

## **THE 505TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP**

**1944 - 1945**

### **A Report from the 484th Bomb Squadron**

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#### **Forward**

One does not always have the opportunity of choosing the time or the people who make up the memorable events of his life. This is a history of a group of such men---most in their teens or early twenties---brought together randomly to organize, train, and to fight in the final year of World War II. A history of young men from all walks of life, working together to leave a heritage of uncommon dedication, courage and heroism---not just a story of air crews, but of airplane mechanics, electricians, armorers, refuelers, cooks, clerks, and all other personnel who worked around the clock to make sure that every mission became a "max effort."

This history is based primarily on a chronological record of one of the many B-29 Squadrons in the Pacific---the 484th Bomb Squadron of the 505th Bombardment Group (VH). This record was originally written by the squadron's Intelligence Staff under the direction of Jack Chapman and Mike Kuzma, and was "rediscovered" several years ago by Charles Craig, a member of that staff, when veterans of our unit organized as the 505th Bomb Group Association. We are indebted to these people for our documenting of the events as they occurred, and to Becky MacIntyre, wife of one of the squadron's pilots, who edited the history and expanded it with excerpts from another brief history of the 505th, an historical record of the Sixth Bombardment Group, and several other publications written after the war about the 20th Air Force and the B-29's role in World War II.

This book is dedicated to all those who served with the 505th Bombardment Group---and, most especially, to those who made the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives in heroic conduct of that war.

William J. Gibson  
Lt. Colonel, Air Corps  
Commander  
484th Bomb Squadron

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#### **TRAINING - HARVARD**

The 505th Bombardment Group commenced training at Harvard, Nebraska, with a handful of officers and enlisted men, few of whom had ever known each other, but with a Commanding Officer who had a well-earned reputation of being one of the hottest four-engine pilots in the Air Forces. Colonel Robert A Ping had recently flown General Arnold to all the theatres of combat and had established a time record in a B-17 from Australia to the United States.

The 484th Bombardment Squadron, created in Florida where it existed for a short time as a cadre unit, was moved to Harvard in the Spring of 1944. Composed of only a few men and officers on its arrival in Nebraska, the Squadron quickly organized and expanded, in keeping with the War Department's plan to use the B-29 as rapidly as possible. The first Squadron order was issued

9 May 1944, and by June, enlisted and officer personnel---both flying and ground---were arriving at the field almost daily from all parts of the Second Air Force area.

The facilities at Harvard field were not originally constructed to accommodate a complete B-29 Bombardment Group. A building program was carried on for the entire eight-month training period while the 505th Group was at the field. Barracks for air crew officers and enlisted men had to be constructed; new hangars had to be built; all types and quantities of supplies and equipment had to be brought to the field. Fuel and storage pipeline facilities were provided. The former B-24 airfield was converted to serve a bigger and more complicated aircraft, demanding larger properties and more men.

Training for combat became the immediate preoccupation of all personnel as soon as they arrived and were comfortably settled---which means, in the Army, open for business and ready for roll call the morning after arrival---be it at 0200 the night before!

### **Training - Harvard**

In June, as training flights with B-17s were begun, and acute shortage of Flight Engineers handicapped full crew operation. Additional crew personnel still lacking were navigators, bombardiers and gunners.

Pilot training for the month concentrated mostly on instrument flying. For variety in the program, formation practice was begun, as well as day and night proficiency checks.

Ordnance men practiced handling bombs; Armament fired the carbine, the personal weapon for overseas service; while Communications conducted tests for its men and practiced with telephone lines under simulated combat conditions. Crew chiefs were assigned men and a specific plane to keep in flying condition. Hangar crews were also divided and two shifts (day and night) were organized, the crews alternating every two weeks.

On 1 July 1944, Lt. Col. Clifford E. Macomber, 484th Commanding Officer, left on detached service for AAFTAC, and was replaced by Major William J. Gibson, who was designated Acting Squadron Commander. First Lt. Gale G. Caldwell replaced First Lt. Donald M. Moore in the Engineering Section. Lt. James V. Newman, Air Radar Officer, reported on 28 July 1944. As of 31 July 1944, the strength of the Squadron was 105 officers, 6 flight officers, and 528 enlisted men.

The average flying time per crew was slightly above the time set forth in the Training Directive; however, average missions completed were far below the prescribed number. This condition existed because of the shortage in crew personnel who must be present to consider the mission complete. Flying time for the month totaled 1686 hours.

Bombing was off to a slow start. With engine changes and weather conditions, it was a bit difficult to get the boys "in the blue." We received our crew bombardiers fresh out of school the previous month and, though none of them had ever been aloft in a four-engine aircraft before, not to mention bombing from one, their initial bombing results were surprisingly satisfactory.

This period of unit training found the administration solving many perplexing problems connected with the movement of the Group Echelon. The need to

complete such necessary phases as overseas, physicals, chemical warfare classes, etc., coupled with the necessity for sending personnel on detached service or furloughs forced the Orderly Room to play a game of "musical chairs."

"For a number of reasons, unit morale has been of a distinctly low caliber. A large part of the enlisted personnel joined from organizations who obviously unloaded some of their least desirable individuals, and these have made a common practice of making trouble for the military authorities; overstaying passes and defying proper authority, generally. Some others have spent most of their time acting as 'Guard House Lawyers,' spreading their false ideas throughout the squadron. The evidence is insurmountable that the number of persons who dread overseas service is amazing---and it is hard to believe that anyone would deliberately seek to besmirch his record to avoid such service. It is hoped that once these neurotics are on their way to war and resigned to the consequences thereof, if any, perhaps they can be made into worthy and responsible soldiers."

Despite this, only two Summary Courts Martial were held: one for absence without leave, and the other for refusal to obey an order. Other offenses were punished under the 104th Article of War (to an extent which brought grave misgivings in view of the paper shortage.)

### **Training - Harvard**

The final POM Inspection, while not overly enthusiastic concerning the condition of the unit, did state that the Ground Echelon would be prepared for its commitment on the date specified, and work toward this end proceeded to the exclusion of all else.

As training went into the final stages, marked improvements were noticeable. During August the sections became better organized; each man now knew more about the part he was to play and the job he was expected to do as part of a combat team.

Lt. Col. Charles M. Eisenhart assumed command of the 484th Squadron on 1 Aug 1944, relieving Major William J. Gibson, who became Operations Officer. The strength of the Squadron was now 118 officers and 571 enlisted men, an increase of 13 officers and 43 enlisted men over the month of July.

The dividing of the Ground and Flight Echelons created some problems in command. Squadron executive officers were designated Commanding Officers of their respective organizations, while the Adjutants were assigned to the Flight Echelons to care for the administrative needs of those who would stay when the Ground Echelon leaves. The processing section for the Flight Echelon was under the supervision of the Adjutants. This system of administration had never been utilized and appeared to leave something to be desired, in that there was a lack of centralized control. Further, the Ground Echelon failed to depart on its commitment date, on order of higher authority, but no effort was made to detain the advancing party, or Ground Echelon of the 501st Bombardment Group. Needless to say, this led to crowded living conditions, discomfort for the new Group, and it created a sense of confusion.

The main efforts of Squadron Supply during August were devoted to preparation of equipment for overseas shipment. The equipment was drawn by the Squadron Supply Officer, who had it moved to a large warehouse at the south end of the field, where it was packed, weighed, banded and stenciled. All boxes were numbered and waterproofed, guaranteeing protection of the equipment against moisture and insuring accessibility to a specific item within a short time. Bedding rolls containing two blankets and one tent-shelter (complete with pins and piles) were rolled and stenciled, one for each officer of

the unit.

The chief maintenance problem in the Armament Section was preparation for the gunnery missions---harmonizing the guns of the B-29s. Inasmuch as this operation took as long as six hours, it was necessary to accomplish it at night (more even temperature, which reduced the "margin of error" in the adjustment made).

Radar equipment was being installed in the airplanes. The first radar set was in operation and no specific maintenance problems were encountered.

Actual individual navigational training was begun in mid-July and by 31 August, ten of the Squadron's 21 combat Navigators had completed all of their training in B-17s and were well into their B-29 phase. The late arrival of eight of our Navigators proved to be a hinderance in getting the training program underway; however, with our full quota now at the station and assigned to combat crews, the training progressed surprisingly well. Ground school and synthetic trainers were proceeding according to schedule.

Radio mechanics were sent to school until it was observed they profited more by practical experience gained on the line. School attendance also interfered with work on the line, as there was a shortage of personnel. Not receiving enough practice in code receiving and sending, the Air Echelon was still attending schools. The radar men in the Ground Echelon no longer attended school, but worked on the line instead. Both echelons worked on the line on a 24-hour basis for installation and maintenance work. Armament personnel completed training courses covering their specialty.

All Airplane Commanders finished checking out in B-29s, but mission training was limited due to the lack of camera and radar installations. However, some high altitude formations and some 7-hour navigation missions were completed.

During the month, four persons were AWOL with three apprehended. Two resulted in Court Martials, one in reduction of grade with restriction. Other restrictions for offenses of infinite variety numbered in the hundreds. In spite of this, morale seemed to be improving.

### **Training - Harvard**

By September, Crew Chiefs were now assigned to B-29 aircraft exclusively and devoted their time to training on these airplanes. M/Sgt. Herbert C. Bush was appointed Line Chief, relieving M/Sgt. John S. Gray, who was assigned to Technical Inspection.

The procurement of general aircraft supplies and accessories was satisfactory, but a shortage in the electrical class (spark plugs, etc.) still existed. In the Communications Section there was a shortage of batteries; there was a shortage of auxiliary power units for operating and calibrating radar sets.

During September the Supply Section made an inventory and banded for shipment overseas footlockers for all officers; comforters and wool clothing were issued to all enlisted men. In addition to above functions, Squadron Supply maintained regular duties such as laundry, dry-cleaning, salvage, and supplying cleaning materials for the barracks.

Greatest maintenance difficulties encountered were because of joint occupancy of one hangar with the 483rd Squadron, and maintenance personnel working on two 12-hour shifts which caused considerable personal fatigue and lack of

time for rest and recreation. By the end of the month this Squadron moved into its new hangar and maintenance personnel's working schedule was revised to three eight-hour shifts.

During the month an explosion of a filter element on an oxygen cart injured two men: Pfc. Ernest F. Yeager and Pvt. Floyd W. Robertson. Pfc. Yeager was quite seriously injured and lost to the organization. Pvt. Robertson was only slightly injured and later returned to duty.

To date the Navigators had flown a total of 1,616 hours and established a great deal of improvement. Seven of our Navigators attended the navigational training center at Batista Field, Cuba. Reports on their performance were very encouraging.

Total flying time for the month was 891 hours.

The only really serious personnel problem was that of AWOLs, but much progress was made toward solving this problem by explaining to the enlisted men their duties and responsibilities as soldiers before they went on pass and furlough. Some resentment existed over being picked up and "jugged" by the MP's through some misunderstanding of a published Base Order whose wording was somewhat ambiguous.

### **Training - Harvard**

In October M/Sgt. Herbert C. Bush was relieved as Line Chief and assigned as Flight Chief. M/Sgt. John S. Gray was relieved as Technical Inspector by T/Sgt. Henry F. Szczepanski and reassigned as Line Chief. Second Lt. Bruce Kranick and Sgt. D.J. Story were on detached service at the Denver Modification Center and Lt. Charles F. Bundy and S/Sgt. Nelson Hoskins were sent to Seattle on temporary duty to locate and check Squadron equipment for shipment overseas.

Maintenance problems this month were caused by aircraft being grounded on cross-country flights because of engine changes and other repairs. These problems were readily solved by sending crews to help with the maintenance. Supplies that were not available at the temporary base of the aircraft were sent with the crews. All men who went cross-country on crews to help get our aircraft back into commission showed a sense of loyalty to the Squadron by their untiring devotion to duty while working at all hours to get their ships flying again.

Operations during the month were marred by two accidents. Airplane #42-24495, which was grounded at Chicago because of an engine change, smashed the right wing tip while taxiing. On 24 October, Airplane #42-24536 crashed during takeoff at Barksdale Field, Louisiana, killing the entire crew: Capt. Paul T. Dowling, 2nd Lt. Robert Powers, 2nd Lt. Melvin Plunkett, 2nd Lt. Lewis Fueyo, S/Sgt. Charles Olsen, Sgt. Cyril Martin, Pfc. Kent Lenz, Cpl. Warner Schmidt, Pfc. Harold Newfield, Pfc. John Nowak, and Pfc. Joaquin Ramos.

Flying training for the month of November consisted of finishing 3,000 mile navigation missions and clearing up odds and ends of missions help up by weather conditions and maintenance problems. POM inspectors approved the flying training program and missions completed and gave the Squadron an excellent rating.

Eventually it was done! We sweated out POM inspection and were declared fit! At this point our crews had developed a sense of responsibility and a spirit of cooperation

that made the operation of the unit more effective.

Morale at this time was good because of three-day passes and time-off given to the enlisted men and officers. The excitement of finally moving began to take effect, with its feelings of danger and adventure. The prospect of having last-minute furloughs put everyone in a good mood.

Organizational changes were constantly being made within the Group, but the final line-up on 6 November, when the Ground Echelon departed was: Commanding Officer, Col. Robert A. Ping; Deputy Group Commander, Lt. Col. Clifford Macomber; Executive Officer, Lt. Col. Charles F. Heidrick, Jr.; Adjutant, Major Erik H. Erikson; Intelligence Officer, Major Harold S. Funk; Operations Officer, Major JOHN R. Wilcox; Engineering Officer, Major Vernon W. Bocock.

The 482nd, 483rd, and 484th Bombardment Squadrons were commanded by Lt. Col. Ellery D. Preston, Major James A. Ferguson, and Lt. Col. Charles M. Eisenhart, respectively.

### **The Movement Overseas**

The movement overseas had been postponed once and had been awaited for some time---almost to the point of impatience. Actual departure, however, came suddenly. Many of the men made their farewells to wives and sweethearts and, on the sixth of November, trucks carried the ground personnel from the airbase to the little railroad station at Harvard.

There were a few hours to wait for the troop train. In the small park adjoining the station, the men unloaded their packs and equipment and sat on the grass. A few wives and sweethearts still lingered during the final hours and shared in the meal prepared and served in paper containers by the mess personnel from the field. Sometime after noon, the contingent boarded the train and began the long journey to----"destination unknown."

Overseas processing at Fort Lawton, Washington, just outside of Seattle, was rapid and of short duration. Late in the afternoon of the 15th, the 505th Ground Echelon walked up the gangplank from the soil of the United States to the decks of the Victory Ship, USS "Sea Star." The ship, the first which most of the men had ever seen, lay at anchor overnight. Early the following morning, after surface fogs had nearly lifted from the harbor, the 10,000-ton vessel slowly began to move away from the dock.

It was a tense and dramatic moment for the individual, and a moment filled with emotion and reflection. The terrific, throaty burst of the ship's horn startled us at first, and then thrilled one with its importance and power. The harbor water was smooth, the seagulls circled everywhere, themselves seemingly excited with the sailing of the vessel out and up the Sound to the open sea.

In a few hours Seattle was left behind, lost in the shrouds of the sea fog. The cold skies of the wintry off-coast Pacific promised a real seafaring experience for the landlubbers from across the land being left behind, and which---the men were discovering in a new way---they loved more than they could easily find words for, or perhaps could ever express to each other.

The second night at sea, almost every one of the 2,000 soldiers on board the "Sea Star" experienced the ancient and indescribable "mal de mer." The majority

recovered and were not afflicted a second time. However, a few unfortunates had unstable stomachs for the remainder of the forty-day voyage.

### **The Movement Overseas**

The ship picked up a small convoy off San Francisco and set a course for Pearl Harbor. Blackouts were observed each night and destroyers were constantly alert for submarines. By day, the number of sea gulls following the ship dwindled as the distance from land lengthened. One day there were no more gulls; the friendly escorts from the mainland had all turned back, and the last bit of America---except ourselves---was gone.

A few days in Hawaii, where Thanksgiving Day was observed, and the journey was continued. Out now at sea in the wide reaches of the Pacific, the voyagers enjoyed warmer weather. Living conditions were crowded and the other discomforts of troop ship life were endured by the men as the days passed by, from horizon to horizon, in a routine of unchanging ocean, monotonous abandon-ship drills, and with a longing to see land once again.

The "Sea Star" anchored at Eniwetok in the Carolines for ten days, while the men tried to differentiate one day from the other by taking a salt-water shower, getting a shave, or finding a book to read. To relieve the low spirits of personnel, a few sacks of mail were flown back from the Marianas and all men were taken ashore for a day's picnic on Perry Island. Special Services provided boxing matches, nightly movies on deck, game tournaments and music programs. The men were permitted to write one letter a day while in port, although they could not say much and could expect no reply in the immediate future.

TINIAN was revealed as the destination for the 505th Bomb Group. The end of the long voyage was in sight. Another ten days and the men would be ashore. Most of them felt that no matter how bad the island might be, it would be much better than the seemingly unending life aboard ship.

One morning a few days before Christmas, the "Sea Star" steamed into Saipan Channel. The first taste of enemy action was an air raid alert for Japanese bombers reported in the vicinity. The emergency was over in a few minutes and the men poured out on the decks again to fill their eyes with the green, solid appearance of the islands.

The officers and men marked for the Air Echelon had continued with training operations after the departure of the Ground Echelon for overseas. The air crews had moved to Kearney, Nebraska, for overseas processing early in December, and from the 15th to the 22nd of the month, the remaining personnel of the 505th (the Air Echelon ground personnel) had left Harvard by civilian train for Hamilton Field, San Francisco. From the West Coast they took off in ATC C-54s for Tinian.

At the same time, the combat crews had begun flying their combat Superforts toward the Marianas and were arriving daily by Christmas

time. With the air personnel and the bulk of the ground crews already setting up living and operating facilities, the Air Echelon had been given A-1 transport priority to expedite transfer to the combat theatre.

The rush and excitement of the move were not without amusing incident. Capt. Chapman, our Senior Intelligence Officer, and Lt. Bird, Squadron Gunnery Officer, detained themselves quite unavoidably at a movie somewhere in Honolulu and missed their assigned transport plane. They managed to catch another plane leaving the next day.

### **Settling in on Tinian**

On Christmas Eve 1944, the men of the 505th were at last busily adjusting themselves to the island that would be their home and base of operations against the enemy for many months to come. Pup tents were staked and set up, and the first meal of "C" rations was eaten.

*Sg. John Hall recalls: "As evening approached on Christmas Eve, the whole field was filled with pup tents. From nowhere, an olive-drab Special Services radio receiver appeared. It was set up on some empty packing cases at a central point in the sea of our tents. The farm-like rig functioned to bring in 'Tokyo Rose.' We could all hear music (Back Home Again in Indiana, and California Here I Come) and then the 'news.' Tokyo Rose welcomed us (the 505th Bomb Group) to the 'Sunny Marianas.' Bombers and paratroopers were to be our Christmas presents. The program closed with some Christmas music and the suggestion that the America GIs enjoy the music before the Japanese Royal Navy and the Imperial Air Force killed all of us."*

The Jap bombers which attacked near midnight brought almost a desired excitement--a relief from the depression of spending the first night, Christmas Eve, on Tinian. Enemy bombers returned Christmas night to greet members of the Air Echelon who were beginning to land on the island in ATC planes from San Francisco.

Tinian was a little green, flat, semi-tropical island formed by pre-historic volcanoes and coral animals. It lay just three miles southwest of Saipan, with its clearly visible harbor of ships and its high mountain, and about 125 miles northwest of Guam. Of the fifteen islands in the Marianas group, Tinian was one of the four largest. It averaged four miles in width and eleven miles in length. Heavy growth of cane greeted the Americans, but the vegetation was not tropical.

After invading Saipan in June 1944, the Marines assaulted Guam on 22 July and Tinian on 24 July. The Japs retreated to the southeast and made their final stand on the high ground on the southern tip of the island. Tinian was declared "safe" by the Fourth Marine Division on 2 August 1944.

### **Settling in on Tinian**

In the Jap Army's retreat, thousands of Jap civilians retreated with them. Crazed by the fear of capture by the Americans, a fear which had been built by Japanese propaganda, the Jap civilians began jumping off the high cliffs to the rocky ledges and the ocean below. Mothers threw their babies over the cliff then followed them into the sea. The Navy sent LSTs and other small craft offshore with loudspeakers and Japanese language experts to persuade the people to surrender to the Marines and give up

this fanatical idea. In spite of their humanitarian efforts, hundreds of Japanese men, women and children hurled themselves into needless destruction. All enemy civilians who surrendered were crowded into the Camp Churo area on the island.

By the first of the new year, practically all Group personnel had reached the island and were busily occupied with getting established. Tinian had been an island of unceasing activity since its capture the preceding August, and now the area assigned to the 505th Bomb Group burst into the scene of intense construction. Men were digging air raid shelters, laying coral roads, setting up pyramidal tents, building personal furniture, loading and unloading supplies and equipment. Despite a lack of tools, poor but not intolerable living conditions, shortage of water and a month of eating "C" and "K" rations, we made great progress.

Seabees were piecing together the quonsets to be used by Headquarters and the flying officers. Showers and latrines were being erected. The persistent and ant-like endeavor that in the months to follow would transform sugar cane fields into an orderly, well-defined military post of wooden barracks and steel quonsets had begun.

The pace of activity at North Field in its construction days was maddening. The line area was a dust bowl with Air Force and Seabee personnel at work day and night. Several Navy Construction Battalions were on the job building four runways, four taxi-strips, and the cross runways. The hardened surfaces were made of coral blasted out of hillsides and moved by truck over "haul roads" to North Field. The CB trucks ran every 30 seconds from coral pit to runway. Blasting was everywhere and constant. Airplanes had to be moved frequently to escape flying debris. Day and night work by the Seabees finished the "World's largest airfield" with its four 8500 ft. runways in an amazingly short time.

Coupled with the normal confusion attendant upon overseas organization, we were subjected to several air raids. Actually, Saipan was the target, but the Bettys always made their bomb run over Tinian. Every alert saw most personnel in search of a foxhole. Also, it was estimated that 500 to 1,000 Japanese soldiers were still at large on the island. The possibility of Jap snipers in and around the 505th area served to keep the perimeter guard so on the edge that many rounds of ammunition were expended in the general direction of the waving sugar can fields. No known contact with the enemy was made, and after the personnel overcame their initial uneasiness, the majority of haphazard flying ceased.

