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40TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON
40th Bombardment Group
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SQUADRON HISTORY
1 March 1944 thru 15 May 1944

During the first few days in March everyone worked and worked hard--the maintenance personnel, as well as every member of each flying crew--checking our ships, their equipment, installing combat engines, and effecting modifications which we could do without aid of the "feather merchants". Altogether our Squadron was assigned nine B-29's which came to us from modification centers.

Since there were only nine ships, six crews had to be transported across by Air Transport Command. Approximately half of these six crews came by boat and Air Transport Command combined while the other half came by Air Transport Command all the way.

On March 11 the men who were to cross by boat were alerted, and on March 12 we boarded a troop train for a Port of Embarkation. After 2 1/2 days of continuous riding we arrived at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia where we were indoctrinated. All medical records were closely checked and missing equipment issued during the three days we were there.

We were transported to the pier on March 18, by train and began embarkation about the middle of the afternoon. Our ship, the U.S.S. Butner was very modernistic, having been commissioned in 1944--this was only her second crossing. At 0900 the following morning, March 18, we pulled out of the harbour into a rather disturbed sea. For almost two days the ship and the sea were unable to reach a working agreement because the waves tossed the ship back and forth, up and down, until it seemed as though we had entirely lost the Law of Gravity. Finally, however, the sea calmed and remained that way the rest of the trip, giving us a chance to enjoy the comforts, and even luxuries in some cases, on board ship. The enlisted personnel were quartered on the second, third, and fourth decks and ate twice daily. On the main deck were officers quarters, theater, lounge, snack bar, and dining room. The entire trip was most pleasant for we had nice quarters, good food, and a comparatively smooth sea most of the way.

At 0000 GCT, March 25 we entered the European Theater of War. On the 28 March we entered the harbour of Casablanca, debarking around noon. Trucks were waiting to transport us thru the city to Camp Don B. Passage.

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Camp Passage is a staging area for troops arriving from and departing for the States. Primarily it is for Infantry forces and has no accommodations for an outfit that isn't self-sustaining. We lived like ground officers, sleeping in tents (fortunately we had cots which ATC flew in for us from some other part of Africa) and eating from mess kits. We set up our own organization of command from our officers, so the Air Corps gradually became self sustaining.

It was not until 9 April that we were able to start leaving by ATC, and then only one ship at a time. Everyone flew in a C-54 and all followed the same route. The ships landed at Tripoli, Cairo, Abadan, Karachi, and Kharagpur enroute. We remained at Kharagpur from 11 April until 13 April then came to Chakulia — some by plane and the rest by train.

The other half of the six excess flying crews left Pratt a few days after those who came by boat. They went to Bahia then to Miami by train where they began traveling by ATC, following this route: Miami, Fla; Puerto Rico; Georgetown, British Guiana; Belem, Brazil; Natal, Brazil; Ascension Island; Accra, Gold Coast, British West Africa; Maiduguri, Nigeria; Khartoum, Anglo Egyptian Sudan; Adgen, Arabia; Masirah Island, Arabia; Karachi, India; Agra, India; Goya, India; Kharagpur.

Five planes left Pratt on 1 April; one 2 April; one 4 April; one 5 April; one 9 April. All ships followed the same route: Pratt; Presque Isle, Maine; Gander Lake, Newfoundland; Marrakech, French Morocco; Cairo, Egypt; Karachi, India; Chakulia, India. All ships had to pull a 50 hour inspection enroute and some ships had minor difficulties — cracked exhaust stacks and fuel pump replacements. One ship had to change two engines and another had to change some propeller blades.

The first few weeks here at Chakulia were very trying ones with disorganization, poor food, no transportation, and no airplanes.

The airfield itself was formerly a B-25 base, having been established somewhere in the neighborhood of 3 years ago. The runways were lengthened, widened and re-enforced to accommodate the weight of the B-29. There is an East-West runway and a North-South one. Only the East West runway is open to traffic for all the ships have been parked along the North-South runway on concrete strips banking the runway — an ideal setup for a Jap bombing or strafing attack, but the only possible arrangement at the present time. The Engineers are working 24 hours a day trying to prepare dispersal areas and taxi-ways before the monsoon season sets in.

After the arrival of the Group Operations Officer, we began having daily meetings of airplane commanders for the purpose of offering suggestions and plans as to alert system, food situation, and anything in general pertaining to organization. For the first week or two we had practice alerts daily, in which one gunner remained in the plane at the CFC station while everyone else took to the trenches.

