

March 1945

In the ten days and nights beginning March 9, Superforts cascaded incendiaries down on Japan in the greatest fire raids of history. Three-hundred or more B-29s struck Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe (in that order), the Empire's largest cities. These unprecedented, low-level night attacks started conflagrations rivaled only by the burning of Rome, the London Fire of 1666, and the earthquake-holocausts of San Francisco and Tokyo. The world was thrilled by the quick succession of the raids. Only a day separated one devastating blow from the next, a sustained operation the Japs could not have thought possible. They were beginning to feel the vengeance and massive air power of their enemy---America.

On the five "fire-blitz" attacks, no gunners were carried, no ammunition was loaded, and the savings in weight was given to increased numbers of the aimable incendiary clusters packed in the bomb-bays. The crews were briefed to sweep in over the targets at the astoundingly low altitude of 5,000 to 6,000 feet. They were to depend on the surprise element and the high speed of the Superforts to get away safely. Not having to climb heavily-laden to the usual bombing altitude also contributed to the logic of this new tactic. The saving in fuel made it possible to approach and leave Japan at maximum speed.

First to be struck was the urban area of Tokyo on March 9th.

Twenty-two Superforts from the Group took off from our island base, beginning at 0815Z. One plane departed 90 minutes before the bombing aircraft to transmit homing signals, acting as a "Dumbo" Superfort. Twenty bombers hit the primary target, one dropped explosives on the last-resort target, and five planes returned because of mechanical difficulties. The homing aircraft was also forced to return early for the same reason. Bombing was done from 6,400 feet.

No enemy attacks were made on our aircraft and only a few Jap planes were seen within striking distance. Inaccurate flak-fire of the barrage and continuously-pointed typed was encountered over the city of Tokyo. aircraft at 6,300 feet at landfall were subjected to automatic weapons fire, but it was meager and inaccurate. Scope pictures indicated our aircraft were over the urban area of Tokyo and accomplished excellent bombing results.

March 1945

Our Group suffered no casualties, although one aircraft was lost in ditching. Two planes aborted before leaving the ground---those of Lt. Corrick and Lt. Hanny, while Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Halloran and Lt. Nicely aborted after take-off. The crews of Capt. Asmus, Lt. Koller, Lt. Brooke, Capt. Johnson, Lt. Jones, and Lt. Bishop represented the 484th Squadron.

In recalling the mission, General Power said: "The 9 March fire-bomb raid was the greatest single disaster in military history. It was greater than the combined damage of the A-bomb drops on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In that fire raid there were more casualties than in any other

military action in the history of the world. From both a tactical and strategic point of view, it was a tremendously successful raid."

Japanese cities proved to be ideal targets for incendiary attack; flak and fighter opposition was surprisingly light at night; low-altitude bombing had improved the performance of the B-29, enabling bomb loads to be increased and saving wear and tear on the engines; and the use of radar had solved some of the problems created by the everlasting bad weather. The B-29 was in business at last!

Nagoya was selected by Bomber Command for the next great incendiary attack. On 11 March, 25 of our Superforts took to the air to drop fire bombs on the urban area of the city, third largest in Japan.

The route to the mainland was flown as briefed. Weather conditions permitted visual bombing by most aircraft; all planes hit the primary target. Crews reported 25% of the city in flames and a number of explosions in the target area. We suffered no losses in personnel or aircraft, and no personnel were injured. All planes returned safely to the base on Tinian.

Maintaining the reputation of being the roughest flak target yet, Nagoya's anti-aircraft batteries threw up heavy fire in some sectors, ranging from inaccurate to accurate. Fliers were finding names for this target---"Flak Bay"---"Searchlight Lagoon." The water approaches to the city were lined with formidable batteries of searchlights and ack-ack.

Of all the Superforts from our Squadron taking part in the attack on Nagoya, three aborted before take-off. Major Changala, Lt. Halloran and Lt. Jenkins. Crews bombing the target were those of Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Obert, Lt. Craw, Lt. Corrick, Lt. Bishop, and Lt. Nicely.

It was on this raid that many crews reported being caught in gigantic thermal air currents, caused by the heat of the fires on the ground. Some bombers were lifted thousands of feet, suddenly, like a leaf above a bonfire, and then dropped as abruptly. Instrument indications were fantastic; loose equipment hugged the ceilings of the aircraft, then the floors---and crew members, in being thrown about, experienced the most foreboding of sensations.

