

878 BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, VERY HEAVY



MISSION

LINEAGE

878 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy, 19 Nov 1943

Activated, 20 Nov 1943

Inactivated, 16 Feb 1946

STATIONS

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 20 Nov 1943

Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 1 Dec 1943

Clovis AAFld, NM, 11 Feb 1944

Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 8 Apr-22 Jul 1944

Isley Field, Saipan, 22 Sep 1944-c.Nov 1945

March Field, CA, c. Nov 1945-16 Feb 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

499 Bombardment Group, 20 Nov 1943-16 Feb 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-17, 1944

B-29, 1944-1946

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan

Western Pacific

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

Nagoya, Japan, 23 Jan 1945

Japan, 22-28 Apr 1945

EMBLEM

On a light turquoise blue disc, border white, edged black, a caricatured, red pack horse facing to dexter, winged white, snorting flames from the nostrils, and having three, brown aerial bombs strapped on back by a brown and yellow band, all in front of a large, white cloud formation; in dexter fess a yellow orange, five-point star, edged black. (Approved, 6 Sep 1945)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Combat in Western Pacific, 24 Nov 1944-14 Aug 1945

It was the 13 December mission to the Nagoya area and Target 193, the Mitsubishi aircraft plant, that the 499th lost their first aircraft in combat. The Mitsubishi plant was well protected; the flak was intense and accurate and over 100 passes were made by enemy fighters. Lt. G. Ledbetter and crew, 878th Sqdn. was hit by flak over Japan but made it back to Saipan where they crashed into Magicienne Bay. All were killed. (Aircraft B-29 V47-3439). Lt. L. M. Silvester, 878th Sqdn. had to ditch V50-3447 north of Saipan due to lack of fuel upon returning but the Navy rescued the entire crew.

The 499th went back to Nagoya on 18 December for another try at the Mitsubishi plant, hitting Target 194, the air-frame factory. Defenses seemed less intense but another B-29 was lost, V24-4666, Lt. L. Conway and crew of the 878th Sqdn; so far the back luck squadron.

The Mitsubishi plant was again targeted for 14 January. Heavy fog prevented a successful bombing-only three buildings were damaged. Flak was moderate but fighter action was intense and determined with an estimated 550 passes being made at the lumbering bombers. Four B-29s were lost on the mission, one from the 499th B. G. Lt. H. Mellen and crew in V22-4647 of the 878th Sqdn. ditched at sea. Only six of the crew survived.

Luck persisted in keeping Tokyo intact when the two Wings struck on 19 February. The target was hidden under a dense layer of clouds as one hundred fifty B-29s roared overhead. Unable to be certain of the primary, the urban area was decided upon as the secondary target. Despite the cloud cover, the flak was accurate and effective. The enemy fighters arrived as usual and they too were

effective. The bombers did well in fighting their way in and out of the target and accounted for many fighters. Six B-29s were lost in the encounter; two from the 313th Wing—crash landed due to battle damage, and four from the 73rd Wing, the 499th B. G. lost one of their aircraft over the target due to a Kamakazi ramming. This was V49-5220, Lt. L. Nickolson and crew of the 877th Sqdn. (The aircraft was from the 879th Sqdn. and on loan to the 877th for the strike.)

Flight crews had a week's rest following this while Com-mand assessed the results of their heroic efforts, but on 24 March, the nocturnal incendiary raids resumed. Nagoya and the Mitsubishi plant were again visited. Bombing was good and all but finished off the area as a viable target. Still, the formation paid with the loss of five bombers, one from the 499th V36-3943, Lt. C. Timmons and crew, 878th Sqdn. were lost over the target.

The 7 April mission was a 73rd Wing effort only, with Tokyo their destination. For the first time the strike force was escorted to the target by P-5 Is from Iwo Jima. It was a beautiful and soul satisfying sight to see the nimble Mustangs sweeping before the formations and protecting the bombers' flanks. It was a great show. Luck finally ran out on Target 357; the 73rd caused considerable damage to the city. Unfortunately, three bombers were lost, one each from the 498th, 499th and 500th Bomb Groups. The 499th lost V22-4674, Lt. C. Hibbard and crew, 878th Sqdn. hit over the target.

The first commander for the Squadron was Lt. Col. Harry N. Brandon, who commanded until being transferred to 500th Bomb Group as Deputy Commander in March 1945. His replacement was Operations Officer Maj. James N. VanHauer (later Lt. Col.), who in turn was replaced as Oper. Officer by Maj. James H. Coats (later Lt. Col.) of the 879th Sqdn. Lt. Col. Van Hauer commanded until near the end of the war (about Aug. '45) when he was transferred and relieved by Lt. Col. Coats. He was the last commander of the Squadron.

Other staff members were Capt. George Bishop-Sqdn. Navigator, Lt. A. Wallace-Sqdn. Bombardier, Capt. Heidi-Sqdn. Flight Engineer, Capt. E. H. McCabe-Sqdn. Intelli-gence Officer, Lt. A. Foughty-Adjutant, Capt. Sam Durham-Asst. Oper. Officer. Squadron life at its best was militarily routine. Time passed slowly if you weren't scheduled for a mission.

Indicative of the growing defenses over Japan is the fol-lowing narrative by the Kenneth B. Smith crew. The mission was Nagoya, Target 193, on 23 Jan. '45. Although no aircraft were lost by the Group on this flight, many air-craft were damaged due to the many aggressive fighter attacks.

The aircraft was V31-4782. Aboard were K. B. Smith-Aircraft Commander, J. W. Miller-Co-Pilot, J. D. Endicott-Navigator, W. F. Duffendack-Bombardier, J. P. Plawecki-Flight Engineer, E. M. Toronto-Radio, H. L. Yarbrough-Radar, D. J. Williams-CFC Gunner, L. W. Winter-Right gunner, W. S. Antidel-Left gunner, and D. L. Johnson-Tail gunner.

The crew took off from Saipan at 0722 to bomb the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Works at Nagoya, on the main island of Honshu. Aircraft V31 assembled as No. 6 airplane in the squadron of the group formation and proceeded en-route as briefed. One of the aircraft in the formation aborted and V31

joined the lead squadron in No. 7 position as had been briefed for this situation. The new position was assumed about 100 miles off the coast of Japan. The only weather encountered en-route was light turbulence and an overcast (8/10 cover) at 18 degrees North. Landfall was made at 1530 at 33 degrees, 42 minutes North, 136 degrees East. At this point, there was an undercast with some breaks in the clouds, and the formation had closed in properly.

On the way to the Initial Point the No. 4 ship flew so that his left wingman was tossed about violently by the prop wash of the lead element. This forced the plane to move over to V31's position; which, in turn, forced V31 to fly directly behind and a bit above the No. 2 ship of the second element in the first squadron. Fighters were observed at altitude and climbing through the undercast far below. The turn was made onto the bomb run at Lake Biwa, the I.P. and the weather was clear for a visual run. On the bomb run, at 26,000 feet, moderate barrage flak, which boxed in the formation, was observed immediately before and after bombs were released by the co-pilot, John Miller.

A number of twin engine fighters (Nicks, Irvings, and a new unidentified type) made head-on attacks on the group formation immediately after bombs away. Shortly after this and before the turn toward the coast of Japan, a 20mm shell hit the No. 1 engine and exploded against the mounting, piercing the crank case. The manifold pressure dropped off to 14 inches and the fuel pressure dropped to 8 pounds per square inch. The engine was left running to get the slight power it was producing and also, so as not to mark the ship as a cripple. The pilot asked the co-pilot to give him additional power by increasing the RPM's to 2500. This power had just been set when the CFC Gunner, J. D. Williams, reported a bad fire in No. 1 engine. The fire had burned a hole about 16 inches in diameter on each side of the nacelle and flames were observed trailing along the outside of the nacelle. The A/C ordered the engine to be feathered immediately and the fire went out. At the same time, it was noted that additional power had not been applied to Nos. 3 and 4 engines. The Cmdr. called the co-pilot on interphone, but saw him suddenly lurch. He had been hit by an explosive shell in the lower section of his body. The A/C immediately applied more power as the ship began lagging behind and had lost altitude.

Just as this was done, a 20mm explosive shell ricocheted off the left wing, penetrated the fuselage and exploded in the tunnel, ripping out a whole section of it, causing instantaneous depressurization. At the same time, the A/C became aware of a sluggishness of the controls and feared that they had been badly damaged. A few seconds later, another hit knocked the right bomb-bay door open, and the oxygen pressure dropped to 175 pounds per square inch.

By now, the enemy fighters were aware of our condition and began intensifying their attacks. The right gunner lost consciousness when the force of the depressurization knocked his head against the side of the ship. He regained consciousness in time to see two single engine fighters attacking, the last of a six plane formation he had previously marked at 3 o'clock preparing for a co-ordinated attack. During this period when they were under so many attacks the A/C alternated between VHP and interphone. He had immediately called the formation, giving his ship number, position, and the seriousness of the situation. This call was repeated several times, each time with a call for help. Other formation aircraft were reached each time, but since the crippled bomber had slipped

over directly behind the formation to gain as much protection as possible, it was difficult for the others to locate it. Three aircraft, Cecil Scarbrough in V26, J. W. Cox in V27, and Ray Brashear in V25, dropped back as soon as possible and formed a protective cover around V31. The whole formation slowed down to permit the damaged B-29 and those protecting it to catch up. They were only a few minutes from the coast by this time and fighter attacks began subsiding. Just before reaching the coast at Hamamatsu, moderate but accurate flak was encountered and V31 took still another hit below the left wing.

From bombs away until the coast was reached, 12 minutes later, V31 received more than 70 attacks: 60 were fought off by her crew in the six minutes it was out of formation: 1 Tojo and 2 Nicks were destroyed and 1 Tony was probably destroyed. In addition, 12 other enemy aircraft were damaged. This great number of attacks by very determined fighters came within a few feet of the bomber before breaking off. It was a great tribute to the bravery, discipline, and ability under fire of the gunners. The waist gunners, who solved the most trying and difficult problems of turret control, and sustained the greatest number of attacks (15 by the left gunner and 25 to 30 by the right gunner). There were only 12 rounds left in the lower rear turret at the completion of the mission.

At first the entire crew was so involved with the defense of the aircraft that they could not help the wounded co-pilot to any extent. They expressed themselves as having felt that they were fighting for their lives and facing certain death. The radio operator and navigator were sent forward several minutes after John Miller was wounded to determine the extent of his wounds and to do all they could for him. When the A/C considered the situation secure, he sent the bombardier back to help in the vain attempt to save the co-pilot's life. The three men worked feverishly, applying sulfanilamide powder, morphine shots, compress bandages on the wounds and blood plasma. They did all they could but he died due to the loss of so much blood. The projectile had severed three of the largest arteries in his body. Also, depressurization was a factor as there was not enough oxygen outlets to handle such an emergency and he was off oxygen for a long period of time.

As they passed over the coast of Japan at 23,000 feet, they were forced to let down rapidly. The oxygen supply was down to 50 pounds per square inch. As soon as the last enemy fighter left, about 100 miles from the coast, the crew went over the ship carefully checking battle damage. Then the gunners started jettisoning all non-essential equipment, such as flak suits and ammunition. One flak suit caught on the open bomb-bay door, but it was freed by one of the gunners. When all excess equipment had been tossed overboard, the doors were closed using the emergency motor. This whole operation was done in an open bomb-bay in the intense cold at 15,000 feet.

Lt. Cox, in V27, volunteered to stay with V31 on the return to base, relaying VHP voice messages from Saipan since their VHP set was out. The contact with the escorting ship was on HP voice contact on 6500 k.c. The crew was prepared for ditching in the event that the aircraft did not make it all the way and they were notified that the ship's normal and emergency IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) were inoperative. Four hours from base, No. 3 engine was observed to be using an excessive amount of oil and it was cut back in power in an attempt to conserve oil and preserve the

life of the engine. the engine continued to consume oil excessively until the gauge read zero and the pressure began fluctuating. Finally, the pressure fell off sharply and the engine was feathered, one hour and a half from base. Power was boosted on the two re-maining engines and altitude was lost slowly and continuously until reaching Saipan.

While still some 40 miles out, the A/C notified the field of the casualty on board and of their emergency condition. Permission was granted for a straight-in approach to Runway-B at Isely Field No. 1. Isely No. 2, at a lower level, had refused the straight-in approach. A gradual turn was made onto final at an altitude of 2200 feet. As the field came closer and all preparations for a landing had been made, the gear was lowered by the normal system. The nose gear came down completely but the main gear stuck about halfway down. The A/C called for gear up to 1200 feet and was ready to crash land the aircraft in case the gear did not retract. Fortunately, the gear came up and the ship made a two engine go around which it was not designed to do. with all the moveable equip-ment jettisoned and very little gasoline in the tanks, it was light enough to respond to the go around. The ship then made a wide pattern, climbing to 1400 feet and was again cleared for a landing.

