there from southern Italy. This could relieve bombers of the need to fly over the Alps, where flying conditions were so often well-nigh prohibitive. Both General Spaatz and Eaker opposed the plan because it would require the investment of too much time and logistical support to reestablish satisfactory French bases. In addition, Fifteenth would no longer have been able to reach the vital targets in Czechoslovakia and eastern Germany. The proposal lapsed because of this opposition, although some planners hoped that a few of Fifteenth's groups might go to Russian-controlled bases in Hungary, a move which never occurred.

After Ploesti, the most important oil targets in the operational area were three synthetic plants in occupied Silesia and one in northwest Czechoslovakia. Production at these plants was reduced by 80 percent during the post-Ploesti attack period. Many of these attacks were delivered in weather conditions which prevented the usual bombing tactics, and necessitated the use of new blind-bombing techniques. The unusual success of a series of these attacks in late 1944 led General Spaatz to describe Fifteenth as the world's leading exponent of blindbombing. These attacks curtailed resurgent German oil production

during the grim period of the Battle of the Bulge in December.

Another assist in that battle occurred between December 25, 1944, and January 4, 1945, when 25 attacks were made against transport facilities in northern Italy. This prevented Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's German forces from withdrawing to support the Axis in the Bulge area or mounting a counteroffensive to retake the vital port of Leghorn, Italy.

As German resistance crumpled and Allied armies approached the borders of the Third Reich, Fifteenth conducted its first assault against Berlin on March 24, 1945, attacking the Daimler-Benz tank engine works. German jets shot down two B-17s, the last aircraft to be lost by Fifteenth in World War II.

On March 25 the last real strategic air assault by Fifteenth was made against airfields and tank plants in the seldom-bombed Prague, Czechoslovakia, area. After this, command missions were tactical and local in effect.

Despite the change from strategic to tactical support, the largest operation ever undertaken by Fifteenth occurred on April 15. "Operation Wowser" was the air phase of Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army break-through at Bologna,

Italy, the anchor of the Germans' Gothic Line since the previous September. Practically every flyable bomber, in all, 1,235--bombed troop concentrations, gun emplacements, and strong points.

After this, missions were directed at preventing German escape from Italy, dropping food to the inhabitants of northern Italy, and evacuating prisoners of war by B-17s converted to cargo and passenger carriers. As further recognition of the end of the strategic mission, on April 16 General Spaatz declared the successful Combined Bomber Offensive to be concluded. Since its beginning on June 10, 1943, when Eighth, and after November 1, 1943, with the addition of Fifteenth, the German will to fight had been broken by aerial assaults from the western and the southern approaches to the disintegrating Reich.

In support of the final Fifth Army drive in Italy toward the Brenner Pass, 2,052 Mediterranean Allied Air Force aircraft from April 15 to 18, 1945, undertook the most sustained heavy bomber support effort ever flown in the Mediterranean area.

The ground advance up the Italian peninsula was so swift that after the fall of Bologna on April 21, the German forces in Italy surrendered on April 29. Mustang fighters were the last aircraft to strike the enemy as they bombed and strafed targets. And finally, Flying Fortresses flew their last mission on May 1 against the main rail station and marshalling yards at Salzburg, Austria. Peace negotiations led to the Germans signing terms of unconditional surrender in Italy on May 2, on the same day Berlin fell. The surrender preceded by five days the final Axis capitulation at Reims, France, with May 8 being officially declared as Victory -in-Europe (V-E) Day.

General Twining, now of three-star rank, left Fifteenth on May 26 and later became commander of the Twentieth in the Pacific area 10 weeks prior to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, the following August 6 and 9. He was replaced in Italy by Brigadier General James A. Mollison (*4) until the end of the Pacific phase of the war in September.

By that time most of the command's personnel and materiel and been deployed either to the U.S. or the Pacific theater.