### **Settling in on Tinian**

Laundry facilities on the island began with washing in helmets and progressed to windmill washing machines. The machine was simple. An empty oil drum set on an old bomb rack holder with the windmill on a stand beside it. The windmill drove a plunger which beat up and down on the soapy clothes in the drum. Later improvements added putt-putt motors to drive the plunger.

The evolution of the water supply on Tinian was a slow process. First, it was dished out from water trailers one canteen per man each day. Then came lister bags in the area and, after that, trucks to haul it to the shower room tanks. Finally, water was piped directly from the wells to the showers.

The first rains were amazing to the men new to the tropics. Many times men could wake up to find their beds in the middle of a river of water, overflowed from ditches and sweeping through the tent like the Ganges on a rampage.

Tinian always had a good, hot, tanning sun, but usually had a cooling northeast-to-southwest breeze. The reason for the breeze was the lack of mountains to cut off the prevailing winds. Hilly Guam and Saipan lost this cooling effect.

In spite of the nuisance raids and the constant drain on Group personnel for many and varied details, the organization and building of the camp had progressed so fast that it was possible to run a practice mission six days after our arrival. Because of the distance separating the billet area from North Field, the problem of transportation gave us some concern. But eventually a line bus was put into operation, leaving the area for the line every half-hour. A battle-scarred building, once a Jap Fighter Command Headquarters, was transformed into a line mess hall.

During January, eight training missions were flown against enemy-held islands of Alamagan, Guguan and Many, with no enemy activity noted. This time was spent in getting practice on briefings, taxi and take-off procedure, and practice in Squadron and Group formations, including target runs. The 484th also flew on mission against Pagan Island, one mission against Moen Airstrip in the Truk Atoll, and two missions against Iwo Jima---a total of thirty-six sorties, not counting ten missions in search of a ditched crew. On all of these there was little anti-aircraft fire, and on the last Iwo Jima mission, only one or two enemy aircraft were encountered. During this period the prescribed formation was altered to provide for more and better fire power and to make flying easier at longer distances.

The RCM Section was engaged in RCM activities for the first time since the Group was organized. Primary effort was directed toward the special RCM project under the direction of the 313th Wing and 21st Bomber Command.

Major Wilcox and Captain Wilkinson were engaged in working up and publishing "Standard Operating Procedures" for use within the Group. More mess halls were put into operation, showers with rationed water were assembled, and a nightly picture show relieved us of a little monotony. The briefing room was completed, and we moved out of the circus tent by West End Avenue.

The value of Air-Sea-Rescue was brought home forcibly to us when Capt. Johnnie Wier and crew, with Major Ferguson, Commanding Officer of the 483rd Squadron as passenger, went down at sea in a burning plane. Corporal Estle Davidson floated for five days in a one-man dinghy before being rescued. This was a high price to pay, but we all learned something when we talked to Cpl. Davidson and realized he had consumed only a half-pint of water in five days! We gained a spiritual boost when he said, "Have faith that you'll be picked up!"

Morale, in general, was fair. Inconveniences such as the lack of lights and adequate bathing facilities were often heard complaints. However, with the pleasant climate, the attractive island terrain, and the almost daily improvements to the camp area, most men were discovering that life overseas was not unbearable.

We thought we were ready for action when we left the plains of Nebraska, but after a month on "the Rock" we were sure of it!

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

In our second month of overseas duty, February, 1945, we became more fully aware than ever of the significance of combat. Having oriented our crews to operations from their island base and having ironed out special Standard Operating Procedure problems presented by a combat area and by formations larger than any in which we had previously participated, we considered ourselves ready for missions against the Empire of Japan.

February 4---THE LONG-AWAITED MOMENT ARRIVED AT LAST! Orders from the 313th Bomb Wing Headquarters directed the 505th Group to bomb the Port and build-up area of Kobe, Japan. All our military careers had been pointed to the effort now about to take place. We had been in the Air Forces for two or more years; we had completed many months of pre-combat training. We had come to this island just a little over a month ago. In that one swift month of intense activity we had organized our system of operation and we had established the various ground crews. Everyone felt an impatient enthusiasm in the raid now about to be mounted.

Crew assignments were made, clerks were busily occupied in the various official details, each aircraft scheduled for the take-off was primed and groomed. Ordnance prepared the bombs and carted them down to the airdrome. Armament loaded the ammunition and the bombs, assisted by Ordnance, who fused the explosives. Communications men, bomb sight mechanics, instrument specialists and CFC men checked over equipment to insure the proper and unfailing operation of all apparatus.

Take-off was listed for 0729K with 28 aircraft scheduled. An air of excitement swept throughout the Group, with a great number of personnel lining the runway to see the early morning take-off. Seabees, who had constructed the airstrips and most of the accommodations at the airdrome and in the Group area, had a natural and expected interest in the first major attack from Tinian by the Superforts to which they had contributed so much sweat and toil. Some of our bombers bore names and inscriptions dedicated to these hard-working men of the Navy's Construction Battalions.

The first B-29, heavily laden with 500-pound general purpose demolition bombs thundered up the runway and lifted itself into the prevailing north-east tradewind. Twenty-four aircraft were airborne; four aborted on the ground.

Superfort formations followed the course as briefed, making landfall near Wakayama, and proceeded to the south tip of Osaka, then to the target. Twenty-four planes succeeded in making the primary target run. Because of poor visibility, all bombs were released by radar. Two enemy fighters attacked between landfall and Initial Point. During the bombing run about 50 more fighters attacked, making about 140 passes; they pressed aggressively as soon as bomb-bays opened. These attacks were not coordinated, except in one instance when the middle fighter of a 3-plane formation stunted while his wing men attacked. There were no air-to-air

bombings or rocket attacks.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

Flak was first encountered in the area of Wakayama and at landfall. Over the city of Kobe our bombers were subjected to anti-aircraft fire from three to five minutes. On the route home, flak was again encountered over Iwo Jima, but the fire was inaccurate.

Over the target, bombs from both Squadrons in which our Group was divided were seen immediately after release to be headed toward land in the vicinity of the Kobe railroad station and the Kawasaki heavy industry. Smoke was seen to extend for a mile adjoining the Kawasaki Locomotive and Car Company.

Fifteen of our aircraft received minor battle damage from enemy flak. One Tony was destroyed, five damaged, and five probably destroyed, two damaged, and five probably destroyed. Three Tojos were claimed damaged; one Zeke damaged; and one Oscar destroyed, two damaged. All our Superforts returned safely to Tinian.

Six 484th Squadron planes were airborne and hit the primary target area. These Airplane Commanders were: Capt. Johnson, Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Jones, Lt. MacIntyre, Lt. Obert, and Lt. Corrick (in the diamond). Lt. Halloran and his crew were carried as a spare and returned early, while Lt. Schroeder and his crew aborted on the way to the target.

Large numbers of both air and ground personnel were awaiting the returning crews, eager to greet the men as they came in and to hear the first-hand reports of what the mission had been like. Interrogation was somewhat confused. Most of the crews were brought to the camp area in trucks about the same time. Crowds of enlisted men and officers cluttered the entrance to the War Room, eager to see the men who had just returned from our first raid over the Japanese Empire. A definitive plan of operation had not been developed by intelligence, and numerous officers managed to get past guards that were placed at the doors, adding to the noise and confusion that filled the building as interrogated crews sipped their whiskey shots, provided by the Medics, and discussed the mission. There were no screened off stalls for the questioning, as were later provided, and an efficient interrogation was difficult to conduct.