The crew was alerted for a possible crash landing and the left gunner, Sgt. Antidel, stood by the emergency landing gear switches. This time the nose wheel came down by the normal system but the main gears had to be lowered by the emergency system.

The landing was then made without further incident. The aircraft was met by the ambulance which took Lt. Miller, to the hospital area. Later the Flight Surgeon, Capt. Moore, stated that nothing, under the circumstances, could have saved his life. Thus ended a gruelling 16 hour, 10 minute flight to Japan and return.

This mission was followed by another to Target 357 in Tokyo on 27 January. The raid considered the toughest of the war for the 73rd Wing. The 878th Squadron lost the one aircraft charged to the Group, over the target. That was V27-4769, flown by the Lt. E. G. Smith crew. This aircraft was in coffin corner of the second wave of the Group and chutes were reported opening shortly after it had become disabled. The aircraft itself crashed at Tsuchiura, Japan on the outskirts of Tokyo. The crew consisted of E. G. "Snuffy" Smith-Aircraft Commander, Jim Edwards-Pilot, Ray "Hap" Halloran-Navigator, Robert Grace-Bombardier, Willie Franz-Flight Engineer , Guy Knobel-Radio, Monk Nicholson-Radar, Bob Holla-day-Right gunner, C. T. Laird-Tail gunner, Sonny Barbieri-Left gunner, Tony Lukasiewicz-CFC gunner. Of this group only five survived the Japanese P.O.W. camps. These were: "Hap" Halloran, Jim Edwards, "Snuffy" Smith, Guy Knoebel and Monk Nicholson.

The story of the bail-out, capture by the Japanese, and confinement in a P.O.W. camp is related by the navigator, "Hap" Halloran, "Our sixth mission was against Target 357, the aircraft manufacturing plant West-Northwest of Tokyo. The date was 27 January 1945. It was the usual, early mor-ning take off-assembly-climb pass the coastline of Japan, where we experienced heavy fighter opposition immediately. The altitude, as I recall, was somewhere around 30 to 32 thousand feet, and there was extremely heavy flak from the time we turned right at the I.P, on to the bomb run. Also, fighter attacks from overhead and in front increased. We were credited with one confirmed fighter kill, and then shortly before the target was reached, we had a frontal attack by

twin-engine lighters which made direct hits on the nose section, blowing off a portion of it. There was shrapnel pieces coming throughout the entire front section which caused serious wounds to Bob Grace (B) and "Snuffy" Smith (A/C).

"As we fell behind we were immediately set upon by 10 or 12 fighters, who set up a pattern from left to right. We had no fire power because all electrical controls were shot out. We also sustained some flak damage while in the soft glide. The fighters that stayed with us, hit us continuously and the aircraft suffered extensive further damage from these attacks. Then, with No. 1 and No. 3 engines on fire and No. 4 feathered, we experienced heavy smoke within the plane, it was obvious that we could not complete the mission. We were still on the bomb run when first hit and we still had the bombs in the bomb bay. The normal escape hatch forward in the nose wheel area, was blocked and we could not lower the nose wheel. Guy Knobel (Radio) was instructed to crawl through the "tube" to tell those in the rear section to bail out (necessary as the intercom system was out). In the rear he found that C. T. Laird was dead in the tail gun position; the others were in good enough condition to eventually get out.

"All up front: Smith, Grace, Edwards, Franz, Knobel and myself eventually slid between the bombs and the bomb-bay sides which was extremely difficult in 57 degrees below zero temperature. This was especially so with the chest-type chutes we were wearing but we managed until our bodies extended about half way below the bomb-bay, where we were sucked out into space. We did not take portable oxygen bottles with us and would estimate the bail-outs were made from about 27,000 feet or slightly lesser altitudes. I fell free from pure survival instinct, probably brought to mind due to the high altitude without oxygen, extreme cold in khaki clothing, and the conjectured fighter attack on our open parachutes. In the free fall, I did slow rolls over and over, and I would estimate I was between 5 and 7 thousand feet when I pulled the ripcord over suburban Tokyo (Tsuchiura).

