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HEADQUARTERS  
40<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group  
APO 631

4 July 1944

GROUP HISTORY  
1 June through 30 June 44

The month of June was the momentous to date in the History of the 40<sup>th</sup> Group. Two and a half years after the attack on Pearl Harbor the 40<sup>th</sup> as part of the newly activated 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force, was given its first opportunity to strike a blow against the enemy.

The first few days of the month were ones of anticipation. Cargo missions across the Hump had been halted on 24 May with the explanation by Col HARMAN that his Group, being well ahead of the other three Groups so far as cargo missions were concerned, would rest on the laurels for a short period of time and devote all its energies to maintenance. This was done and all aircraft not awaiting parts were put in A -1 condition.

On June 2 Col HARMAN and Lt Col COIRA inspected all airplanes with their combat crews and maintenance crews (photo 1), and expressed themselves as being well satisfied with the inspection.

Sunday afternoon, 4 June 1944, crews for all combat airplanes were assembled in the Base Theater and informed that they were to go on the first combat mission of the B-29's. (Photo 2, 3) The briefing was very general for reasons of security and no hint was given as to the target. Brigadier General SAUNDERS arrived shortly before the briefing ended, added a few heartfelt remarks to what had been said, and wished everyone the best of luck on the mission.

The final briefing, for Pilots, Co-pilots, Navigators, Bombardiers, Radar and RCM officers, and Radio Operators, was set for 0200 the following morning.

The Field stirred with activity throughout that night and very few men were able to find time to sleep. The combat and maintenance crews were busy making adjustments and last minute checks on their airplanes; the Intelligence personnel were working on maps and charts and photographs, and arranging the mass of information which was to be given to the crews at the briefing; the Mess officers, cooks and K. P.'s had midnight meals to prepare as well as breakfast for the combat crews, and box lunches which would be taken on the mission; and everyone, for the first time perhaps, sensed the importance of his own job and the necessity for doing it well.

Final briefing was held in the Group's S-2 briefing room. The target-the Makasan Railway Workshops at Bangkok – was announced without dramatics. The crews were told the routes and altitudes they would fly, the type of formation, enemy airfields they would pass over, enemy planes they might encounter, AA defenses at the target, evasion and escape procedures, air-sea rescue facilities, and all the other bits of information which must be given to crews prior to a mission. But for the atmosphere of intense concentration the briefing might have been for nothing

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**many times back at Pratt, Kansas, a fact that was mildly astonishing at the time.**

**After the briefing, which ended with synchronizing watches, the various crew members gathered together in different parts of the room for specialized briefings which concerned their own particular duties.**

**At 0602 IST on 5 June 44 the first 40th Group airplane started to roll down the runway. (Photo 4) It was B-29 # 42-6344 piloted by Major GEORGE T. WESCHLER of the 25th Squadron. The others followed at one minute intervals. The ships were heavily loaded, grossing from 131,000 to 135,000 pounds, and as they trundled down the runway slowly gaining speed it seemed as though they would never get off. Almost every plane used the entire length of the runway before staggering into the air barely clearing the low trees a hundred yards or so from the end. (Photo 5)**

**B-29 #42-6318, piloted by Major JOHN B. KELLER, of the 395th Squadron (Photo 6) took off toward the West at 0628 IST with a gross weight of 131,250 pounds. Midway on the take-off roll the pilot lifted the nose wheel off the runway and held it in the air for the remainder of the roll, to the extent of striking the tail skid several times. The airplane left the ground after using 7000 feet of the 7600 feet of runway and proceeded in an apparently normal manner. The left wing dropped once but was leveled, then dropped again and continued to drop until the airplane struck the ground (about 2 minutes after take-off) and cart wheeled. The plane exploded and caught fire. Shortly afterward three of the GP demolition bombs exploded (two high order, one low order.)**

**All aboard were killed with the exception of the Co-pilot who was too seriously injured to give a comprehensive account of the accident. However, from his brief statement, the accident was due entirely to power loss of an undetermined cause in #2 engine. Examination of the badly burned engine revealed no further evidence.**

**Including #318, 26 planes were airborne in 31 minutes. Mechanical difficulties prevented three planes from lining up for take-off and one pilot had to cut his engine half way down the runway.**

**Of the remaining 25 planes, three failed to reach the target due to mechanical difficulties; the rest dropped a total of 411 bombs on Bangkok through 9/10 clouds. Most of the bombing was accomplished by radar between altitudes of 24,000 and 26,000 feet, and most of the planes bombed individually due to the fact that during ascent through the overcast enroute to the target the elements of the four-plane diamond formations became badly scattered and few ever regained formation.**

**All crews reported a great deal of confusion over the target with B-29's making bombing runs on numerous headings. The absence of any effective fighter opposition and the meager AA fire permitted the planes**

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to stay over the target for unusually long periods.