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(See Hiss, 395th Bomb Sq, Cont'd)

Transportation was a great problem at first due to the lack of equipment and improper distribution of that which we did have. The only way of getting from the barracks area to the flight line (about 5 miles distance) was to stand on the roadside and wait for a truck, jeep, or weapons carrier to pick you up. This difficulty was alleviated to some extent upon the arrival of the Squadron Commanding Officers because each squadron was then assigned a weapons carrier.

When the crews who had crossed by boat and APC arrived at the field, another problem presented itself, that of getting flying time in for the past two months. At that time there was available for flying (under the control of Group Operations) two B-29's, one L-5, and one B-24. These were kept busy every moment it was possible to get Groups permission, ferrying personnel around our chain of fields or flying parts in from Calcutta and various points. The B-24 had leaky gas tanks, thin tires, and a dent in the leading edge of the wing where it hit a bird in flight, the B-29's had anywhere from 25 to 50 combat missions to their credit and thin tires also; and the L-5 had no battery so it had to be cranked by hand spinning. Notwithstanding all these hindrances some of us managed to get flying time for both ourselves and members of our crew.

The intense heat here was quite a change from snow covered Kansas or the cold nights of North Africa and a little hard to become used to at first. Finally, however, we have settled down to heat, heat prostration, and unceasing dust.

It is hard to form a conception of the lousy food we had when we first arrived. "C" rations would have been a welcome delicacy but we couldn't even get that. It seems as though the British were short stopping our rations and sending us British rations instead, under cover of the reverse Lend-Lease agreement. Originally the officers ate in one side of the enlisted mens mess, and were served "Family Style" by native bearers. Together with their being unable to understand English and the scarcity of food we had a pretty tough time getting enough to eat. No refrigeration or ice was available, so when we had meat, it was slaughtered in the morning and cooked for lunch and supper before it could spoil.

As the ships began to arrive arrangements had to be made for feeding the crews on the line who were standing by on alert. At first, the mess officer tried transporting the food down in the ships food warmers, but that entailed too much washing and the mess hall didn't have enough helpers. Finally, the solution to the feeding problem was arrived at through a central mess tent on the line. The food was prepared at the mess hall and transported down to the line on a truck then "dished out" in mess kit style. The system wasn't so bad except for the dust, heat, and hawks. The hawks would swoop down and grab food right out of the mess kit you were holding, if you weren't careful.

A new officers mess was opened approximately two weeks after our arrival which was much nicer than the old one, for we were fed cafeteria style. Finally, we began to get ice and the food got better, both in preparation and variety, until finally the meals are quite palatable.

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(Sq. Dist, 395th Bomb Sq, Cont'd)

Recently, with an influx of motor vehicles, the problem of feeding on the line became nil, for now all squadrons are transferring their crews on alert over to the Maintenance Squadrons mess tents.

Our quarters are quite a distance from the line -- approximately five miles -- they are nothing to brag of, but then they could be worse for there are always tents. They are very simple in construction, but ample protection from the climate and insects. Of course, they do say that during the monsoons the snakes and bugs invade themselves right into your room -- sometimes even into your shoes and bed. The walls are made of mud plaster, roof of straw, and floor of concrete. Some of the buildings are divided into five rooms, while others are separated into two large rooms and there is no screening except what one makes from mosquito netting. The showers are in one building and the latrines in another. Most of the rooms have a wardrobe, a small table, a chair, a chest of drawers and two banks -- all rather crudely constructed with non-fitting drawers and doors. Mosquito nets are quite the style, despite the fact that only one or two cases of malaria have been reported in this sector within the past two years, for both mosquitos and gnats are fairly plentiful. At night, everyone moves his bunk outdoors, for it is too hot to sleep inside the building.

Every officer and enlisted man has a bearer to take care of his room, laundry, and personal wishes. One bearer usually serves four men and does a pretty good job even though some of them can speak but little English. All officers with rank of 1st Lt. or above were quartered in two barracks up on a hill which the 2nd Lt.s promptly dubbed "Snob Hill". The 2nd Lt.s were quartered in large two room barracks near the old mess hall which they fondly call "Dysentery Hall".

There is a Red Cross Service Club for the enlisted men - quite a swanky affair with curtains, pictures on the walls, a library, short order counter, recreation room and hostesses. It is the one and only touch of home and "Spot of Heaven" anywhere around this heat infested camp.

The officers aren't quite so lucky as the enlisted men for the only excuse for an officer's club is far inferior to the Service Club and much too small for the number of officers. It was set-up by the Engineers long before we arrived and originally was designed for 100 officers. The Engineers were kind enough to invite Air Corps officers to make use of it but the influx was far greater than the supply. Naturally there isn't enough food, drink, or ice to go around each night.