Smith, Edwards, Knobel, Nicholson and myself were eventually reunited in April in the Omori Prisoner of War Camp, between Tokyo and Yokohama. We had been interned at different locations prior to that time. We never had actual confirmation of exactly what happened to the other fellows, but it would appear that they were killed by the civilians when they hit the ground. Obviously they were angered, as I was told by an interpreter, that our airplane had crashed in suburban Tokyo and had destroyed many homes and killed many people. So, while we never received such a confirmation, I would assume that the non-survivors were killed shortly after landing.

"I was not fired on by fighters after I opened my chute but I was circled five times by two Zeros. On the third pass, I waved and on the fourth or fifth, they were actually close enough that I could see them smile. I interpreted that as comradeship between fliers who share common dangers; besides that, I waved because I just didn't want them to shoot at me while I was hanging there in space."

"Hap" Halloran, when asked to comment on the cause of his aircraft's loss stated, "Direct hits from 50mm cannon by fighters," he said of the mission, "some flak and subsequent heavy damage by fighters and from flak once we had to slow down."

Ten of the crew bailed out safely . . . "as Cecil Laird was killed by fighters in the tail position. Chutes seen to open were none. The long free fall precluded that for me. In my case, I was surrounded by (not captured) by civilians. The ones in the back were pushing to overrun the ones in front. They were fearful that I had a gun. I would estimate there were two to three hundred people in the immediate area, who quickly separated when an Army truck came up, and the military, armed with lugars, made their way to the front. I was severely beaten by the civilians. The military cut up my parachute, gagged me, used the chute to blindfold me, tied my hands behind my back, tied my feet together and then tied my hands to my feet.

Then they threw me on a "coal type" truck and while en-route to Kempeitai, which is the military police headquarters near the Emperor's Palace in downtown Tokyo. I was put on exhibit at various street corners where large crowds had con-gregated. The standard practice was for the individual to bow in all directions to the civilians. They did take off the blindfold and untie us during those exhibitions before the public. One civilian took a pair of scissors and tried to cut off my little finger to get the ring I was wearing as a souvenir."

In reference to the treatment received from his captors, "I would describe it as extremely bad, degradation, beatings, mostly with rifle butts, no medical attention. I went from 212 pounds to 125 pounds in 67 days of solitary confinement; barefooted walks for interrogation through snow in February and March; cold cells, actually horse stalls converted to a holding place. Since I was in the first horse stall, in the Kampeitai POW Sector, my cell was quite often visited by dignitaries, including (according to one of my guards) the Emperor. It really didn't make any difference because we always had to lie down, face away from the front of the cell, and cover our-selves with a blanket when anyone visited us.

"After 67 days of solitary confinement, on some occasions, I was with Japanese civilians who were also in prison for causes I am not sure of or understand. I was transferred to a cage in the Tokyo Zoo, where I spent two nights before being taken to a POW Camp in Omori, on Tokyo Bay near Yokohama. This was just after the night fire raids started by the B-29s. I sat through several of those in my cell in Kampeitai and it was hard to believe that they were our bombers at such a low alti-tude. A 90 millimeter anti-aircraft gun, just outside my cell, shook our building for the duration of these raids. Some of the more friendly guards, after the fire raids, indicated to me that the B-29 prisoners were in serious trouble, because approx-imately 100,000 Japanese civilians had been killed in the raids and the streets were filled with the dead and dying. He sus-pected retaliation against us. There was also the physical danger of being burned as the fires were very close to our place of confinement."

"Hap" then continued, "The five surviving members of our crew were reunited at the Omori Camp, and even though we were standing next to each other in line, we did not recognize each other with our long beards, loss of weight, etc. There were 32 people in this group, plus 18 in another POW group that moved in that day to the same barracks. We had Col. King (500th Gp. Comdr.), and Col. Carmichael (73rd Wing) with us; also Maj. Goldsworthy (881st Sq. Ops. Off.), all of whom later became Generals. We also had Pappy Boyington, the Marine flyer, and Commander O'Kane off the

submarine Tang in our special group; both of which later received the Congressional Medal. I am still in regular contact with Pappy Boyington and we see each other about four or five times a year. He now lives in Fresno, California."

As for treatment in the POW camp he related, "The rest of the time in the POW Camp would be as reported by thousands of others, so I will not comment on it". Did your camp receive POW supplies dropped by B-29's? "Yes, the third and fourth weeks of August 1945 the B-29's did come at low altitudes over our POW Camp at Omori and dropped 55 gallon drums of food and supplies to us. Some of them over flew the camp and the drums went into the water and exploded (compression of drums). We were very grateful for the supplies, but probably more important was the fact that our B-29's were coming back to help some of their own."

