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HEADQUARTERS
40th Bombardment Group
APO 631, %PM, New York City

14 July 1944

HISTORY 1 April thru 31 April 1944

The first day of April was "D" day for the 40th Group. Shortly after midnight 11 B-29's began taking off from Pratt Air Field for Presque Isle, Maine, their first stop.

The planes were heavily loaded with an average gross weight of 132,000 pounds. Each B-29 carried an extra engine in the rear bomb bay, bomb bay tanks, spare parts, emergency repair kits, documents and material for the Group sections, and all of the personnel equipment of the crew and passengers.

Crews were briefed at Pratt only for the first leg of the flight – to Presque Isle – and some thought that England would be their final destination. Speculation of service in England increased when the second leg of the flight terminated at Gander Lake, Newfoundland. (At each terminal crews received briefing only for the next flight leg, never for the complete route.) The sight of B-17's ready for ferrying to England caused many to think they would next be taking off on the North Atlantic route.

However, the next leg took the planes from Gander Lake to Marrakech, French Morocco – a distance of approximately 2700 miles. Climatic conditions took a decided change from the snow and ice of Newfoundland to the heat of Africa, and performance of the airplanes decreased as the temperature increased. Frequent plug changes became necessary due to fouling and engines did not give full rated power. There is a strong suspicion that the planes were refueled with bad gasoline at Marrakech, but this has not been proved. Service in England was discredited completely when the next leg was briefed to terminate at Cairo, Egypt.

At Cairo the first – and only – serious accident occurred. B-29 #42-6249 piloted by Maj BENTON W. O'NEAL of the 25th Squadron was washed out on landing due to a damaged nose gear, weakened previously by improper towing. All crew members escaped without serious injury.

From Cairo the planes proceeded to Karachi, India, and thence to Chakulia.

On 2 April Col LEONARD F. HARMAN piloting # 42-6331, the first B-29 to arrive in this theater, landed at Chakulia. Col HARMAN, who had left Salina, Kansas, on 25 March, assumed command of the Advance Echelon, 40th Group on 5 April. (Incl. 1)

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History, Hq 40th Bomb Gp, 1 April thru 31 April 1944, dtd 14 July 1944, Contd.

Effective at 2400, 9 April, Headquarters 40th Bombardment Group at Pratt, Kansas, was closed (Incl. 2); at 0001, 10 April Headquarters, 40th Group was opened at AAB #631 and Col HARMAN assumed command. (Incl. 3)

On 10 April the last B-29 left Pratt.

On 11 April those combat crews who had left the States by boat, began to arrive from Casablanca in C-54's of the Army Transport Command. These men had undergone a grueling experience. After a rough trip across the Atlantic they were quartered at Camp Don B. Bassage, a staging area near Casablanca, and subjected to rigors of an Army life which most of them had forgotten existed. Tents served as quarters, reveille was at 0600, and the mornings from breakfast until dinner were spent in close order drill and athletics. It was not with reluctance that they took leave of colorful old Casablanca.

The Maintenance Squadrons, in the meantime, had also arrived in India. The SS Champollion, carrying the 1st and 3rd Squadrons, had anchored in Bombay Harbor on 1 April. On 2 April the two organizations disembarked and entrained immediately for the transit camp at Deolali, India, where they remained for nine days becoming oriented to the food, climate, people and wild life of the country. On 11 April they entrained again for their final destination, arriving at Chakulia on 15 April.

The 2nd and 4th Maintenance Squadrons disembarked at Bombay on 4 April, boarded the special train immediately, and arrived at Chakulia Army Air Base on 8 April, after an uncomfortable trip.

The Maintenance Squadrons were given a few days to get settled in their "tent cities" and then maintenance was begun in earnest on the B-29's which by now were lining the North-South runway. Tents were pitched beside the line Operations, Engineering, Tech Supply, Intelligence, Communications and Armament. Men reported to their sections within two days after arrival and began working to bring the planes to top combat efficiency.

It was then learned that one of the principal jobs of the 40th (as well as of the other three Groups) would be to haul gas, oil and supplies to its advanced Base at Hsinching, China, to which the code name A-1 had been given.

The first major engineering difficulty encountered in India was with gun sighting blisters. Due evidently to expansion and contraction of the plexiglass in the extremes of temperatures (ground level and high altitude) the blisters would crack and large sections would blow out when a plane was at altitude. The supply of new blisters was far from adequate; there were not enough available

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History, Hq 40th Bomb Gp, 1 April thru 31 April 1944, dtd 14 July 1944, Contd.

to repair 25% of the damage. The only alternative left to the Engineering Sections was to repair the old ones. To do this sections of damaged blisters were cut out to conform to the contours of those to be repaired, then cemented and bolted over the openings. To date none of these repair jobs has failed nor have any new blisters been secured for replacements.

With most of the planes on the field and with a majority of the personnel present, the life and activities of the Group centered on adjustment and organization in accordance with the facilities and the physical aspects of the Base.

At the initial conference, held by Col HARMAN, concerning the defense at the Base it was reluctantly admitted that despite air warning and defense facilities the planes were vulnerable to enemy attack. Jap Bases were close enough to offer substantial threat to the project, therefore the decision was made to maintain alert crews on all planes 24 hours a day.