March 1945

The third of the low-level incendiary attacks was the night of March 13. The target was Osaka. Our Group was to contribute 30 aircraft to the Bomber Command's all-out force, but four had to return early. One plane, because of electrical malfunction in the bomb racks, jettisoned its full load after passing over the target. The remaining Superforts, however, released their incendiaries over Osaka.

Representing the 484th Squadron were Capt. Johnson, Lt. Shipp, Lt. Halloran, Lt. Koller, Lt. MacIntyre, Lt. Brookie, Lt. Jones, Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Craw, Lt. Corrick, and Lt. Nicely. Major Changala aborted in the air, and Lt. Obert aborted before take-off.

Damage assessment: 8.1 square miles of Osaka destroyed.

Field Order No. 13 of the 313th Bombardment Wing directed the 505th Group to attack and destroy the urban area of Kobe. Accordingly, 36 aircraft were airborne from this Group on March 16.

Of the Superforts taking off from Tinian, four returned early because of engine trouble; the remaining 32 planes dropped their incendiary loads on the primary target. One B-29, which could not close its bomb-bays until it was 200 miles past the target area, landed at Iwo Jima due to a shortage of gasoline.

Fighter opposition was meager and concentrated only in the target area. Continuously pointed, heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered over the city of Kobe, but it was inaccurate. Meager and heavy fire was observed from naval vessels in the Bay and at the initial point. These heavy guns fired continuously-pointed flak, which was also inaccurate.

Nagoya, the toughest searchlight and flak target in Japan, had not been hit badly enough in the first incendiary blitz earlier in the month, and was chosen for the final incendiary low-level attack---a repeat visit by the fire-dropping Superforts---on March 18. Thirty-three aircraft were airborne and all began the long flight to the Jap mainland.

Approximately 19 unidentified enemy aircraft were encountered. Two ineffective attacks were made on the tail of one B-29. No other attacks weremade. Light flak over the target was intense to moderate. One Superfort fuselage and wing gasoline tank was hit and landed at Iwo Jima for repairs. Lt. Shipp lost two engines over the target and a third about 175 miles from Iwo. The crew ditched and all were picked up 41 hours later by Air-Sea Rescue. Enemy searchlight tracking was consistently good; parachute flares were observed in the target area, presumably dropped by enemy aircraft. Barrage balloons were seen near Nagoya, and continual radio jamming was reported. Thirty-one of our aircraft landed safely at their base on Tinian.

The 484th Squadron was well represented on this mission. Although Lt. Halloran's B-29 aborted after becoming airborne, the crews of the following Airplane Commanders reached the Jap mainland and bombed Nagoya: Major Changala, Capt. Ryburn, Capt. Johnson, Lt. MacIntyre, Lt. Shipp, Lt. Brookies, Lt. Jones, Lt. Obert, Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Craw, Lt. Corrick, and Lt. Nicely.

With the highly successful conclusion of the 10-day fire blitz, a general holiday was proclaimed throughout the Wing by Brig. General John H. Davies, Commanding General, as a reward and rest for all the men who had put forth a maximum effort during the sustained attacks. Free beer was given in unlimited quantity to all who cared to drink it. Some men engaged in games of softball and volleyball, while others were content to just lie in their "sacks" and relax.

For the splendid achievements of the fire raids, large number of flying personnel received Air Medal's and Distinguished Flying Crosses. A few ground personnel on the line were awarded Bronze Star medals. Everyone felt very proud of the powerful blows delivered to the Japs.

March 1945

On the 24th of the month, well-rested from the grind of five 15-hour missions within ten days, the Group returned to the attack against the Empire. Nagoya was again the target, but this time demolition bombs

were unloaded on a specific objective---the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Works.

Twenty-two Superforts took off from Tinian and bombed individually from 7800 feet, while only one B-29 returned early. Seven enemy fighters were met about 80 miles from landfall and were seen all the way to the coast, where they disappeared without making an attack. Five fighters were over the target. Continuing flak was encountered over the run, while the greatest concentration was experienced in the bay and dock areas. No claims of enemy aircraft were made, and our Group suffered no losses in planes or personnel.