The congestion created a bottleneck in the briefing room since crews arriving from the line were unable to find room in the building, and, if they had, there were no available intelligence officers to interrogate them. Crews were met as they unloaded from trucks, and were taken to the various headquarters quonsets and told to await a call. Some of the huts did not have lighting and the tired, impatient men had to sit wearily in the dark, falling asleep, then to be awakened and led to a loud, smoky, brightly-lit room for interrogation.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

On the tenth of February, twenty-one of our Group's B-29s taxied down the North Field runways for the second major mission to Japan. The target this time was the Nakajima Aircraft Factory at Ota, Japan. Two Superforts aborted before take-off; one bomber failed to gain lift on the long runway and crashed into a large mound at the east end of the air-strip. All eleven crew members were instantly killed in the explosion of bombs and gasoline. The aircraft itself was completely demolished, parts being scattered over a wide area.

Following assembly, the mission proceeded to the primary target. Of the 18 aircraft from our Group, one bombed a target of opportunity. Enemy air opposition was first encountered off the coast near landfall and a few attacks were made between there and the Initial Point. Concentrated assaults occurred from IP to the target. The first tactical squadron encountered some fifty enemy fighters; the second tactical squadron met attacks from approximately 25 Japanese interceptors. Most of the Superforts experienced meager and inaccurate flak, but the 484th Squadron's two elements ran into a more intense fire.

Our combat losses from fighters and flak were two Superforts known to have collided over the target, one aircraft known to have lost an engine and to have been attacked by fighters, and another considered lost to enemy action but believed crashed in the sea. Three more of our aircraft ditched on the return to Base. Their positions were radioed to rescue craft and searches were begun at once. Of the three ditched planes, Lt. Halloran's crew was picked up almost immediately; the crew of Aircraft 824 from another Squadron was subsequently rescued. Lt. Lowry was not so fortunate. He and three other crew members were lost in the crash-landing of their plane at sea.

Extent of the bombing was difficult to ascertain due to smoke. Six major buildings and four smaller ones were destroyed by fire and direct hits. Considerable damage was later observed in the housing accommodations in the target area.

Our Squadron had seven airplanes scheduled for take-off on this mission. Lt. Shipp aborted after take-off, while Lt. Koller and Captain Asmus aborted before being airborne. Aircraft 787, Lt. Walter H. Schroeder, commanding, was lost over the target. Other members of his crew were: Lt. Milton Truitt, Pilot; Lt. Herbert Shulman, Navigator; Lt. Robert Jeffries, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Arthur Burkhart, Flight Engineer; Sgt. Steve Bednar, Jr., Radio Operator; Sgt. Alfonso Edwards, CFC Gunner; Cpl. Francis Prester, Radar Gunner; Cpl. Louis Murzycki, Tail Gunner.

Lost with Lt. Otin F. Lowry were Cpl. Clifford Morton, Radar Gunner; Cpl. Merrill O'Connor, RBG; Lawrence Mooty, LBG.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

The mission to Ota stood long as the roughest our Group had engaged in and was often used as a yardstick in measuring how tough subsequent raids were. There was tragedy, heroism, and extremity over the target and in the sea on the return to Tinian.

Lt. Lowry's B-29 was critically damaged by flak and fighters over the target. One engine was knocked out, the bomb-bays were badly lacerated and numerous cables cut; the fuel tank transfer lines for #2 engine were useless. Efforts of the Bombardier and the Engineer to repair the fuel transfer system and to splice severed control cables in the bomb-bay were futile. Faced with the insurmountable mechanical difficulties, Lt. Lowry prepared his crew for the imminent ditching. Lt. Francis Sult, Pilot, kept up a running report for the Airplane Commander on conditions throughout the aircraft and attempted to instill confidence among the crew members. He directed the jettisoning of everything that could be removed from the inside of the plane. The Navigator and Radio Operator, meanwhile, were working swiftly to determine longitude and latitude. The crew stood by ditching positions as the moment approached for an ominous descent into the dark sea below.

Landing lights were on, but the surface of the water was not sighted through thick cloud cover until the last one or two seconds before impact. Unfortunately, the big bomber crashed into a great swell and not in a trough. Stopped suddenly by a heavy mass of water, the plane broke into three sections. The nose dropped off and sank immediately, while the other two sections filled rapidly. Lt. Lowry and three other members of the crew were presumed lost with the bomber.

T/Sgt. Claude Blackwell, Tail Gunner, was momentarily dazed on impact, but revived when the rush of water into his compartment miraculously swept him out of the sinking plane. Immediately inflating his one-man dinghy, he began a search for other members of his crew. He recognized the seven-man raft, but was unable to approach it because of the mountainous swells. Sgt. Blackwell then heard the Radio Operator calling for help and he began paddling in the direction of his voice.

On reaching him he found Lt. Robert Weigel, Flight Engineer, also on the scene. Since the Radio Operator had lost his one-man dinghy, Blackwell and Weigel pulled him out of the sea and laid him across their individual dinghies. Keeping the rafts apart to prevent chafing of the rubber, the two fliers buoyed the radio man all during the night and until the next afternoon. All three suffered violently from seasickness. Lt. Weigel had swallowed large quantities of salt water and oil and began coughing up blood, attracting sharks to the vicinity. After some 36 hours in the water, the men were picked up by a rescue destroyer.

The Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded posthumously to Lt. Lowry. Both Sgt. Blackwell and Lt. Weigel received the Soldier's Medal. The Air Medal was awarded to 2nd Lt. Benjamin Townsend, Lowry's Navigator, for his remarkable coolness and efficiency in performing his intricate mental calculations under the intense difficulty of imminent ditching.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

Lt. Halloran had better luck in his ditching. Ten minutes before bombs-away, fire from an enemy fighter hit #3 engine. Holes appeared and oil began to

gush out, but damage wasn't judged to be serious. Bombs were dropped on the target and after a turn from the bomb run, a fighter---high in the sun---got #2 engine. Again, however, things didn't appear critical; but Lt. Halloran soon noticed that both engines lost power when he tried to keep up with the formation leader. He kept falling behind, and when the Japanese coast was reached on the way out, the Engineer informed him that oil pressure was down so far that #3 engine would have to be feathered. When this was done, #2 engine immediately became useless. Efforts to feather this engine, however, were fruitless because the feathering oil had been shot up. The Flight Engineer suggested remedial measures in an attempt to get maximum power from the remaining two engines, but the 60-ton bomber continued to lose altitude and speed. The crew lightened the aircraft in every way possible, firing ammunition from the machine gun belts and jettisoning the camera, the bombsight, food kits, flying suits, flak helmets, and technical equipment of all kinds. Lt. Halloran thought about ditching while it was still daylight, but finally decided to get as close to his base on Tinian as possible---thinking he might even be able to make it back.

Forty-five minutes past the Japanese coast at 15,000 feet, the airplane encountered icing conditions, forcing it down to 6,000 feet in less than an hour. The auto-pilot was on in case control cables should suddenly break from earlier flak damage. Two and one-half hours from Japan, radio contact was made with a B-29 Dumbo and Lt. Halloran turned on his landing lights so the Dumbo could locate the distressed bomber's position. This was done, but then course corrections were furnished and the two Superforts lost one another in the darkness. Later, contact was reestablished by blinking lights and by one of Lt. Halloran's gunners who fired the upper forward turret with a small reserve of ammunition retained for the emergency. Altitude was now at 3,000 feet above the dark sea below.