The Base had formerly been the home of B-25 Squadrons. Taxiways and well built revetments existed but the size and weight of the B-29 cancelled their usefulness to the 40th Group. Therefore the planes were parked, temporarily, along either side of the North-South runway on concrete hard stands and the East-West strip, 7600 feet long, was used for landing and taking off. (Photos 1, 2, 3) Crews set up their own tents between planes in order to maintain a constant alert status. This was necessary due to the fact that the housing area was approximately five miles from the line and transportation facilities were far from adequate.

Lack of transportation in sufficient quantity to cover the distance between the line and quarters area, coupled with the unsatisfactory messing facilities for the alert crews, the inability to do much flying, and the sight of two long vulnerable rows of B-29's lined up wing tip to wing tip did much to lower morale. However the sight of rapid construction of housing and messing facilities in an area near the line, improvement of roads and transportation facilities and work on the new taxi ways and parking areas all helped spirits to rise. Every one felt that "it's pretty bad now, but wait till things get organized."

Another factor which to some extent hindered smooth functioning of the Group was the fact that Group had become a tactical unit. It was necessary for the squadrons to relinquish much of their independence in sublimation to the Group effort. In addition there were the difficulties of communication and transportation and the confusion which resulted from improper coordination. Some of the problems resulting from this arrangement have not been satisfactorily solved to date.

Conditions did improve considerably as policy became adjusted, and supply and equipment facilities improved. Morale stepped up when local flying was begun on 19 April and crews who hadn't ferried planes across were permitted to get the feel of the plane again.

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History, Hq 40th Bomb Gp, 1 April thru 31 April 1944, dtd 14 July 1944, Cont'd.

On 24 April Col HARMAN flew the first Hump cargo mission to China, landing at A-3 (Kwanghan), the advance Base of the 444th Group.

On 26 April, by 40th Group General Orders No 3 of that date (Incl. 4), the 40th Bombardment Group Forward Base Detachment was organized at APO #210 (A-1) with a staff of seven officers headed by Maj JOHN M. SEELEY of the 45th Squadron. Members of the Detachment arrived at their new station on 29 April and began work the following day in preparation for the arrival of the "C-29's".

By the end of April several things had become apparent. Climate and weather were going to offer handicaps from a personnel as well as an equipment standpoint. The temperature was constantly over 100 degrees during the afternoon and the men suffered. The heat had a definitely adverse affect on plane performance which would aggravate the problem of obtaining additional spare parts. Finally, the B-29 project had been rushed overseas before the theater was ready to accommodate it.

Despite handicaps, the Group was finally in a theater of Operations and Jap targets were within range. The crews were eager to get to work.

F. G. WOOD JR.
Capt, Air Corps
Historical Officer

Incl. 1

**ADVANCED HEADQUARTERS 40TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP
APO #631**

LFH/dpv/c

5 April 1944

GENERAL ORDERS)

NUMBER : 2)

ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND

Under the provisions of AR 600-20 the undersigned assumes command of the Advance Echelon, 40th Bombardment Group.

**L. F. HARMAN
Colonel , Air Corps
Commanding**

Incl. 2

RESTRICTED

GENERAL ORDERS)	HEADQUARTERS 40 TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (VH)
:	Army Air Field, Pratt, Kansas
NUMBER 3)	8 April 1944

1. Effective 2400, 9 April 1944, Headquarters, 40th Bombardment Group (VH), will close at Army Air Field, Pratt, Kansas.
2. All correspondence intended for the Headquarters, 40th Bombardment Group (VH) will be forwarded on or after 9 April 1944 to A.P.O. 9915, c/o Postmaster, New York, New York.

By order of Lieutenant Colonel COIRA:

ROBERT W CLOWES,
1st Lt., AC,
Actg Adjutant.

OFFICIAL:

ROBERT W CLOWES,
1st Lt., AC,
Actg Adjutant.

Incl. 3

**HEADQUARTERS 40TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP
APO #631**

LFH/dpv/C

10 April 1944

GENERAL ORDERS)

NUMBER :
4)

**OPENING OF HEADQUARTERS.....I
ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND.....II**

I – Headquarters, 40th Bombardment Group, opened at 001, 10 April 1944, at AAB, APO #631.

II – Under the provisions of AR 600-20, the undersigned assumes command of the 40th Bombardment Group.

**L. F. HARMAN
Colonel, Air Corps
Commanding**

Incl. 4

HEADQUARTERS 40TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP
APO #631

RRH/dpv/C

26 April 1944

GENERAL ORDERS)

:
NUMBER 3)

In compliance with Hq 58th Bomb Wing APO #631, subject "-----", file no. --, dated 18 April 44, the 40th Bomb Gp Forward Detachment is organized effective this date at APO #210, c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y., with the following officer staff:

<u>NAME, GRADE, ASN</u>		<u>DUTY</u>
MAJOR JOHN M SEELEY	0388639 AC	Detachment Commander
1 ST LT FRANK W MC WALTERS	0566111 AC	Adjutant
CAPT PAUL S ANDERSON	0447660 AC	Flight Surgeon
2 ND LT PHILLIP O SCHWARZ	0650599 AC	Statistical Officer
1 ST LT ELLIOT GOLDWATER	0816530 AC	Engineering Officer
2 ND LT WILLIAM R CHENEY	0581509 AC	OM Supply Officer
2 ND LT CLETUS M NELSON	0865074 AC	Technical Supply Officer

By Order of Colonel HARMAN

R. R. HOLMAN
1st Lt., AC
Adj.

OFFICIAL: