

Fifteenth was inactivated on September 15 after nearly two years of wartime existence having fulfilled its mission in contributing a generous share of the Allied war effort.

Summing Up

In any attempt to sum up Fifteenth's World War II achievements, one is almost overwhelmed with the evidence, but certainly some generalizations are in order. During almost 18 months of operations, the command had destroyed about half of all the fuel production capacity in Europe, a good part of German fighter production capacity, and had crippled the enemy's transportation system over half of once-occupied Europe.

Fifteenth had developed precision bombing to a fine point. Eight out of 10 bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the intended impact. Many attacks were delivered in adverse weather conditions, but successful use of the new blind-bombing techniques helped maintain precision drops. Strategic bombing reduced the German Air Force to impotence in terms of both fuel and materiel. It was furthermore a tremendous factor in breaking down the German submarine campaign, and upset the German war economy by causing manpower and materiel shortages.

In addition to its attacks on industry, communications and oil, Fifteenth directed much of its activity toward the rescue and repatriation of aircrews shot down in enemy territory. No other air force recovered so many of its missing pilots and crews; no other undertook escape activities in so many countries. By V-E Day some 5,998 personnel had been returned by air, surface vessels and on foot through enemy lines. In more than 300 successful operations, men were brought back safely from Tunisia, Italy, France, Switzerland, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany.

When it was apparent that the war had been won, General Twining sent a congratulatory message to all units on April 1, 1945. After praising the command's accomplishments, he concluded by saying:

"Such deeds are not attained by waiving a magic wand or by use of Aladdin's lamp,



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but by hard work, loyalty, and a conscientious devotion to duty of the entire Force. I am greatly impressed by the effort put forth by the [Fifteenth] Service Command and the ground echelons of all units, without which such a tempo of operations would be impossible. This, with the expert planning by the organization staffs and the courage and skill of the air crews, rounded out the team that enabled [this] Air Force to attain the highest degree of effectiveness."

(*1) Only one more numbered air force was created later--the Twentieth in 1944 for the Pacific area.

(*2) On April 18, 1942, just over four

months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, then Lt Col Doolittle had led a one-way attack by 16 B-25s from the aircraft carrier Hornet on targets in Tokyo and other Japanese cities, with mission recovery in China.

(*3) Gen. Twining also had had some heroics in that theater. When commanding 13th Air Force in February 1943, his B-17 was shot down, with 15 aboard, in the sea off the New Hebrides Isles. With the others, Twining spent six days on a life raft before a Navy patrol bomber rescued them.

(*4) Gen Mollison was chief of staff of the Hawaiian Air Force at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack.