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**10 Jul 44
FGW/gcb**

**HEADQUARTERS
40th Bombardment Group
APO 631, c/o Postmaster, New York, N.Y.**

10 July 1944

HISTORY

1 March through 31 March 1944

During the period of intense and almost frantic effort to get the B-29's in shape for combat overseas (which started in the latter part of February and continued through March) the 40th Group was charged with the accomplishments of seven changes and modifications. The remainder of the 40 to 50 modifications were to be done by crews from four modification centers.

This civilian personnel constituted a different and unpleasant problem. Tempers were already short due to long hours and little sleep, and overtaxed housing and messing facilities did not help matters. In addition the Group personnel felt that in many instances the civilians, who demanded fleece lined flying clothing and other special military equipment due to the arctic wind, were not working as hard or as long as they could and should have been. However, despite the confusion and the unavoidable conflict between the Feather Merchants and the G.I.'s work progressed.

The 40th Group, as stated, was responsible for seven modifications. First it was necessary to change all engines which were not classed as "War" engines. Most of the engines were R-3350-23's which had to be replaced with the "A" models. During the period 27 February to 11 March 40th Group personnel changed 116 engines and 24 turbo superchargers.

Second, all rudders which were not of the new strengthened design had to be changed, a total of 22 rudders.

Third, all main landing gear tires on all aircraft had to be changed, the nylon casing being preferred to old type. In all 144, tires were changed.

Fourth, the front collector rings were discovered to be unsatisfactory due to the fact that vibration was causing the brackets to crack and break. It was necessary to change approximately 100 sets.

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Fifth, a modification had to be made on all cowl flaps. Considerable trouble had been experienced with the top cylinder heating up and burning out. The top cowl flap, therefore, was raised two inches and fixed solidly in the position thus allowing more air to pass over the cylinder. In all 124 of these changes were made.

Sixth, the radar section had the tremendous task of installing 36 APQ-13 radar sets. The men were hampered by inexperience - - none have ever installed a set of this sort - - but the job was done and each set checked operationally.

Seventh, all propellor pistons and governors had to be modified to provide for more certain feathering at high altitudes. A total of 100 propellers and pistons were modified.

After all engine changes and modifications had been accomplished, each airplane had to be flown for a period of not less than two hours in order to break in the engines and check the work done.

All the above was done by Group personnel in the short space of five weeks despite wind and snow, shortages and lack of facilities.

Going back to 3 March, at midnight of that date all officers and men of the Group were confined to the Field for "Maintenance reasons." No one was allowed off the Field without a special pass (which was granted only in an emergency) nor were wives allowed on the field. In view of this most of the married men sent their wives home, since they thought it was likely the restriction would remain in force until the actual date of departure.

On 3 March the 1st and 3rd Bomb Maintenance Squadrons debarked at Oran, North Africa and proceeded immediately to a transient camp. Passes to Oran were made available and the Red Cross tours organized. From the 3rd to the 9th of the month the Squadrons lived in tents and subsided largely on "C" rations.

On 10 March the two Squadrons boarded the French liner Champollion for the next leg of the voyage. Though an international bit of "SNAFU" THE Champollion was put in a convoy going to Naples, Italy, where, on 15 March, the harbor installations and shipping were attacked by German bombers. The Champollion was undamaged except for shattered windows on the bridge and in the officers lounge caused by near misses. There were no casualties and the men of the 1st and 3rd were described as being notably calm throughout the attack.

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The Squadrons continued their voyage without incident through the Straits of Messina, Port Said, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and Aden. On 31 March the Champollion was one day out of Bombay, India.

On the morning of 10 March General Henry H. Arnold arrived on the Field. He immediately called a meeting of the nine crews in the Group who had been selected to ferry the first B-29's to their destination. Crew members were notified as quickly as possible. Some were working on the "line" and others were asleep, having just completed a maintenance shift the night before. The General did not face an immaculate, clean shaven group of men.

From the first word General Arnold uttered, the crew members were impressed with his decisive, efficient manner. He stressed the fact that the eyes of four men in particular would be on them. Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and Chiang-Kai-Chek, and that the tremendous difficulties encountered in carrying the war to the enemy were not their standard of measurement of effort – only results. After touching on the fine manner which the airplane crews had worked in getting the project ready for movement, General Arnold questioned the pilots present as to the amount of time they thought would require to accomplish the three shakedown missions, and the consensus was one week.

He then said that every man should get away from all the work of preparation for a week of leave, then come back, run the shakedown missions and be fresh to take the ships over. He concluded his talk with a wish for good luck and Godspeed.

Whether or not the General was aware of the part the combat crews had been playing in the modification work is not known, but the aspects involved in giving anyone leave at this time created a furor which lasted until the next day. Some of the crews realized that seven-day leaves were impracticable; others realized only that General Arnold had said they should be given leave. The majority finally decided to take only three day passes, but the incident directly affected the morale of the Group.

On March 11 the restriction was lifted and once more off-Post and on-Post visits were permissible. By this time, however, most of the wives had gone home and were too far away to be visited on a three day pass. This was another situation which adversely affected the morale. Most of the men visited nearby cities for a last fling.

During March several parties of Group and Squadron personnel left Pratt Army Air Field, some to proceed to their destinations by boat and ATC and others going by ATC all the way.

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On 15 March the 2nd and 4th Maintenance Squadrons docked at Melbourne, Australia, and remained in port for two days while supplies and fuel were taken aboard. No Army personnel were given shore leave here.

On Friday 17 March the Mount Vernon left Melbourne and proceeded to Bombay, India, arriving there on 31 March after an uneventful voyage.

On or about 15 March it was learned that Colonel Louis E. Parker was missing in action from a mission over Germany. There were numerous rumors, some that he was a prisoner of war and others that he had been killed. To this day (12 July 44) it is not known definitely by anyone in the Organization whether Col. Parker is alive or dead. In any event the 40th Bomb Group has lost a well loved and respected Commander who was a fine soldier and, in every sense of the words, a gentleman of the old school.

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