From photos taken by a reconnaissance plane several days after the attack it was determined that the target was not seriously damaged. However several other installations of less importance received hits.

With two exceptions all 40th Group planes landed safely-somewhere in the Calcutta area. At Chakulia, as the planes began to arrive, the field was closed in by a Northwester. For a short period visibility was reduced to 100 yards and gusts of wind attained a velocity of 50 miles per hour. In all only four planes landed at Chakulia to be welcomed, fed, and interrogated by a soggy S-2 section which had been moved into the partially completed operations building for that purpose. The remainder of the planes, most of which were on their last few gallons of gas, landed at other Bases in the vicinity and returned to Chakulia the following day.

The two exceptions mentioned above were both planes belonging to the 395th Squadron which were forced to ditch in the Bay of Bengal due to failure of the fuel transfer systems.

"On 5 June 1944, B-29 #42-6282, Capt JOHN E. SANDERS, airplane commander, proceeded on a combat mission in formation, beyond the point of no return using wing tanks only, without testing the operation of the fuel transfer system. The pump had been tested on the ground prior to the mission, and its previous excellent air operation was taken for granted. Due to the tail heavy condition of the airplane, the pilot did not desire any gasoline transferred before bombs were dropped. When the fuel transfer system was tried, it failed to function and course was altered to nearest field, Cox's Bazaar, India. Upon arrival there, the Navigator was uncertain of his position and believed it was a Japanese Base. Rather than risk delivering a new B-29 airplane to the Japanese at their field, the Pilot decided to continue to Chittagong."

"About fourteen (14) miles short of the field at Chittagong, India, the Pilot was forced to land the airplane in the water about 1½ miles off-shore. The airplane was landed excellently in smooth water and began to fill with water immediately in both pressurized compartments. All crew members escaped from the forward compartment after pulling life rafts release handles. No crew member escaped from the rear compartment without aid from outside by crew members from the front compartment. Four (4) crew members were never seen after ditching began and were either injured in the landing and drowned, or were unable to escape from the plane and were drowned. Although the life raft doors were released, the rafts did not emerge from their compartments. Surviving crew members were quickly rescued by the Air Sea Rescue which had been alerted by Capt SANDERS and crew by radio." (Photo 7)

"B-29 #42-6304, Pilot, Major ALEX N. ZAMRY, took off on morning of 5 June 1944 on combat mission flight. The flight proceeded entirely normally to the target where bombs were dropped. Fuel transfer system had been checked enroute to the target and was operative. Fuel transfer system was again checked after leaving target, but neither time was any appreciable amount of fuel transferred due to the airplane commanders desire to maintain his center of gravity in a normal forward position.

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“When the fuel quantity gages averaged approximately 350 to 400 gallons per engine, transferring was attempted and smoke was observed coming from the Flight Engineer’s panel after seven (7) minutes operation. Then Engineer replaced the wire which was burned out and after 4 to 5 operation, the wire burned out again. The Engineer twice ran a wire directly from the switch to the Fuel Transfer Relay and both times the wire burned out. At that time the fuel transfer operation was abandoned and gasoline was jettisoned from the bomb bay tanks which resulted in filling the airplane with fumes. When all engines stopped for lack of gasoline, landing was affected in probably an excellent manner but due to the high swells the nose went under water. When the IFF detonator exploded, it is believed that the gasoline fumes in the airplane also exploded, blowing the ship open and scattering the crew from the aft compartment”.

“The life rafts had been released and surviving crew members boarded them and left the vicinity of the airplane. The airplane sank in about twenty (20) minutes. All crew members escaped except the Pilot and the Radio Operator, who are believed to have been knocked unconscious by the impact.”