Damage Assessment: Clearing smoke uncovered 173,000 sq. feet of new damage to the big plant. In addition to the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Works, the following other targets were hit: Chigusa factory, Nagoya Arsenal, the Mitsubishi Electric Manufacturing Company, and the Torimatsa factory of the Nagoya Arsenal.

The last three missions of the month were to lay mines in the waters off the Inland Sea. On March 27, 19 planes dropped parachute mines in the briefed fields of the Shimonoseki Strait. Although it was our first such operation, it was performed without mishap and, with succeeding missions, won considerable praise from Army and Navy headquarters.

From the "B29 Story" by Major Gene Gurney, USAF

Beginning on the night of March 27, 1945, the mining campaign became a continuing operation. The 20th Bomber Command had previously run eight missions against harbors from Palembang to Shanghai; the 21st Bomber Command now extended aerial mining on a vastly greater scale to the harbors and waterways of Japan's home islands and to the Korean coast, often using as many as 100 B-29s in a single mission. The primary target areas from the first was Japan's greatest shipping crossroads---the Shimonoseki Straits, the narrow waterway between Kyushu and Honshu, forming the only western exit from the vital Inland Sea. Nearly half the mines dropped by the Superforts were parachuted into these waters; after June 8 an almost continuous complete blockade of the Straits to vessels larger than 1,000 tons was in effect. Ports on the western and northern coasts of Honshu were also mined, and in July the coastal ports of Korea. In all 8,814 tons of mines were laid during 46 missions; this was 6 percent of the tonnage dispatched from the Marianas. Only 16 aircraft were lost out of 1,528 airborne.

March 1945

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

The results exceeded expectations. Only part of the story lay in the tonnage sunk, though over 750,000 tons of enemy shipping were lost or disabled and a further 500,000 tons damaged. The blockade of ports and waterways kept usable ships out of operation, preventing food and raw materials from reaching Japan and military supplies and personnel from departing.

The range of the Superfort left no Japanese or Asiatic harbor immune. With radar, the B-29s could operate at night and in adverse weather and could not be effectively combated. The mines themselves were

marvels of ingenuity. Pressure, magnetic, and acoustic mines could be set to defy sweeping and to explode when the damaged would be the greatest.

Traffic through the Shimonoseki Straits fell from 520,000 tons monthly at the outset of the campaign to a mere trickle of 8,000 tons monthly at its conclusion. Repair yards were soon congested beyond capacity, and many damaged ships were unable to reach repair facilities. The combination of these plagues with the constant appearance of new mine fields and new mine types threw Japanese shipping into hopeless confusion and prevented effective use of remaining ships and water routes.

What this disruption of her shipping meant to Japan was summarized by Captain Tamura, head of the Japanese navy's mine-sweeping section: "The result of the mining by B-29s was so effective against shipping that it eventually starved the country. I think you probably could have shortened the war by beginning earlier."

The B-29 crewmen didn't see the results of their work, and many of them considered the mine-laying job boring. All they had to do was drop the mines at the right time and place. The navigator was the "bombardier" in aerial mining; he received exact instructions from the Navy on reference points, hydrostatic pressures, and spacing of the mines. The missions were usually flown at less than 10,000 feet with each plane carrying 12,000 pounds of mines.

The mines themselves were the results of years of experimentation. Parachutes six feet in diameter slowed their fall, then were released to allow the mines to sink to the bottom. Some of the mines were set to explode when the noise of a ship's engines or screws came within range; others were exploded by the action of the ship's steel structure.

The 313th Wing based on Tinian had been given the mine-laying assignment; the results of its four and a half months of work were far better than anyone had dared hope. Half of all Japanese tonnage destroyed during that period fell victim to the 313th's mines. Although the Twentieth Air Force had been reluctant to spare its B-29s for what was considered to be a Navy job, the damage done to Japanese shipping was staggering, and it was accomplished in the midst of a full-scale bombing program for the Superforts. The plane that had raised so many doubts among the airmen who had taken the first B-29s overseas to India had become a truly versatile weapon of war.

March 1945

Nearing the home islands of Japan on the night mining mission to Shimonoseki Straits on March 27, Lt. Brookie was informed that his radar had only a 10 to 15 mile range. With this difficulty, the Navigator, Lt. Carl E. Van Horn, mistook the southeastern coast of Kyushu for the southwest coast of Shikoku. Finally, one checkpoint was found which could be positively identified. At this point the crew was about an hour behind scheduled time. Lt. Brookie could have jettisoned his mines and returned to Tinian, but he elected to lay them in the briefed field, despite a defective radar, and despite the fact that all the other planes had already gone over the target. Correcting course, he turned north to Bungo Strait. During this run, the Radar Operator, S/Sgt. John Hurley, was constantly

working on his set to achieve greater range. As the plane was proceeding through the Bungo Strait, the set became operative.

Over one hour after all other planes had made their runs, Lt. Brookie approached the target. During the run, eight night fighters were fought off. A flak burst from a surface craft smashed the Bombardier's panel (2nd Lt. Jerome K. Miller). Intense flak from shore batteries was encountered. Engine #3 was shot out and on fire; the interphone and oxygen systems were lost. Engine #3 throttle cable was cut and #4 engine mixture control cable severed except for two strands. However, the run was completed and the mines were dropped in the briefed area. After turning off the target and while still over Kyushu, Lt. Brookie had to throw his #3 propeller. Overcoming every handicap, he landed his plane and crew at a friendly field.

March 1945

Lt. Jones, also engaged in this mission, made perhaps the most unusual return of any of our Superforts. Over the Japanese mainland, everything looked so quiet the crew became a little uneasy---for no accountable reason other than a vague suspicion of Jap treachery. About four miles from the target, a bomber in the formation ahead was suddenly engulfed in a fountain of tracer fire. The crewmen became tense as Lt. William Beaubien, the Navigator, made a slight correction in course to get on the target run, and the plane headed directly into the flood of ack-ack. While dropping its bomb load, the Superfort was showered with flak bursts, as if some giant down on the ground had stirred the embers of a vast bonfire, filling the sky with fire miles high. It was impossible to escape being hit.

Lt. Jones kicked the left rudder for a turn off the target run, but nothing happened. Both the rudder and the elevator controls were shot away, and the run had to be made with the automatic pilot. Lt. Jones, his composure unshaken, told the crew over the interphone that the landing on Tinian would have to be made with the automatic pilot---a hazardous and most unprecedented emergency procedure, since the mechanical settings would make the pilot's delicate control impossible. The men, at that moment, were more worried about getting away from Japan.

The flight homeward was bizarre, even comic. Despite Lt. Jones' struggle with available controls, having no elevator, the giant bomber weaved and turned in vast arcs through the sky, like an insane roller-coaster. This was not all---as if the slow, monotonous, wave-like rolls were not disturbing enough. A flak burst had ripped a huge section of the tail surface into a flapping, dragging "rudder," forcing the plane to fly sideways. The Navigator compensated for it as more or less constant drift. After long hours of flying in this manner, with the unwanted "rudder" consuming a dangerous amount of fuel, Tinian was finally sighted---with a half-hour's fuel remaining. Lt. Jones called to the tower for a crash landing. He had heard of only one previous landing made successfully with the auto-pilot, and that one had been accomplished with at least the aid of elevators.

As a testament to this superb flying skill, Lt. Jones brought his plane down without any further damage, and without injury to any member of the crew.

March 1945

In the month of March, our life overseas had become more settled and more organized. As the novelty of being in the Marianas rapidly wore off, improvements made to the Squadron area helped to lessen the monotony of daily routines. Daily news summaries of the war were presented over the public address system by the Intelligence Section. Nightly motion pictures continued to be one of the most vital supports of morale, and quantities of Armed Forces editions of books were eagerly received and read by large numbers of personnel. Special Services editions of popular magazines were also well-received. Many men found time to visit the various natural beaches on the west and southwest shores of the island, only one of which was officially approved. The permanent showers were opened and being able to take a quick shower without having to stand in the mud while a truck hose furnished water was another lift to morale. Church services were held regularly in the Group Chapel would eventually be constructed.

Near the end of the month, the Group laundry was established, which alleviated the inadequate Quartermaster service.

During March the Group ice plant, sponsored by the officers, was begun with the prospect of cooled drinks closer. Our mess hall was equipped with an electric refrigerator, and perishable foods could be preserved locally. An ice-cream freezer, also purchased by the officers, made it possible for the men to enjoy one of the most famous America desserts.

The most significant personnel change during the month was the assignment of Major William J. Gibson, Operations Officer, to Squadron Commander. He replaced Lt. Col. Charles Eisenhart, who moved up to Deputy Commander of the Group. Major John Changala became Operations Officer.

April 1945

In our fourth month overseas, we engaged in 16 missions to the Japanese main islands---the highest total for any 30-day period. The attacks (running about every other day) included every type of operation from mining, which began the month, to the series of strikes against the Kyushu Airfields at the end of the month, in support of the battle of Okinawa.

The first operation of the month was a double-pronged affair.

On 3 April, nine Group aircraft took part in mine-laying in the Kure ho and Hiro areas. Ack-ack was meager and inaccurate; no airplanes were lost, and all crews returned safely to Tinian. Five of these Superforts were from the 484th Squadron: Lt. MacIntyre, Lt. Brookie, Lt. Obert, Lt. Helfert, and Capt. Johnson.

At the same time, 17 other Superforts were busy bombing the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Works in Tokyo, and the port and urban area of the capital. Three bombers of the 20 airborne on this mission were forced to return early due to mechanical trouble. The 484th had six Superforts on this mission. Lt. Craw aborted after take-off, but Lt. Koller, Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Corrick, Lt. Nicely, and Capt. Brown completed the flight.

Another Japanese aircraft engine works was the target for the next blow. On 7 April, the Mitsubishi plant in Nagoya was hit by Superforts, joining in a Bomber Command raid.

The B-29s proceeded individually to Iwo and from there to the Aikuchi Cape, which was the Group assembly point. Weather conditions, however, hampered forming up over Aikuchi, and only 21 planes proceeded to IP in a combat group and bombed the primary target. There was no fighter escort to ward off the heavy fighter attacks. Fourteen assaults were met over Biwo lake. Determined opposition was encountered in the target area; there were 47 passes experienced. Predominant was the "12 o'clock express," with Tojos, Tonys, Zekes, and Oscars approaching singly and in pairs, and diving straight down on the lead aircraft. Leading and accurate flak was also observed. None of our aircraft suffered severe damage, and eight enemy planes were claimed destroyed, three probably destroyed, and seven damaged.

Strike photographs revealed many fires in the target area and many buildings directly hit and destroyed. Of the 32 airborne B-29s, two made early landings. The other 30 bombed the Jap mainland. Of these 30, seven made emergency landings on Iwo Jima because of gasoline shortages.

It was a maximum effort for the 484th. Fourteen planes were airborne, and there were no aborts. Crews participating were those of Capt. Asmus, Capt. Johnson, Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Halloran, Lt. Brookie, Lt. Jones, Lt. Obert, Lt. Jenkins, Lt. Pifer, Lt. Corrick, Lt. Bishop, Lt. Helfert, Lt. Herlihy, and Capt. Brown. Major Gibson, flying with Capt. Ryburn, led the Squadron as Command Pilot.

Damage assessment: Ninety percent of the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Plant at Nagoya was destroyed or put out of commission.

April 1945

At this time, the invasion of Okinawa---which had begun on 1 April, Easter Sunday---was meeting violent Jap fighter attacks. In an attempt to knock out the Kyushu Airfields, from which these Jap raids were mounted, our Superforts made the first of a series of strikes with fragmentation bombs and high explosives. On 8 April, the day following the Mitsubishi raid at Nagoya, Kanoya East Airfield was the target. On 9 April, there was another mine-laying mission to Shimonoseki Strait. All planes returned without incident.

On Thursday, 11 April, the Group returned to high explosive bombing, with the target the Hodagaya Chemical Industries plant in Koriyama.

Twenty-one Superforts flew the briefed course to Japan, 19 hitting the primary target and two jettisoning their bombs. On the target run, our formation saw another element on a collision course and gave way to the right of the approaching aircraft to pass. In the resultant dispersal, one of our aircraft lost the main group and went over the target alone at 15,000 feet. Crews saw some anti-aircraft fire, but there were no casualties. Seven B-29s landed at Iwo Jima on the return flight.

Tokyo was revisited on the 13th. Thirty-six Superforts from the Group were directed by Wing orders to destroy the arsenal area of the Japanese capitol. Method of attack was by individual target run, and there was to be no fighter escort. One plane developed engine trouble prior to landfall and was forced to jettison bombs and return to Tinian. The remaining 35 aircraft bombed the primary target.

Twenty-eight fighters were reported in the target area. Our Group experienced five attacks and claimed one fighter destroyed and one damaged. An unidentified aircraft was seen to launch four rockets at a B-29 without effect. Over the target, continuously pointed barrage-type flak was encountered. At 8,000 feet, four "balls of fire" about the size of a fighter plane flared up at level height, then drifted to earth and flared up again upon hitting the ground. The right blister scanner on aircraft 4V-390 said he was certain the "ball of fire" had a wing.

One Group Superfort was lost with the entire crew, circumstances unknown. The radar operator and a RBG on another crew were injured. Two bombers landed on Iwo Jima and all remaining planes returned to Tinian.

Damage assessment: 10.7 square miles of Tokyo were heavily damaged.

April 1945

On April 15 aircraft of the 505th Bomb Group were directed to attack the urban area of Kawasaki. In compliance, 30 aircraft took off from the island's North Field, starting at 0735Z.

Only four fighter attacks and one rocket attack were reported by this group in approaching and over the target area. Unidentified Jap fighters followed the B-29s after leaving the target for approximately 250 miles. Aircraft 894, which was attacked while in a searchlight beam, received a 13.7 mm hole in the left wing. Several crews observed air-to-air rocket attacks in the target area. Eleven crews observed "balls of fire" which came up from the ground, leveled off and followed the aircraft. Four of these unidentified objects pursued the bombers two hundred miles out to sea, at utmost speed, forcing the B-29s to land at Iwo due to excessive consumption of fuel. In the target area, one "ball of fire" was seen to strike a plane and blow it up. Accurate and continuous flak was experienced over the city of Kawasaki. Despite all of this opposition, all our planes, except one that landed at Iwo, returned to the Base. Planes from the 484th were those of: Johnson, MacIntyre, Obert, Craw, Corrick, Bishop, Herlihy and Brown. Asmus and Hoffer aborted.

Damage assessment: Included in the total damage assessment from this coordinated mission and the one against Tokyo, just preceding it, was damage to 54 numbered targets. Among these were arsenals, ordnance supply depots, clothing depots, gun powder works, power stations, chemical plants, armories, rail yards, radio stations, freight yards, warehouses, piers, instrument works, iron works, elevators, factories, steel and chrome works, rubber plants, wire cable companies, and spinning mills.

April 1945

In eight missions during the latter half of the month, a half-dozen Kyushu airfields were hit repeatedly in an effort to reduce Japanese fighter and bomber interference with American operations on Okinawa. In the same period, one attack was made on the Hitachi Aircraft Company, near Tokyo.

On the 20th of the month, 22 of our planes returned to Kokubu for another vicious attack. On this mission, fighter resistance was quite determined. About 36 fighter attacks were counted by the B-29s in our formations, but we suffered no losses.

Kushira and Kanoya were the attack targets for the 22nd of April, and on the 24th, the Group returned to strategic bombing with a blow directed at the Hitachi Aircraft Company near Tokyo. Ten of our Group planes joined the other Groups on the raid; an eleventh bomber (Lt. Bishop) was forced to return with a blown cylinder head in one of the engines.

All ten planes bombed the target, flying at 14,000 feet. Direct hits were observed in the plant area, and strike photos of the factory taken after the last squadron had passed over the target revealed huge fires. There was ack-ack in the target area, and 19 fighter planes approached, six of them making assaults. The gunners fired with zeal, and not a little apprehension. Claims were one Irving and one Zeke, and one Tojo damaged. We suffered no losses in aircraft or personnel.

On Herlihy's plane, two miles out from the coast, a hit immediately set #4 engine on fire with such intensity that flames began streaming 40 feet behind the massive wing. All four engines cut out momentarily at this point, but three of them, fortunately, started again. The propeller on the burning engine was feathered, and the crew was ordered to stand-by for emergency. Other bombers in the formation advised an immediate bail-out. With altitude at 12,000 feet, Sgt. Dock Taunton, Engineer, prevailed upon Lt. Herlihy to let him try to put out the fire, there being little chance of friendly rescue so close to hostile shores.

The following procedure was used on an attempt to put out the flames:

(1) Sgt. Taunton cut the mixture, retarded the throttle, feathered the engine, cut off the booster pump, closed the fuel shut-off valve, closed the cowl flaps and the inner cooler and oil flaps, and turned off the magneto switches. At this point, he used one CO2 cylinder only, as he didn't know whether he had to deal with an accessory fire or an engine fire. The engine was then unfeathered and the gear lowered for a bailout, but Sgt. Taunton again persuaded Lt. Herlihy to try one other method---a dive.

