



*USO troop at Istres 1945.*



*Photo Actress Betty Hutton with USO show at Istres posing with 92nd Bomb Group personnel in the mess hall.*

11 September 1945, best typified the hundreds of other flights since June. The last truckloads of 85-pointers rolled into Istres before dawn. The troops were welcomed by the Red Cross ladies and the awaiting crews of the B-17s. Crew members assisted the veterans in the fitting of their parachute harnesses and Mae Wests amidst the shouts of "Hey Mac, help me on with this thing, will you?" There was the inevitable final roll call before takeoff, and as the planes taxied and began their liftoffs, the passengers relaxed and took naps, visited with the affable crew members, or craned their necks to see the landscape below. The planes leveled off at 6,500 feet, keeping the coastlines of France and Spain in sight. Once aloft, the pilots usually walked back into the passenger section and chatted with the soldiers. Project Green had witnessed thousands of returning combat veterans lining the sides of the B-17s in their webbed benches, but the crew members never tired of hearing stories from the GIs, most of whom had seen over 40 months of continuous fighting. For example, there was the moving story of the First Armored Division corporal. Soft-spoken and stoic, he told the story of thousands who had been in combat:

"When you first get into action, it's fun, an exciting adventure; after a while, after you've survived a lot of your pals, you get a little scared sitting in your foxhole and listening to the

shells whistling around you; you've been lucky so long. And then after that, you just don't care. It isn't fun; you're not scared; you just don't care."

Silence fell over the listeners as the soldier continued. He had not heard from his wife since the battle for Cassino in 1944. "I don't blame her; I've been away a long time," he murmured (28)

As the plane neared the last leg of the journey, the pilots traditionally circled lower so that the passengers could catch a glimpse of Gibraltar, "the Rock." Soon, Casablanca came into view, and the planes landed without incident. The soldiers shouted their thanks to the B-17 air crews, and were rushed away on trucks by Air Transport Command personnel so that they could board the awaiting transport planes ready to take them back to the United States. Without delay, the B-17s were in the air again, on their way to Port Lyautey, 35 miles away, so that they could pick up the final load of French refugees and return to Istres. (29)

The return to Istres was equally as interesting for the air crews. From the beginning of Project Green, the 92nd and 384th Bombardment Groups' crew members had been under strict orders to do everything possible to ensure that the passengers, soldiers and French refugees alike were not frightened or nervous about their flight. Hence, the crews always made it a point to move among the passengers, conversing with them, and reassuring them that they were safe. On the return flights from Port Lyautey, the crew members visited with the refugees in broken French and English, played with the children, and called attention to the points of interest along the route. There were some instances of airsickness during times of turbulence, but most flights were uneventful. (30)

Project Green's termination on 11 September 1945 was a direct result of the end of the war in the Pacific Theater. The transport planes operating between Casablanca and the United States were abruptly transferred to the Pacific for use in the evacuation of recently released American prisoners of war and the wounded. (31)

Unfortunately for the officers and men of the 92nd and 384th Bombardment Groups, Istres would remain their home until 28 February 1946. For a brief interim, shortly after Project Green ended, the groups were assigned the task of transporting Greek refugees from Munich, Germany, to Athens, Greece. That mission, labeled Project Blue, was short-lived, and by mid-October the two groups found themselves out of work. For the remaining four months they were forced to endure the hardships of the mists of