

OUR U.S.A.A.F. VISITORS ARE PROUD OF "THE FIGHTING 97TH".

Crews of the nine Super-Fortresses (B.29s) of the U.S.A.A.F. who arrived in this country on June 9 on a goodwill visit which comes to an end on June 16 are proud of the fact that their parent unit is the famous 97th Bombardment Group - "the Fighting 97th" - of which General Ira C. Eaker said: "I do not believe that any organization of equivalent size can, with justice, claim to have participated more definitely or extensively in the downfall of the enemy."

The 97th completed its training in Great Britain in the summer of 1942, undergoing an intensive course of instruction in British operational methods, during which, as one observer wrote at the time, they were "read to, lectured to, talked to until their heads buzzed with English."

From Britain the 97th made their combat debut over Europe in the afternoon of August 17, 1942 and thereby opened a new chapter in the history of aerial warfare, its attack on the Rouen marshalling yards being the first demonstration of high altitude precision daylight bombing.

The outcome of this operation was awaited with considerable anxiety and high-ranking officers of the R.A.F. stood with General Spaatz, then commander of the U.S. 8th A.A.F., to which the 97th belonged at that time, on the control tower of the airfield, watching for the return of the Fortresses. Great was the relief when it was known that all had safely recrossed the English coast and when the eighteen bombers landed on the airfield there were scenes of enthusiasm and excitement.

In September 1942 the 97th went to North Africa in support of the Allied invasion and became part of the U.S. 12th A.A.F., and later, when based in Italy, joined the newly-formed U.S. 15th A.A.F.

From its Mediterranean bases the group ranged almost the entire length and breadth of enemy-occupied Europe, and outstanding among its achievements were the sinking of the Italian cruiser Gorizia, and the first air attack on military objectives in Rome.

The peak strength of the group was 3,000 officers and men. In three years the 97th accomplished 543 combat missions and the number of decorations awarded to its members - 18,852 - was a record for any American group in the Mediterranean theatre.