(2) With altitude at 14,000 feet, the plane dived with unfeathered propeller, with fuel shut-off valve closed, and switches off, in an attempt to such out the fire. The plane was dived 10,000 feet at 400 mps, with gear down. During the dive the fire was extinguished; however, the engine continued to emit black smoke.

(3) Lt. herlihy leveled off at 2,000 feet and the engine was again feathered, the cowl flaps opened, and the second CO2 cylinder used. At this point the smoke subsided. With the feathered engine, the plane and crew landed at Iwo Jima safely.

Lt. Herlihy was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross, and Sgt. Taunton for the Air Medal.

April 1945

Two days after this mission the tactical support pounding of Kyushu Airfields was resumed. Nittagahara Airfield was the target on the 26th for 23 planes loaded with explosives and fragmentation bombs. The next day, the 27th, twelve B-29s took off for another visit to Kokubu Airfield. Two of the bombers had to land at Iwo on the flight up, and another plane got separated from the Group and joined a formation to bomb Kanoya Airfield.

About 35 Jap fighters met the raiders this time and pressed their initial attacks with phosphorus bombs. Most attacks were made out of the sun; a second method of assault was to come in on a high nose approach, diving down and pulling out slightly below level, within 100 to 500 yards of formation. They hurled their bombs into the formation as they broke away. No planes were damaged, however, although the bombers flew directly through the phosphorus plumes and streamers. Crews could smell the odor of bursting bombs, while the gunners fired on the attackers.

While other planes of the Bomber Command spread all over Kyushu, hitting at scores of airfields used to stage Jap fighter and bomber attacks against Okinawa and the American Naval Forces off of the island, 22 of our planes headed for Kokubu.

Fighter opposition was on the largest scale yet encountered. The enemy had become fully aware of the sharp curtailment our raids were having on their air operations. Our first squadron crews met 50 to 60 enemy planes immediately after bombs-away. The ensuing air battle lasted 15 minutes; 30 to 40 attacks were made. The second squadron of B-29s ran into 15 persistent enemy fighters from UP to the target and out again to land's end. These passes were unaggressive, with phosphorus bombs being reported. Our gunners fire was heavy and murderous. Total claims were: 21 enemy planes destroyed, 7 probables.

Airstrips at Tachikowa were the targets for the final mission of the month.

Cloud cover made it impractical to bomb the primary target, so the planes moved over to the city of Hamamatsu and made a radar run. Two aircraft had to land at Iwo---one with #3 engine out---and Capt. Johnson, with #3 engine feathered and an oil leak in #2. Considerable fighter resistance was met in this strike, and a good number of the enemy fighters were knocked down. One of our tail-gunners was killed by enemy fighter fire, and two of our planes suffered battle damage.

April 1945

Living conditions in the Squadron and Group areas became steadily more pleasant and agreeable during the fourth month of our occupation. Roads running north-south and east-west were widened and improved,

accelerating traffic and making travel less disruptive. Broadway---as in Manhattan, whose streets the roads on Tinian were named---was the main artery North-south and was the first to be made a double-lane thoroughfare, with the native species of low pine forming a natural separation. A panoramic Riverside Drive was begun, to skirt the full west length of the island along the 150-foot cliffs overlooking the sea. There was a majestic view from this road of the expanding harbor at Tinian Town and the dias-like island of Agiguan, sitting five miles across the bright blue Tinian Strait.

The airfield was continually being improved and enlarged. Four runways were completed, permanent quonset huts for the various airdrome maintenance sections and services were erected. The road connecting the area with the airfield was finally open to all traffic.

In the area, wooden prefabricated hutments were started, and the men began moving from their tents to the new barracks. Large power units were acquired by the Squadron and lighting was more ample, if not more dependable.

"Gooks"---a name given to Japanese, Korean, Chomorra, and other native civilians---continued to build coral rock walls and to perform such duties as garbage and waste details.

A beer counter was established in the Squadron Day-Room, and this morale-building beverage was sold nearly every other night for several weeks, until it was reduced to a more Army-like regularity---once a week, at most.

