

839 BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, HEAVY



MISSION

LINEAGE

79 Bombardment Squadron (Light) constituted, 20 Nov 1940
Activated, 15 Jan 1941
Redesignated 79 Bombardment Squadron (Medium), 30 Dec 1941
Redesignated 8 Antisubmarine Squadron (Heavy), 29 Nov 1942
Redesignated 839 Bombardment Squadron, Heavy, 14 Oct 1943
Inactivated, 7 Nov 1945

STATIONS

Savannah, GA, 15 Jan 1941
Manchester, NH, 19 Jun 1941
Cherry Point, NC, 12 May 1942
Miami, FL, 11 Sep 1942 (operated from Trinidad and other bases in the area, Jul-Aug 1943)
Pueblo AAB, CO, 14 Oct 1943
Bruning AAFld, NE, 17 Nov 1943
Alamogordo AAFld, NM, 15 Dec 1943-10 Mar 1944
Lavenham, England, 4 Apr 1944-26 Aug 1945
Drew Field, FL, Sep-7 Nov 1945

ASSIGNMENTS

45 Bombardment Group, 15 Jan 1941
26 Antisubmarine Wing, 22 Nov 1942
487 Bombardment Group, 14 Oct 1943-7 Nov 1945

ATTACHMENTS

25 Bombardment Group, Jul-Aug 1943

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-18

A-20

DB-7 (for training and maneuvers), 1941-1942

B-18

DB-7

B-34

A-29

RM-37

B-24

B-24, 1943-1944

B-17, 1944-1945

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Antisubmarine operations, 9 Feb 1942-28 Aug 1943. Combat in ETO, 7 May 1944-21 Apr 1945.

The first clash occurred the morning of 19 July 1943, when the aircraft piloted by 2LT W. P. Destiche sighted and contacted by radar, simultaneously a sub some 25 miles distant. The B-24D attacked twice, dropping four depth charges during the first run and employing its guns on the second. An oil slick resulted from the first attack. The sub remained on the surface, and bravely fought it out with its deck guns of several calibre's, and the B-24D was damaged by 20mm hits on its tail and props. After the second, strafing attack, the sub crash dived and, in spite of his damage, LT Destiche remained in the area for 30 minutes before he was forced to retire due to increasing difficulty in handling his crippled aircraft. Other units were dispatched to the area, but apparently nothing more of the sub was sighted. LT Destiche's radio and radar operator were slightly wounded, although the names of these men are not recorded.

Four days later, at 1400Hrs on 24 July 1943, LT George Richmond's crew sighted a sub operating off the South American coast, although the exact location is not recorded. LT Richmond dived his plane to the attack, and the sub turned broadside to the plane. The U-boat opened up with 37mm AA fire when the B-24D was about 400 yards out - and a round pierced the bombardier's panel, thereby prematurely releasing four depth charges. At this point, the plane was only about 75 feet above the sub, which remained fully surfaced. As it passed over the sub, the tail gunner opened up with his twin .50's and reported two explosions about 50 yards astern of the sub. The sub's conning tower rocked furiously and it executed a crash dive. The B-24 circled and released another depth charge in front of the swirl. Both the radio operator and the bombardier were wounded slightly by the sub's AA fire, and one of the subs shell's hit the left elevator, while another entered the bomb bay and shattered the top of the waist windows, "illuminating the inside of the fuselage like a Fourth of July celebration," in the words of one crew member. The bombardier's panel and No.3 engine were hit. Despite heavy handling, LT Richmond brought the B-24 and its crew safely back to base.

LT Richmond's crew sighted submarine survivors on a life raft in the Caribbean on 31 July, and dropped survival kits to them, but then was ordered to continue its mission. It was later confirmed (by the U.S. Naval Operating Base at Trinidad) that this was a raft earlier dropped by a Navy flying boat to three survivors of a submarine first attacked by LT Destiche's B-24 on 19 July, and which finally sank on 21 July. On 6 August, a Squadron B-24 based out of Zandery field once again sighted the survivors, reported them, and they were later rescued by a convoy escort leader. One of the survivors was the U-boat Commander.

Next followed two night attacks by Squadron B-24's on subs operating in an entirely different area, this time off one of the Dutch islands of the West Indies. While flying patrol duty 1 August 1943 at 7:45PM, LT Mayfield Schilling's crew contacted two radar targets. One turned out to be an Argentine registered tanker, but the other was "a small target a mile and a half ahead of the tanker," which turned out to be a U-boat. LT Schilling "homed" on the target, but it disappeared. The pilot then applied the prescribed tactics for such an event and, an hour later, again picked up his target. This time, he made a run on the sub. It disappeared before the attack could be carried out. Meanwhile, Schilling's radio operator received a radio message to leave the area. Later, this order was

countermanded and he was ordered to return to the area. The next morning, the U-boat was again located approximately 18 miles ahead of the hapless Argentine tanker. Because of the "inaccuracy" of the radar, at this point the landing lights were turned on to aid the bombardier in finding his target. Within 10 seconds, the sub fired cannon and machine gun AA at the aircraft; the pilot executed a sharp climbing turn and came back over the area, but the sub had slipped away rapidly.

The following night, LT J.W. Roberts' crew contacted by radar another sub, possibly the same one. The B-24's co-pilot saw the sub visually a quarter mile to starboard and it immediately commenced AA fire at the aircraft. The B-24's rear gunner expended 70 rounds of .50 caliber gun fire, and the plane circled to make a run on the target, but the sub once again crash dived. Two hours later, the U-boat was contacted again, on the surface and moving fast. The plane, in a 30 degree bank, attempted to follow it down, but was too close and too far to the left to drop depth charges. The sub fired star shells as well as every AA gun it had, all of which burst well above the B-24. The Liberator returned about 100 rounds of .50 caliber fire but, once again, the sub crash dived. Neither plane nor sub seemed to have sustained any damage.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.