Not included in this accident report of the ditching of #304 was an account of the grueling 36 hours the survivors (two of them badly injured) endured before reaching land in the two life rafts. Although Major Edwin R. Glas, whose radio operator intercepted the position reports sent out by #304, reported this to be the Hot News interrogator at Kharagpur and supplied him in writing with complete information as to the probable course, speed and distance flown by #304 after the last position was given, the position which the air Sea Rescue unit was given was incorrect. The 19 minutes which elapsed between the last report and the clamping down of the transmitting key, were not taken into consideration.

For this reason, in all probability, the crew was not found by the search planes. In addition, due to the wide spread and seemingly authoritative rumor that Major Zamry’s crew had all been rescued and were in Calcutta on 8 June, little effort was made to persuade higher headquarters that the number of search planes should be increased.

As it happened the surviving members of the crew floated into a small island just off the mouth of the Ganges where, suffering from thirst, exposure, shock, flashburns and other injuries, they were found by some Indians who notified the British authorities who in turn notified the Air-Sea Rescue unit at Calcutta. Shortly thereafter they were picked up by a PBY and taken to a hospital at Calcutta.

So ended the first combat mission of the 40<sup>th</sup> Group. Weather had been a more dangerous enemy than the Jap but despite the fact that the B -29 had not yet had an opportunity to prove its defensive capabilities the crews were confident and eagerly awaited the next Field Order from 58<sup>th</sup> Wing.

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On 6 June word was received that the Second Front had been opened. The news was received calmly and without celebration but it is likely that everyone was inspired to work just a little harder in order to get the war over that much sooner.

On 8 June aircraft of the 45<sup>th</sup> and 395<sup>th</sup> Squadrons were moved to the new dispersal area to the east of the north-south runway and on the following day planes belonging to the 25<sup>th</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> were moved. The engineers were already at work lengthening and "half-soiling" with concrete the north-south runway which up to that time had been used only as a parking and taxi strip. (Photos 8,9)

At a regular meeting of the Group Staff on 10 June Col Harmon announced that another mission was coming up and that the field order was expected shortly.

On 11 June Major Scherck, Group S-2, was called to Wing Headquarters at Kharagpur and returned the same day with Field Order #3.

Once again the field became a beehive of activity. Maintenance, operations and Intelligence personnel once again put in long hours, sometimes 30 at a stretch, in preparation for a mission which was to replace invasion news in the headlines. For this time B-29's were to bomb the Japanese mainland from their advanced bases in China. All available planes were to proceed to A-1 (Hsinching, China) on D-day minus 2 and return to Chakulia on D-day plus 2.

On the afternoon of 12 June a general briefing for all crews scheduled to depart for A-1 was held in the Group S-2 Briefing Room and the enemy situation in China, emergency landing fields and escape and evasion were covered. For purposes of security the route, the target and all information relating to them was not disclosed prior to the final briefing at A-1.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of the month a total of 20 combat B-29's left Chakulia for Hsinching as though on regular cargo flights across the Hump. One plane, #42-6261, piloted by Capt. Marvin Stockett of the 45<sup>th</sup> Squadron took off from Chakulia on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> and was last reported as clearing into the Jorat control. Nothing has been heard from or of this plane to date and it is officially listed as missing.

The final briefing was held at 0900 local time on the morning of the 15 June in the Operations building at A-1. With the announcement that the target was the Imperial Iron and Steel works at Yawata, in Japan proper, and that the round trip distance was 3200 statute miles, it was realized that this would be the real test of the B-29. Never before had a combat mission of such length and endurance been flown.

The briefing was terminated at about 1030 R and crews immediately had lunch and then proceeded back to their planes for last minute preparations.

Eleven general officers and numerous war correspondents representing all important news agencies lent emphasis to the fact that this mission was to be one of the great events of World War II.

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The appearance of the field that afternoon was the same as that of any heavy bomber base prior to take off. Jeeps, weapons carriers and trucks were all pressed into service bringing crews to their planes. An operations jeep dashed from one plane to another picking up loading lists and Form F's. Last minute checks were made on clothing and equipment, guns, ammunition, bomb bay doors, loading and the precious gasoline.

Behind the simplicity of routine preparation were the enormous logistical problems necessary, for the accomplishment of the mission. The B-29's had been pack horses for a month but now they were "combat loaded." This was the "spree" that Col Harman had told us we would go on as soon as we had enough (gas and oil) in the "bank."