May 1945

The month of May opened with a resumption of the minefield missions. On the third, 21 aircraft from the Group took off to lay mines in the Shimonoseki Strait area. At the same time, another group of four planes were airborne to lay mines in the Kobe-Osaka area. Airplane commanders were instructed to lay their mines in the specified area individually, rather than in formation. Enemy opposition was negligible.

Major Gibson, Commanding Officer of the 484th Bomb Squadron, flew this mission with Capt. Johnson's crew, assigned to Superdumbo. Other crews participating were those of Capt. Ryburn, Lt. Koller, Lt. Jones, Lt. Corrick, Lt. Obert, Lt. Pifer, and Lt. Savage.

Two days later, on the fifth, a small force of Group planes left Tinian to sow mines in the Nagoya Bay area. Again, no enemy interference was encountered.

In early May, the battle for Okinawa had developed into one of the most bitter struggles of the war. In artillery expenditure and air action it was the greatest fight of the Pacific. Only at Peal Harbor were more ships lost than those sunk or damaged off Okinawa by Japanese suicide fighters and bombers. Principal staging area for these Jap planes were the numerous Kyushu Airfields, 350 miles to the north. Our Superforts again had to be used in the operation; no one had ever foreseen tactical strikes at airfields.

May 1945

Two targets were designated for the attack on May 7---the Oita and the Usa Airfields.

The squadron attacking the Oita Airfield ran into heavy air opposition; the Japs had sensed the danger to the support of their trapped forces in Okinawa. On the second run over the primary target, the formation encountered 50 to 60 fighters, which attacked continuously to the target and beyond, to a point 20 miles off land's end. The fighters approached from the northeast, possibly from Bofu or Matsuyama.

Because of the confusion and the melee of the battle, it was impossible for the crews to give an accurate count of the number of attacks made, but an estimated 75 to 100 aggressive assaults were fought off, most of the fighters being single engine Jacks, Franks, and a few Georges. An estimated ten twin-engine craft were also noted, concentrating on nose attacks, low and level, with breakaways right, left, and steep dives under. Several of these fighters flew straight through the formation, rolling over as they came. Most of the single engine planes made pursuit curves on both sides. Coordinated attacks were the rule, rather than the exception. As many as eight lined up for side-wheeler attacks in trail.

Those single-engine planes which attacked level to high, 10 to 12 o'clock, turned up their bellies to throw phosphorous bombs into the formation from launchers which looked similar to rocket-launching tubes. About 30 of these bombs were counted bursting in pairs; they were accurate, but inefficient. On the first run, one crew reported seeing a "ball of fire" three or four miles right of course. It came up from the ground, leveled off at 10,000 feet, flew level a short distance, then split in two and glided to the ground, where it exploded.

One crew on this mission was forced to ditch with two or three engines shot out. Nine survivors were rescued by a friendly submarine. Two members of the crew were killed by enemy shell fire, possibly over target.

Another Superfort, a 484th Squadron plane, was downed by enemy aircraft while making its second run on the target. The men lost were: Lt. Richard A. Gray (APC), Lt. Edward K. Grempler (P), Lt. Joseph A. Plaszkowski (N), Lt. Carl R. Gustavson (B), Lt. Matt C. Meyers (X), M/Sgt. Robert J. Aspinall (FE), Sgt. Galen Westmoreland (Radio), Sgt. John C. Edwards (Radar), Sgt. Julius R. Rivas (CFC), Sgt. Marvin L. Binger (RBG), and Sgt. Dorsey L. Riddlemoser (TG).

The Squadron attacking the Usa Airfield followed the route as briefed. Eight Nicks were met at the assembly point, and about 20 more Nicks and Irvings joined the ensuing air battle from IP to the target and out again to land's end. Most of the fighters attacked out of the sun, using cannon fire, as well as the usual machine guns. A second of our Group's Superforts was lost---unintentionally rammed by a Nick which had been hit by a burst of our gunner's fire. One of the crew of the falling B-29 may have parachuted to earth. No other parachutes were seen.

Engaging in this rough mission were: Brookie, Koller, Herlihy, Nicely, Changala, Jones, and Corrick.

Seaki Airfield on Kyushu was designated as the target for one squadron of 12 Superforts on 11 May. Of the 12 aircraft scheduled, eleven were airborne; three of these had to return early because of mechanical difficulties and a fourth landed at Iwo. The seven bombers remaining continued on to the airfield and dropped their bombs. There was no fighter escort. Enemy planes were sighted, but none attacked.