Regarding final release from the POW Camp "Hap" stated, "I was released from Camp on 29 August, by a landing craft from navy ships in Tokyo Bay. Commander Stassen, I believe the former Governor of Minnesota, was the commanding officer and we were taken to the hospital ship Benevolence due to our condition. We were actually picked up in nets from the boat and taken aboard ship. Admiral Halsey visited me in my room the second night aboard, as he did many others. We were very close to the Missouri at the signing of the Peace Documents in Tokyo Bay in the early part of September. I was subsequently flown aboard a hospital plane to Guam and then to Hawaii, followed by six months recuperating at Ash-ford General Hospital at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia."

This group of five members from the E. G. Smith crew and Sgt. Vance of the W. F. Lattimer crew from this same squad-ron, are the only known repatriates of the 499th Bomb Group. The other repatriate from the squadron was T/Sgt. Vance, a gunner on the Will Lattimer crew that was lost on the Tokyo fire raid of 13 Apr. '45. Not much is known about his capture or what happened to the rest of the crew. He did survive internment and returned home after the war.

It is noted that there would have been quite a few more had the Japanese observed the rules and practices of the Geneva Convention which set the rules and practices for the humane treatment of prisoners. It is also noted that death in combat is a standard risk of war, but death at the hands of irate civilians or military is not, and is abhorrent under any conditions.

The 878th Squadron participated in two ditchings where recoveries were made by the U. S. Navy. The first one occurred on 13 Dec. '44 when the Lt. Sy Silvester crew, flying a loan aircraft (50-3447 "Umbriago-Dats My Boy") from the 879th Sqdn. returned from the mission to Target 193, Nagoya.

The aircraft was ditched 85 miles northwest of Saipan when they ran out of fuel, caused in part by a navigation sextant malfunction. The ditching occurred at night. They made a good water landing and the entire crew got out in orderly fashion except for Bombardier Russ Morris, who was thrown through the plexiglass nose section but, miraculously, was not injured. Being cold, wet and sea sick, they drifted all night in two bobbing life rafts. The next morning, much to their surprise, the aircraft was still floating nearby even though one bomb bay door was open when they ditched.

A/C Silvester and Ken Snow the C.P. decided to reenter the aircraft to salvage another life raft and other survival gear. By mid-day of 14 December, they were spotted by a Navy Catalina (PBY) flying boat, which orbited the downed aircraft until late in the afternoon when the Destroyer U.S.S. Cummings was vectored into the position for the rescue. After the pick-up, the destroyer's gun crews tried to sink the still floating aircraft by gunfire but "Umbriago" resisted and did not want to die. It was not until several rounds struck the empty wing tanks did she slowly roll on her side and disappear beneath the waves.

The second ditching occurred on 14 Jan. '45. The mission was Target 194, Nagoya, made by the Lt. Henry Mellen crew. Aggressive enemy fighter activity over the target resulted in direct hits which damaged the fuel system of their aircraft (V22-4647, "Hasta Luego"). The damage trapped about 1000 gallons of fuel which could not be transferred by Flight Engineer Bill Heller. As they continued their course back to Saipan it became evident that they would have to ditch. The crew jettisoned most of the excess equipment on board, secured the remainder and while they still had power from two engines, all assumed their ditching positions. Lt. John Cox and crew had joined them sometime earlier as escort and they observed and reported the ditching as about 150 miles north of Saipan and late in the afternoon.

Touchdown on the heavy sea was met by a terrific force causing the aircraft to break in two upon impact. A/C Mellen never emerged from the water-filled forward compartment. F. E. Heller-Bomb, McCabe-Radio Op., Shelby and C. P. McClure did, with McClure going immediately to the aid of one or more buddies trapped in the plane. His valiant attempt failed and he disappeared beneath the sea along with the aft section.

While this was going on, the other four survivors from the forward section climbed into a life raft that had been released from the aircraft. They rode the rough sea throughout the night and well into the next day. Navigator Kachuck and Radar Op. LaRue had escaped the sinking aft section but were unable to join the others in the raft. Kachuck and LaRue, supported only by their life jackets and their will to survive, rode out the turbulent waves separately and alone for more than 15 hours.

The next morning a Catalina flying boat, aided by information furnished by the Cox crew, located the downed airmen and called for assistance by a destroyer in the vicinity. The U.S.S. Marsh rescued the six survivors in the early afternoon of 15 January.

Of the survivors only four of the six were regular crew-members F. E. Heller and Radio Op. Shelby were normally assigned to the Hal Mehlow crew, but were substituted for these absent crewmembers of the Mellen crew on this ill-fated mission. Missing-in-action were: H. Mellen-A/C, E. Reinhard-CFC, R. Vandergrift, G. Walker-G, and L. McClure-C.P. For his heroic action in attempting to save those trapped in the sinking tail section at the cost of his own life, Lee McClure was posthumously awarded the Soldier's Medal.

Somewhat of a pun but it is a good caption for one of the original crews of this squadron who flew their tour of duty with no less than seven (7) Aircraft Commanders and twelve (12) Co-pilots. Due

to a poor start the crew had at one time the 'unwanted title' of having the most combat hours and the least number of missions in the squadron. they also had the distinction of flying the first and last combat missions to the Japanese Empire flown by the 73rd Bomb Wing. The first being the historic daylight raid on Tokyo, which started the ever increasing number of Superfort bombings from the Marianas and the last mission which destroyed the mighty Osaka Arsenal.

This crew left the States as the Capt. Sam Durham crew with 2nd Lt. Charles Hibbard as co-pilot. After several mis-sions, Capt. Durham was transferred to XXI Bomber Com-mand and Lt. Hibbard was upgraded to Aircraft Commander. The crew flew two missions with Lt. Hibbard, one of them being the "never-to-be-forgotten" mission of 27 Jan '45 to Tokyo-357 in which this wing dealt a devastating blow to the Japanese Air Force. Although most of the ships in the for-mation suffered extensive damage and one of the squadron ships was shot down, this crew sustained only slight battle damage.

When Sqdn. Comdr. Lt. Col. VanHauer formed a staff crew he used all of the enlisted men of this crew and all officers positions were filled by his staff with the Comdr. as A/C No. 3. Lt. Hibbard was given a crew of his own; that being the Eugene Parrish replacement crew, as the A/C had been returned to the Zone of Interior for medical reasons. This staff crew flew several missions including the first low level fire raid to Tokyo on 9 Mar '45 when the squadron went in at 7000 feet altitude.

Then, because of squadron duties, it became necessary to permit staff officers to fly only on every third mission, person-nel were transferred from other crews to fill in, with Ops. Officer Maj. James Coats becoming the fourth A/C. While flying with this crew they flew the mission to Tokyo-357 on 7 Apr '45 and had the sad experience of seeing their former A/C Lt. Hibbard shot down over the target. After leaving, enemy fighters knocked out No. 4 engine, causing the loss of several hundred gallons of gasoline. This forced them to set course for Iwo Jima. A second engine was lost shortly after leaving the coast but Maj. Coats aptly handled the situation and made a two-engine landing at Iwo without further inci-dent. This was the first of two two-engine landings for this A/C at Iwo Jima. The second time was much more compli-cated as he had to make an instrument landing in bad weather. This occurred on 10 Jun '45 on return from the Hatachi mission.

The fifth A/C was Capt. Art. Dern and the crew flew a number of missions with him including several fire raids. This commander left the crew when he completed his 35th mission before the rest of the crew in keeping with the Rotation Policy. The sixth A/C was Lt. Burkett (877th Sqdn.), who flew the crew on the day raid to Toyokawa Arsenal on 7 Aug '45.

The seventh and last A/C for this crew was Lt. Jarret (577th Sqdn.), who was completing his tour of duty with the mission to Osaka Arsenal on 14 Aug '45, which became the last mission of the war against Japan. Henry A. Kolakowski, the left gunner on this crew, in conjunction with the rest of the crew, had this to say about the many changes in the "up front" personnel, "In regard to the common belief that a heavy bomber crew is trained as a team and when this team is broken up, because of circumstance, it ceases to function as a team. This crew operated smoothly through the many changes and although strain was felt by everyone, it proved 11 ic point that if the men are trained to do their job thoroughly and are efficient in their work, they can fly as a smoothly

operating combat crew. This was proven in view of the fact that the crew always completed the bomb run and destroyed two enemy fighters and damaged three others, always returning to their base, though several times badly damaged."

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 28 Aug 2010

Updated:

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