

## HISTORY

### FIFTH BOMBARDMENT WING (US)

The Fifth Wing was activated by General Order No. 30 of the Eighth Air Force on 10 July 1942, but it wasn't until the end of August that the unit approached full strength at its base at Westover Field, Mass. In early September Col. John W. Monahan assumed command of the Wing with headquarters in the Munitions Building, Washington, D.C., while the Headquarters Squadron remained at Westover.

On 24 Oct. 1942 seven officers and seven enlisted men sailed from Hampton Roads, Va., in Convoy "D"—with 80 ships—supposed to have been the largest convoy in history at that time. While this group was still on the high seas, another contingent of seven officers and 57 EM left Staten Island in Convoy "D-5". The first party landed at Fedala Beach behind the 3rd Division on 9 October and after four days of unloading ships and living in a sardine factory, moved to Casablanca. On 19-20 November the men in convoy D-5 came ashore at Casablanca and set up housekeeping in a metal warehouse. During the next three weeks Wing Personnel unloaded organizational equipment and recovered lost or stolen goods, and on 8 December moved by rail to Oujda. At Camp Kilmer, N.J., meanwhile, the last contingent of 34 officers and 52 EM embarked on 12 December and reached Casablanca on Christmas Eve, spending a cold night in the metal warehouse. This party moved to Oujda on 28 December.

Brig. Gen. Joseph H. Atkinson, former commander of the 97<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, assumed command of the Wing on 5 Jan. 1943 per General Order No. 1 of the Wing. Colonel Monahan went to the 12<sup>th</sup> Bomber Command. Six days later the unit moved by rail and road to Biskra, a community of some 10,000 population on the edge of the desert. EM were quartered in vacated French barracks. Officers occupied the Garden of Allah, tourist showplace owned by Count Landon. Headquarters was set up in the Casino, with A-2 operating off the gambling tables. The Wing was established on an operational basis at noon, 12 January, and on 14 January the two groups composing the Wing, the 97th and 301st, pulled the first Wing mission. The 301st put 26 B-17s over docks and shipping at Sfax, scored hits and suffered no losses while knocking down a ME 109 and damaging a FW 190. The 97th sent 16 B-17s over docks and shipping at Sousse, starting fires and suffering no losses. Both attacks were escorted by P-38a of the 1st Fighter Group.

Heavy bombing was a novelty in the early days. Correspondent Ernie Pyle frequented the Wing and Margaret Bourke-White flew a mission and snapped pictures for a spread in LIFE. Martna Raye, Carole Landis, Mitzi Mayfair and Kay Francis, the original overseas entertainers, played Biskra on 23 January. Two days later General Arnold paid a surprised visit, congratulating the Wing on current operations and stressed patience in waiting for supplies. While the planes were pounding Tripoli, Gabes, Tunis, Bizerte, Ferryville and other North African targets, some of the highlights of life at Biskra were the landing and capture of axis saboteurs, a horse show by the French Spahis Regiment, the devaluing of the franc from 75 per \$1.00 to 50 (on which some men cleaned up) and a big party with the Lafayette Escadrille.

During 1-5 March the Wing moved to Chateaudun du Rhumel, a small Algerian town west of Constantine with the two groups based nearby. The unit had begun to turn its attention to targets in Sicily and Sardinia when the 99<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group joined and flew its first mission in late March. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was the next arrival, beginning operations in late April. After the close of the Tunisian campaign in May the Wing with its mounting strength began to stretch out, flying as far as La Spezia and Leghorn in Italy. On 1 June Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and General George Marshall visited the 97<sup>th</sup>. Shortly afterward there began the all-out assault on Pantelleria, followed by the first attack on Rome and the softening of Sicily for invasion. Toward the end of July there was a lull in operations while the allies issued ultimatums to the Badoglio government. When Italy failed to respond the Wing opened up again on Naples, Foggia and other Italian targets.

On 5 August 1943 the Wing moved from Chateaudun to Depienne, 30 miles southwest of Tunis, while the groups clustered nearby. From here the Fortresses ranged far and wide, reaching into southern France, the Brenner Pass, Greece and finally Germany itself. In November the Wing was transferred from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. As 1943 waned it became apparent that the prize targets for heavy bombing were beyond the range of the North African bases. To accomplish the earlier long pulls into far northern Italy and Germany it had been necessary to stop at intermediate points in Sicily and southern Italy for gasoline. Now a move seemed imminent and in early December the entire Wing packed up and traveled to Italy, basing in and around newly-liberated Foggia. At that time the rumble of guns could be heard at the front, some 60 miles distant, and night air raid alerts were common. Personnel had a chance to examine at first hand the devastation they had heaped on Foggia from North Africa.

In January, 1944, Brig. Gen. Charles W. Lawrence (then Colonel) came from CO of the 99<sup>th</sup> to succeed General Atkinson as Wing Commander. With the fast-growing 15<sup>th</sup> AF General Lawrence sent his Fortresses in an ever-widening arc through every Balkan country, Austria, Germany and France. Great air battles raged until the Luftwaffe declined. Late in March the 463<sup>rd</sup> Group joined and flew its first mission, and in early April the 483<sup>rd</sup> Group followed suit. With six groups the Wing became the largest in the 15<sup>th</sup>, and was forced to relinquish command of fighter groups which had been with it off and on for more than a year. The Ploesti campaign began in April and in June the Wing flew the first mission to Russia. In late August it evacuated more than 1,000 airmen from Rumania, and in October launched the first single-sortie Mickey missions by day and night. Meanwhile, the campaign against axis oil points had carried it deep into Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. At the two-year mark the Wing could point to these statistics:

MISSIONS-----	450
SORTIES-----	45,362
TONNAGE-----	104,694
E/A DESTROYED-----	1,525
LOSSES-----	474