

## APRIL 1943 – SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

It was a foregone conclusion when the 384th left Wendover Field it would be for greener pastures. Ironically, or perhaps it was because the move began on April Fool's Day, a dust storm was in progress when the desert-weary squadrons arrived at Sioux City's Army Air Base. Nevertheless, there were trees and green grass in the surrounding countryside and even the oozing mud a fellow sank into when he stepped off the boardwalks was a welcome relief from the parched sands of western Utah. Here, among these gently rolling farms, began the final phase in the training program that was to weld the 384th Bombardment Group into one of the most effective aerial combinations the United States was to throw into the Battle of Germany.

Colonel Peaslee was constantly looking for defects, quietly correcting every discernible fault, loudly proclaiming every achievement of his men. He worked with them and relaxed with them, and steadily, day by day, he grew in stature in the minds of the men he commanded. On the week before Easter Sunday, the Group sent thirty-four B-17'S to join a large formation bound for the West Coast. For the commanding officer this marked a return to the scene of his youth, for Colonel Peaslee "grew up" in Salinas, CA and it was there that the 384th made its temporary base.

From Salinas, the Group flew the longest mock mission of its phase training. One hundred and twelve heavy bombers, led by Colonel Peaslee himself, swept over San Francisco in five regular bombing formations in a northwesterly direction. Reassembling at sea they thundered back from the north and theoretically wrecked the "Golden Gate." Actual combat was simulated, with Airacobras whining in and out of the formation in a furious attempt to "protect" the city. On another occasion the planes flew a night mission, again with San Francisco as the target. As they swept in from the sea the city did not show up at all in the dark, but as they passed over the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges, the lights suddenly appeared, outlining the huge spans like a string of pearls lying in the dark water. Although blacked out from the sea, San Francisco was a brilliant pattern of lights to a plane directly overhead.

The tired crews returned to Sioux City on Easter Sunday, proud of the leading part they had taken in the largest formation of heavy bombers which had ever flown over the Pacific Coast. By this time the 384th was closer to combat than the pleasant atmosphere of Charlie's Steak House or the Empire Room could indicate. Within two months they were to know first-hand that twenty millimeter cannon can rip a Flying Fortress apart.

Excerpt from "as briefed" by Walter E. Owens published 1946.