The PX isn't much more than an empty building except once monthly on Ration Issue days. Their stock is very short and limited only to a surplus of personal rations not drawn each month. This past month everyone was supposed to get 18 bottles of beer, but the supply ran out about half-way through and some men only got two bottles -- tough!

There is a Theater in the barracks area but the projector is so poor and the films we get so old that it is almost an ordeal to attend a show. The sound track is usually always out of synchronization with the film and the reel slips very frequently causing the scene to flutter: then, too, you can usually expect the film to break at least once during a showing.

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(By Hise, 3.500 Book Sq, Cont'd)

A few days before we started flying gunnery and "Hump" missions we had a series of lectures on "Evasion and Escape". A Lieutenant who was navigator in a B-24 that had to be ditched in the Bay of Bengal, told us of his experiences in a life raft and his eventual rescue. Then a British flyer told us of his escape and evasion from the Japanese ground forces after having been shot down and captured by them. A Captain who had travelled on foot throughout China, India, Burma, Thailand and Assam, setting up escape routes, talked to us of his journeys and described the people, their customs, and idiosyncrasies, giving all the information he had gathered that would be useful in an escape or evasion.

Every crew member was briefed on the route over the "Hump" and given all pertinent data as to enemy positions and possibilities of attack before the ferry missions were started. Our first ship went over the "Hump" on 3 May with the second ship following the next day. One ship got almost half way over when he lost an Engine and had to salvo his bomb bay tanks in order to hold his altitude. Another ship blew an exhaust collector ring about three hours out from Chakulia and had to turn back. He was able to make partial use of that engine until all the oil drained out about one hour from the base, then he had to feather it.

One night about two weeks ago the gunners on one ship were working on the tail guns. A round was accidentally loaded in the chamber and the guns went off. Due to a faulty part they continued shooting until all 250 rounds that were loaded in the gun had been fired. The accident occurred shortly after dark and the incendiary and tracer bullets lit up the sky like a Roman Candle on the 4th of July. The guns shot continuously for approximately 60 seconds and the barrels were white hot -- they looked as though they had just been removed from a blast furnace. Unfortunately the guns were parallel with the ground and pointing toward the Engineers area. The bullets riddled their mess hall and sprayed the entire area, killing one man and seriously injuring another.

Approximately a week ago one of our pilots was flying an Intelligence Officer to Charra in the L-5. Fifteen miles from Charra the engine "conked out" and they had to make a forced landing in some rice paddies. The field was so rough that the ship plowed into a small embankment. They stayed overnight in a native village and walked into Charra the next day. The Intelligence officer was not hurt but the pilot sprained a vertebrae and at the present time is in a cast. He has been sent to the hospital in Calcutta with the possibility of being shipped to a hospital in the States.

Capt. Lindley was made operations officer upon his arrival here, relieving Major Glass of that duty.

On the 13th of May, Airplane Commanders had a meeting with Col. McGinnity and Col. Harmon. Col. McGinnity explained and outlined the program of training for Radar Bombing which, starting this past Monday, 15 May, is to continue for 9 days. (Already 5 of our crews have accomplished these missions and are convincingly amazed at the results) Col. Harmon congratulated the Group as a whole on their success thus far in getting the ships over here and on missions already accomplished over the Hump. The 40th Group is quite noticeably ahead of all other groups in missions flown over the Hump and tonnage of fuel and supplies delivered. Upon request he took a few minutes and explained to us the organization and chain of command over here. Also discussed future plans as to missions, field conditions, quarters, and recreation.

(Sq Hist. 34th Bomb Sq. Cont'd)

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The maintenance problem has begun to straighten out with the passing of time and arrival of our engineering Officer. Maintenance personnel are furnished from the 4th Bomb Maintenance Squadron which was just recently re-joined with the 395th. Our chief maintenance difficulty is lack of tools and equipment, nevertheless, the men are doing an excellent job of improvising. Each ship has a maintenance crew assigned, but they are shifted to aid on another ship when theirs is flying. Due to the heat, working hours are from 0600 until 1130, with the afternoon off, then, from 1800 until the job is finished.

On 15th of May, a barracks in which 18 of our officers were quartered caught fire and burned. Most of the officers lost practically all of their personal and issue clothing and equipment. The fire spread so fast after catching, due to a strong wind, that two trips inside was the most anyone had time to make before the roof began caving in. Arrangements were made the next day for quarters and quartermaster clothing.

After almost three months of being away from the States, we have begun to realize the full meaning of "things we took for granted" back home - a cold cup of water, a hot dog with mustard, or a hamburger with onions - what more could we fight for than these freedoms and many others we know so well.

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Ass't. Historical Officer.

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