The Dumbo suggested that Lt. Halloran follow him on instruments, but his compass was out of operation. Red flares were tried, but failed to light. The Navigator, Lt. Paul M. Shuford, released red parachute flares which worked, but the Dumbo could not see them.

While talking with the rescue B-29, Lt. Halloran spotted a ship's light beneath him. The gasoline gauges were now inoperative---In fact, they had read empty for the last half hour. When the light was identified, he elected to ditch at once. The Radio-Operator sent in a position report, which wasn't acknowledged because of heavy traffic on all available wave bands. The crippled B-29 circled the ship twice at the left with landing lights on. The surface craft responded with his lights, and one low approach was made to get her course. With a left turn, Halloran came into the wind at 135 mph and ditched in a slough 1,000 yards off the starboard bow, wheels up and bomb-bay doors closed. The tail hit first for the only impact. There was no skid or slew; only deceleration. The speed at impact was only 90 mph.

Lt. Halloran's escape hatch was open, but slammed shut on impact. It reopened easily. The Bombardier fell from his ditching position at the crash---but the Airplane Commander grabbed him as he swished by. Halloran got up on the window sill, neither he nor the Pilot had anything to hold on to. They grasped each other's hands and pulled themselves up. Then Halloran went along the top of the plane and found the Radio Operator in the Navigator's astrodome. He seemed dazed, so Lt. Halloran pulled him out and sat him on top of the fuselage and told him to hang on to the aerial until he returned. He proceeded to the life raft on the left and helped one of the gunners get it out and inflate it.

Eventually all crew members were hauled into life-rafts and picked up by the

USS "Bering Strati." Forty-millimeter shells failed to sink the bomber, so it was rammed twice before it finally sank. Lt. Halloran was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

Lt. Jack P. Bishop's aircraft, a spare at take-off, joined the mission to Ota when one of the scheduled planes aborted. Approaching the Initial Point, Lt. Bishop penetrated the thick cloud front which had persisted all the way to Japan. Flak became more intense and accurate, and an estimated 80 fighters were in the air---19 attacking his plane alone. Of the ten-plane formation, only four managed to bomb the target; three were lost, and three forced to abort. As these losses occurred, Lt. Bishop moved up from #2 low flight to complete the diamond in the lead element. Icing in his front window compelled him to shift over to fly right echelon, since the only clear vision was on his left side.

Major Changala was Flight Leader of this formation. One the bomb run, when the three planes had to abort because of enemy action and three other planes were lost to enemy fire, Major Changala also had to abort his position as Flight Leader because of radar malfunction. In the lead plane of the flight, however, he controlled the formation. When planes were successively lost on the target run, he moved into #2 position in the lead flight and, from this position in the lead flight and, from this position, he directed the entire formation at bombs-away, in spite of intense flak and violent fighter interception.

Capt. Bernard L. McCaskill experienced a bombing malfunction on this raid which, perhaps, could be distinguished not only as the first of many similar difficulties in succeeding missions, but also as one of the most hazardous. On the target run, bomb-bay doors would open only part of the way and then close. Lt. Carl Gustavson, Bombardier, tried to salvo but was unsuccessful, whereupon Capt. McCaskill, as Squadron Leader, informed all aircraft over VHF to open doors. At bombs-away he pulled his own emergency salvo and completed the full drop for his element. Capt. McCaskill knew that when he pulled his release, the malfunction might prevent reclosing the doors---the resultant drag consuming such quantities of fuel as to forestall return to a friendly landing field.

Later, over the sea, Lt. Gustavson and T/Sgt. Robert J. Aspinall, Flight Engineer, entered the bomb-bay after all emergency systems had been tried for two hours. Altitude was 15,000 feet, air temperature was zero degrees. By an ingenious use of the bomb-bay hoist cables, they succeeded finally in closing the doors. Their method was subsequently used to instruct all crews in the use of hoists as an added emergency procedure.

Mission briefings were opened formally by Col. Ping, who announced the target. All the bulletin boards and charts in the Briefing Hall held information about the impending raid. After Col. Ping talked, Operations gave the "how" of the mission and Intelligence followed with the "why." The Group Weather Officer outlined what we could expect to encounter,

and a flak chart was revealed with its large red circles. Most sweated briefing fact was takeoff weight of aircraft.

The amount of air-sea rescue surface ships, subs, or Dumbos had a direct effect on morale. The more of these, the higher the morale, and crews felt better about the possibility of ditching. Briefings were usually closed by a chaplain's prayer.

Post-mission interrogations followed the Red Cross' refreshments and consisted of general interrogations and special interviews. Filling out the Intelligence Section's form en route helped to speed the process and hurry crews to the sack.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

Field Order #5 of the 313th Bombardment Wing directed the 505th Bomb Group to attack and destroy the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory at Nagoya, Japan, on the 15th of February 1945. For this mission a total of 15 aircraft were airborne.

Following assembly, the cloud cover became so thick that maintaining formation was next to impossible. The poor weather forced five aircraft to bomb targets of opportunity, and nine aircraft released their bombs on mainland targets by visual and radar means. Four planes of the 484th managed to hold together and reached the primary target. Cloud cover was so dense that the photographs taken revealed nothing.

Our Group suffered no losses of aircraft and claimed two Jap planes in the Nagoya area. Capt. Ryburn received a flak hit over the target which caused a fire at the blister station, but his gunners promptly extinguished it.

Of the 484th aircraft scheduled for takeoff, Lt. Koller, Capt. Asmus, and Lt. Jones aborted on the ground. Airplane Commanders participating in the mission were Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Shipp, Lt. Halloran, Lt. Obert, Lt. Jenkins, and Lt. MacIntyre.

The only four planes in the Wing to maintain formation and bomb the primary target were all from the 484th. Major Gibson was Command Pilot, flying with Capt. Ryburn. The other three Airplane Commanders were: Lt. MacIntyre, Lt. Obert, and Lt. Shipp. The cloud front was encountered three hours from the Honshu Coast. After a climb and penetration, Major Gibson and Capt. Ryburn broke into the clear over the entrance to Ise Wan and circled for half an hour to gather the scattered formation. Lt. Obert, Lt. Shipp, and Lt. MacIntyre joined them---and the four aircraft, led by Major Gibson, made the bomb run and hit the target---passing through intense flak which severely rocked Major Gibson's plane three times.

Fifteen fighters attempted to knock down the formation, Major Gibson's plane catching fire from one of these attacks. Capt. Ryburn's CFC system was inoperative and the other three Superforts had to protect him as much as possible for viciously attacking Jap fighters. Lt. Elmer Thiel (lead bombardier in Ryburn's crew) without radar led all four B-29s over the target in a crosswind run of 45 degree drift (winds at 120 knots) and on an unbriefed

run.

major Gibson and the four Airplane Commanders (MacIntyre, Obert, Shipp and Ryburn) were recommended for Distinguished Flying Crosses; Lt. Thiel for the Air Medal.

### **505th BG - - 484th BS**

#### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

Another Nakajima Aircraft Factory, this one at Tokyo, was the target for our Group's fourth mission against Japan.

Starting at 2135K on 18 February, 25 Superforts took off for the attack. A short time after assembly, both tactical squadrons made frontal penetrations of a thick cloud front. Weather conditions prevented bombing the primary target and, of the 25 aircraft airborne, 19 bombed the secondary target by radar (the city of Tokyo), two bombed the last resort targets (Kawasaki and Toyohashi), and one bombed a target of opportunity (Shizuoka). Three planes returned early, having jettisoned their bombs over the water.

