

March 1944

Campaigns. This unit has become operational and is operating in the ITALIAN campaign.

Operations. Operations of the Groups within this Wing have been as follows for the month of March 1944.

<u>TARGET</u>	<u>UNITS</u>	<u>DATE</u>
(1) METKOVIC M/Y	460	19 March 1944
(2) MOSTAR A/D	460	30 March 1944

The first problem of operations was the difficulty of operating, either for training flights or missions, caused by the condition of taxiways and landing strips. Between 11 February and 19 March (the latter date being the date of the Wing's first mission) the airfields were frequently inoperative. The fields had only recently been begun, and it was not until June that the last of the four fields was completed - and that means completed only in the sense that hardstands, taxiways, and runway were fit for operations; needed buildings were not then and are not at this date of writing completed. In the early days, as has been mentioned, weather was generally and usually inclement. For example, after all four Groups were operational it was usual for all four airfields to be covered by for during the early morning hours; missions were flown under this handicap, but some of them had to be canceled on this account. With frequent rain and occasional snow take-off was always hazardous and frequently impossible.

The principle problem of training was that of learning that while each Group was confident of its ability to fly, excellent formation experience proved the opposite. Since this fundamental of combat had not been mastered in training in the United States it had to be learned the hard way in combat. But it was learned.

Problems of maintenance were difficult, but they, too, were met and surmounted.

The date of 19 March 1944 will stand out conspicuously in the history of the 55th Bombardment Wing, for on that date 33 B-24s took off and the same number attacked the M/Y at METKOVIC, YUGOSLAVIA. This was a "Freshman" mission, but it was none the less seriously taken. Box patterns of the formation were good, but the two attack units were too far separated for adequate combat flying. Bombing results were unsatisfactory; while several hits were scored the pattern was spread and the river took the severest beating.

Freshman missions were the character of the next four operations.