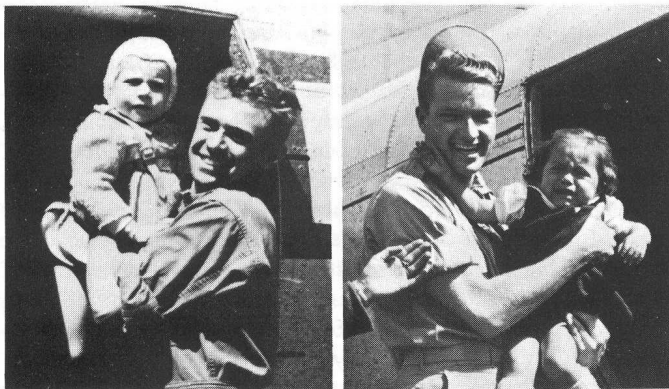




*Red Cross ladies at Istres Airfield 1945*



*French refugees arriving at Istres from North Africa.*



*92nd Bomb Group crew members with French refugee children.*

tion problems and an acute shortage of quarters for the 92nd and 384th Groups. As the units arrived from England, the engineers were drilling for water, laying drainage pipes, constructing prefabricated buildings, digging latrines, and carving out new roads. Because of the solid layer of rock that lay a foot beneath the dusty topsoil, the engineers were forced to use dynamite in most projects. Until the prefabricated buildings were set up, the men of the 92nd and 384th Groups pitched tents as temporary quarters. No sooner were the tents raised than a treacherous Mistral swept

through the base in late June, lasting four days, and over half of the shelters were blown down. (18)

Project Green was officially under way by 15 June 1945. Three aircraft with 92 infantrymen left Istres at 0700 hours for Casablanca. The flight took five hours and 20 minutes to complete. From Casablanca the aircraft were flown to nearby Port Lyautey, where the crews and planes remained overnight. They returned to Istres the next day, loaded with French refugees. During the first week of Project Green's existence, the 92nd Bombardment Group's 325th Squadron, the only fully operational unit in June, flew three missions per day. By the second week, six aircraft were being dispatched daily, and by 30 June the 325th Bombardment Squadron had airlifted 2,029 Army personnel to Casablanca and had returned 311 displaced Frenchmen to their homeland. (19)

On the whole, Project Green was a remarkable accomplishment for the 92nd and 384th Groups. From June 1945 until September 1945, over 100-million passenger miles were flown without a single accident. A total of 39,397 veterans were transported from Istres to Casablanca, and another 6,000 former French exiles were returned to their homeland. August was the peak month for Project Green with 16,792 troops carried to Casablanca, 1,170 over Eisenhower's monthly quota. (20)

The commanders of the two groups, Col. James W. Wilson of the 92nd, and Lt. Col. Robert W. Fish of the 384th, were, from the time of their arrival at Istres, deeply concerned about the morale of their officers and men. From the time of the announcement of Project Green at Podington, many of the personnel grumbled that they were "sidetracked on a branch road that led only to a dead end." And, they lamented, that road "reached from England to southern France to North Africa and back, and no place else." The 85-pointers and over-40 veterans of the groups, equally as eligible to return home as their passengers, justifiably yearned to return home. But they found themselves living in a depressingly miserable environment of wind and dust, and no hope of seeing the United States until their job was done. Morale, then, was a great concern to the group commanders, and they went to great lengths to ensure that their officers and men were busied with a variety of recreational activities during their off hours (21)

Despite the extraordinary methods devised to improve morale, there was a typical amount of GI griping. For the most part, however, it was good-natured complaining, and Project Green was carried out flawlessly. A base exchange was opened, a weekly suggestion bulletin was published with the commanders and their staffs personally responding to the troops, a 4,000-book library was made available, and everything was done to remedy what could have been a hopeless, dreary assignment. Each week the personnel at Istres consumed 12,000 bottles of Coca-Cola and 9,000 quarts of beer in "Cagney's Cellar" and other recreation clubs scattered throughout the huge base. Every night the echoes of "The Dust Bowl Blues" could be heard:

"Got sand in my shoes a-rubbin' in my feet, but the only time I mind is when I go to eat. Got the hey-rey ra-dee da da,  
I got the Dust Bowl Blues,  
I got the Dust Bowl Blues." (22)

The schedule of activities, designed to both ease the pressures and hardships brought on by the demands of Project Green