About 70 enemy aircraft were encountered between IP and Tokyo. Attacks were concentrated during the bomb-run and immediately thereafter. Most passes were fly-through attacks. In a few instances, assaults were pressed so close that attempts of ramming were suspected. A few Jap fighters followed the formation out to sea. Anti-aircraft fire was met for approximately seven to eight minutes; the fire was accurate and caused some damage to eight of our aircraft.

Due to adverse weather conditions, damage assessment could not be estimated. However, several crews reported observing fires in the Tokyo area. No losses suffered by our Group in either personnel or aircraft. Seven enemy planes were claimed destroyed in the target area: nine Jap planes were reported damaged.

The nine 484th Squadron Superforts bombing the mainland were commanded by Major Changala, Capt. Johnson, Lt. MacIntyre, Lt. Jones, Lt. Obert, Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Corrick, Lt. Hanny, and Lt. Bishop.

Just before the target, Lt. Bishop's Superfort lost #4 engine through enemy action and turned away with a windmilling propeller. No chart had ever been computed for a dragging propeller, but Sgt. Andrew Washburn, Flight Engineer, by interpolating two charts he had, calculated the fuel flow per hour for this engine. The safe return of the plane to its base depended largely on the accuracy of the computations Sgt. Washburn had made on his own initiative and resourcefulness, never having received this particular instruction in technical school. Lt. Bishop and Sgt. Washburn worked closely in selecting the optimum time for throwing the propeller, and their aircraft was brought safely back to Tinian.

### **505th BG - - 484th BS**

#### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

The last mission of the month was scheduled for the 24th. Nineteen Superforts were airborne and winged their way over the Western Pacific

to join the Bomber Command in an attack against the port and urban area of Tokyo.

Weather conditions prevented bombing the target visually, and of the 19 aircraft airborne, four returned before reaching the mainland. Eight planes bombed the primary target by radar, and seven bombed last-resort targets.

There were no losses of aircraft or personnel. Damage assessment was not observed on any target because of the cloud cover, but later reconnaissance revealed the total damaged area of Tokyo was 28,000 square feet.

The following 484th Squadron Airplane Commanders and their crews engaged in this mission: Capt. Johnson, Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Shipp, Lt. Jones and Lt. Corrick. Lt. Col. Eisenhart, Squadron Commander, flew as Command Pilot. Capt. Asmus, Lt. Koller and Lt. Bishop aborted after takeoff.

As the month of February came to a close, our crews---who had, quite naturally, been apprehensive on venturing into combat over Japan---for the most part decided it did not hold all the terrors they thought it would. With the exception of some poor flying weather and a little bad luck on the Ota mission, our performance was excellent.

During the course of the month, Capt. McCaskill was transferred to the 483rd Bombardment Squadron to bolster their combat crew strength. Three new crews, those of Lt. Brookie, Lt. Craw, and Lt. Nicely, were assigned to the 484th and started training during the month. Their progress was slow due to a shortage of equipment and aircraft, but it was expected that they would be ready to join in the runs over the Japanese Empire in the near future.

Training was intensified in February by the initiation of a Ground School Program and training flights sandwiched in between combat missions. Capt. Johnson attended lead crew school and reported that a very good course had been taught.

Ground maintenance was reorganized and changed from a system of loosely coordinated Squadron Sections to a Combat Maintenance-Flight Line Maintenance-Production Line Maintenance system, with all three of the Group's Squadrons closely knit into one operating unit. Many of the ground personnel did not receive this consolidation with much enthusiasm at the outset, but the plan worked out more successfully and efficiently than some men would have believed possible.

#### **505th BG - - 484th BS**

#### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

Capt. Ward W. Huffman of the 484th was made Maintenance Officer in charge of Scheduled Inspections and Maintenance. Lt. Gale G. Caldwell was designated Combat Maintenance Officer to supervise Technical Inspectors and Servicing. Second Lt. Richard Best became Combat Maintenance Officer in charge of Flight Line Maintenance for our Squadron. M/Sgt. John S. Gray was assigned to the Combat Control Office. M/Sgt. Herbert C. Bush was designated Line Chief, and M/Sgts. Wilson S. Heald and Armand J. Forment were assigned as Airplane Crew Chiefs.

There were still shortages of equipment and supplies on the flight line,

but no deficiencies were considered of a critical nature, unless it could have been the lack of enough auxiliary power units.

There was a decided improvement in the personnel transportation to and from the line. A convoy system, operated by the Service Group, provided adequate transportation mornings and evenings, a service supplemented by the Group bused operating on a 30-minute schedule. In general, individual vehicles were not authorized and anyone driving to or from the line without proper pass to use the Seabee's Haul Road would be forced to cover a circuitous distance of some four or five times the nearest route.

Shore lines, the east and south sides of the island, were restricted areas, but this didn't stop the souvenir hunters. They explored caves and brought back everything from guns to gold teeth. They dived into the water at the beaches and found cat's eyes. They went to the invasion beaches and got gas masks and hand grenades, both Jap and U.S. Army.

Ruins of Tinian town and the Jap shrines were other places to be seen and explored. The dock area and the Navy dump on Canal Street were places to visit also. Here, the men looked for building materials of scrap aluminum or lumber. These were very scarce items, but needed to board up a tent or build furniture.

Another source of interest was Camp Churo, where the Jap civilians lived. Civilians worked in and around our area, building flower beds and rock walls.

Seabees were a source of many things. Steak dinners, beer or ice-cream, if you knew someone, and shell necklaces and bracelets if you wanted to trade for them. The CB's were always friendly and their good deeds were sometimes repaid with B-29 rides on a test hop. Only one air force complaint developed---rising prices on their bartered goods. However, the Seabees did a good job in building the area and North Field, and were well-liked.

**505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

In the month of February there was more zealous construction in our area than in any succeeding month. The mess hall was completed and many men had their first mess-gear meal since landing on the island. However, since our mess hall was the first to be completed, officers and crew personnel of the other two squadrons were served in the 484th, while our ground personnel continued with K-rations, which had replaced the C variety. (These were cached in considerable quantity by many men in their tents against the day, they thought, when food would be scarce.) The C-rations which had been our diet after first setting up camp in pup tents, had not taken long to pall the appetite, although we had thought them tasty, indeed, compared to ship fare.

When the 484th mess hall facilities were finally returned to our exclusive use, a man felt little could be desired in the matter of eating---when he could at least sit down to a table and not have to open any cans or packages.

The pyramidal tents which had been erected within a week after our

arrival, displacing the meager shelter halves, satisfied some personnel, while others felt life in the floorless, windowless tents was miserable---especially when rains swept in and left a more of mud inside and out. Every tent had its mouse, who more or less acted as a housekeeper with the crumbs of food inevitably dropped on the ground.

For many weeks the only shower facilities were those provided by the Squadron decontamination truck, which sprayed water over men who wished to wash their bodies. With daily bathing a necessity because of the humidity and the fine, invisible dust constantly in the air, opening of the permanent shower rooms was awaited longingly and impatiently.

Mail began to flow into the area regularly and was the most important single morale-lift the men had---followed by the nightly movies furnished at a newly constructed Group outdoor theatre.

### **505th BG - - 484th BS**

#### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

From the "B-29 Story" by Major Gene Gurney, USAF

But the road to Tokyo still seemed to be a long one. Sixteen times LeMay had sent his bombers to Japan. Fourteen times photo reconnaissance planes returned with pictures showing the targets still standing. Not one important target had been destroyed although the 21st Bomber Command had dropped over 5,000 tons of bombs on Japan. Further, losses had continued high. While there had been relatively little damage from flak, fighter interception and the long overwater flights had taken their toll. By the end of February enemy fighters had shot down 29 of the command's Superforts, flak had downed one; fighters and flak together had accounted for nine. Mechanical difficulties had caused the loss of 21 planes; 15 were lost due to unknown causes.

The men were becoming unnerved. "Ironpants" LeMay tried almost every tactical trick in the book while his crews cursed both him and their plane.

"Hell," he answered, I'm not here to win friends. I'm here to win a war. And the only way to do that is for my men to drop the max weight of bombs on the target."

They were not doing it.

LeMay send them up at night---at high noon---in formation---singly---a hundred at a time---two hundred at a time. The reconnaissance planes returned with pictures that showed the targets undestroyed.

Then early in March LeMay decided on a bold change in tactics.

The B-29 had been considered the perfect tool for daylight precision bombing, and Japan the perfect target. However, there had always been strategists who favored the use of other tactics, and their number increased as the cost of daylight missions went up and it became apparent that pinpoint bombing with high explosives was not producing

the damage expected.

Because of their congestion and generally inflammable construction, Japanese cities seemed a logical place for the use of incendiary bombs.

The problem was to improve strike results without needlessly endangering his men and planes. Maybe low-level incendiary attacks were the answer. The fire bombs were sure to do considerable damage if they were spread thickly enough. But could they get in there that close to the ground with that big plane and get out again? He might be sending his men on a mission from which most of them wouldn't return. He alone could issue the orders. The responsibility for failure would be his.

Day and night LeMay worked on plans; he studied strike results, weather forecasts, intelligence reports---everything that might affect the success of a bombing mission. He was not an ostentatious worker. Sometimes he appeared merely to be sitting at his desk, staring off into space.

"he doesn't appear to work much," said the captain who had been LeMay's aide for three years, "but he thinks more than any man I have ever known. In England he averaged no more than four hours' sleep a night for over a year. Here, on Guam, he will be on the job all day, see his planes off at dusk, stay up all night to get their reports, and at eight in the morning he is back at his desk, prompt, energetic, fresh. It would kill most men to keep up with him."

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

From the "B-29 Story" by Major Gene Gurney, USAF

During the first days of March LeMay made the decision---probably the greatest one-man military decision ever made.

The plan took on shape and detail:

Wind velocities, bomb loads, gas loads, ammunition loads, man loads; airspeeds, magneto settings, oil pressures; star fixes, courses, Japanese landmarks, ocean landmarks, islands; radio frequencies, distress frequencies, code words, flash signals; number of planes, number of men, number of bombs, number of ambulances, number of doctors; initial points, aiming points, target areas, assembly points; start-engine time, taxi time, take-off time, Japan time, Washington time, sunrise, sunset; enemy flak, enemy searchlights, enemy submarines, enemy interception, enemy espionage; enemy factories, enemy power plants, enemy canals, enemy docks. . . The Imperial Palace of the Emperor of Japan.

Thus the LeMay Plan was explained to the men who would fly it.

*Tonight they would go into Tokyo between 5,000 and 7,500 feet. . . Every other mission had been flown between 25,000 and 30,000. The altitude had been dropped five miles!*

*Tonight they would go into the heart of Japan singly. Every other mission had gone over the target in formation. It was formation, interlocking fire, that protected bombers from being slashed by enemy fighters.*

*Tonight they would go into Tokyo in darkness.* . . For the last 10 missions, even during the day, they had been unable to see the target.

*Tonight they would fly to Japan, and back---3,000 miles and more---without any bomb-bay tanks of gasoline.* On almost every mission to date planes had dropped into the swallowing Pacific because they were out of gas. And all those planes had carried bomb-bay tanks.

*Tonight they would carry nothing but fire.* . . The bomb bay of every aircraft would be loaded with fire bombs.

The men were dumbfounded. . . . frightened.

LeMay, the famed high-altitude, formation-flying, precision-bombing strategist, had tossed aside every rule in the airman's bible. . . .

The men exclaimed to each other: Will any of us ever get back? No gas in the bomb bays! Five thousand feet! Didn't they shoot the hell out of us at 25,000 feet?

The cooks, the clerks, the friends who would be left behind, looked at the combat crews as if they were seeing them for the last time and wanted to remember their faces. The ground men knew their friends would go to Tokyo at 7,000 feet, that they would have no guns or ammunition, that their job was to burn out the heart of the capital city of Japan. This would be *that* mission for a lot of them.

The LeMay Fire Plan was headed for Japan. Shortly after midnight Tokyo would be blazing; shortly after midnight some of these planes might be shot down; shortly after midnight many of these men might be dead.

In the Mission Control Room of each wing, scoreboards told the story in figures; the number of planes off, the aborts, the early returns. But no scoreboard tallied the scratched nerves, the numbed hearts, the bitten lips of the men who were on watch---the mission control officer, the air-sea rescue team, the teletype operators.

On all the islands nervous radio operators were standing by to catch the first message. Telephone switchboards and tele-typists were ready to flash to the wings the bad news of crashes and lost planes---the expected news of ditched aircraft---the good word of Bombs Away.

## **505th BG - - 484th BS**

### **Combat Missions/Life Overseas**

From the "B-29 Story" by Major Gene Gurney, USAF

At 1:21 the flash came, Bombs Away. . . .General conflagration. . . Flak moderate to heavy. . . Fighters none.

The message was dramatic but cryptic. Just as the scoreboards on the ground told the incomplete story, so the radio report left much unsaid. It omitted the horror seen and the frenzy felt.

Blink, blink, blink. . . Faster than their eyes could count---up and down, column after column of small green lights blinking on and off. Every one of those silently blinking green lights on the instrument panels meant

another incendiary bomb had left its station, was falling, set to burst 2,000 feet above Tokyo and disintegrate into 38 separate balls of liquid, almost unquenchable fire.

A major crossed himself with his left hand---his right clutched at the controls---and murmured, "This blaze will haunt me forever. It's the most terrifying sight in the world, and, God forgive me, it's the best."

A crew chief cracked jokes, but he was grateful that the danger of collision over the target was eliminated by the fierce light of the fires.

A colonel-pilot didn't mean to talk into his intercom: "When I first heard we were to go in below seven thousand, I didn't give the General much credit for that brain wave. It's against everything the ship is built for--- but I'll fly these missions any day in the week. By God, you can see what you do. Seeing an enemy city burn to hell makes up for a lot of flak fright."

Many of these men had been attacking Japan since the previous November. In those four months more than 800 men from the 73rd Wing alone had been killed. And during those costly raids they had seldom seen their target; too often weather had ruined their formation; too often their bombs had dropped uselessly into rice paddies.

But this was the payoff!

This time every man in the Superforts was able to look out and see Tokyo blazing wildly, burning, smoking, exploding. The planes filled with the stench of smoke which sifted in through the air vents.

For Curtis LeMay, the hours of the mission had been agonizing ones. But while his giant planes were taking off, crossing the miles of ocean, and swinging low over Tokyo, he had betrayed agitation only by constant pacing.

With Brigadier General Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff from Twentieth Air Force Headquarters in Washington, LeMay received the special report from General Power, who landed at 10 A.M. The plan had worked. There had been anti-aircraft fire and innumerable searchlights, but Japanese defenses had soon fallen apart. Damage was many times greater than that inflicted during the raid of February 25. They had proved the feasibility of low-level bombing with incendiaries.

In an interview with newsmen General LeMay said, "I believe that all those under my command on these island bases have by their participation in this single operation shortened the war. To what extent they have shortened it no one can tell, but I believe that if there has been cut from its duration only one day or one hour, my officers and men have served a high purpose. They will pursue that purpose stubbornly. They are fighting for a quicker end to this war, and will continue to fight for a quicker end to it with all the brains and strength they have."