The runway, usually dusty, was settled. Groups of friendly Chinese watched the proceedings with wonderment, raising their right thumbs in the air as crews came up to their airplanes, and shouting "Ding How!" The crews returned the friendly greeting because to these people was due a large portion of the credit for making the mission possible.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Group dispatched 18 B-29's from A-1 to participate in the mission. Sixteen planes were airborne, two failing to take off due to mechanical difficulties. Col Harman was at the controls of the first to take the air at 1616 R.

The following is the narrative of the 40<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group Consolidated Mission Report:

"As per field order all aircraft proceeded individually to the assigned target, the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at YAWATA, JAPAN. To conserve gas aircraft proceeded on mission at altitudes of from 8500 feet to 11000 feet to clear mountains approximately 200 miles east of Able 1. These mountains were very inaccurate on maps being used, rising to higher altitudes than indicated. This could have resulted in a major disaster since planes were on instruments when crossing them. Weather fortunately supplied few breaks in cloud formations permitting pilots glimpses of terrain and thereby enabling correction in altitudes to be made. All aircraft passed this hazard safely.

"Of the 16 aircraft airborne 4 were forced to abort due to mechanical difficulties and they returned safely to base landing from 1240Z to 0920Z. The remaining 12 aircraft proceeded on mission and 11 dropped a total of 88 500 lb GP bombs on the target area. One (1) aircraft due to errors in navigation drifted considerably north of course and upon finding himself over KOREA decided against trying for the primary target due to possible gas shortage and dropped his bombs on the town of URUSAN on southeast coast of KOREA. Course to target followed by the 11 aircraft was approximately as briefed (base to 34 00' N-129 30' E to IP. OKING IS 34 13'N-130 05'E to target) with the exception that various aircraft missed the I.P. and were forced to bomb on headings different than the 122 degrees True assigned.

Weather over the target was undercast with heavy haze obscuring the target and all approaches were made by radar. On 9 of the 11 aircraft the radar operator released the bombs and on the remaining 2 the bombardier dropped, one on a lead plane release and the other on estimate only.

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“Due to lack of photo coverage no accurate assessment of bomb damage is possible at this time. Interrogation reports would indicate that 16 bombs fell on the aiming point and it is believed that most bombs fell within the general target area or in an area where damage to dwellings was accomplished. Crew of one aircraft (#209 pilot Lt Col WILKINSON) reports the could observe large fire in target area when 60 miles away on return. Fire appeared to be in a straight line with flames up to 5000 feet. Various smaller fires in the target area were reported by other aircraft.”

“Over the target automatic weapons fire was intense up to approximately 12000 feet and heavy AA was reported as moderate. Approximately 30 searchlights in target area were reported. Aircraft from this Group were over the target at from 13000 feet to 18000 feet from 1616Z to 1708Z. Only one aircraft (at 13000 at 1708Z received minor damage and there were no casualties.”

“No barrage balloons or smoke screens were reported and there were not Interceptions by enemy aircraft. A moderate number of lights in eastern China were reported and naval aids to navigation in the Yellow Sea and at the target were left on. All crews reported excellent blackout regulations in the target area.”

“Aircraft returning this base had up to 1500 gallons of gas in tanks on landing. Other than aborts aircraft landed from 2305Z to 0057Z”.

“Considering distance involved, the weather which in the case of some aircraft resulted in as much as 8 hours instrument conditions and the resultant navigational problems involved it is believed the mission was an outstanding success.”

It would be understatement to say that the planes were a welcome sight as they returned early that morning of 16 June. Everyone on the field was out to count them as they appeared over the field and settled down gracefully on the runway. The crews, after eating, bore patiently the detailed interrogations and then went quickly to their beds in the Chinese hostels. As they went to sleep, back in the States millions of Americans were exuberantly receiving the first news released on the raid.

Photographs of the Yawata area were taken several days after the mission by an F-5 belonging to the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Prints received by this Group about two weeks after the mission indicate, regrettably, that no bombs (with one possible exception) fell in the immediate target area, but that varying damage was done to numerous other installations including residential sections in the vicinity.

One reason for this seems due to the fact that available information on the target area was incomplete. It was anticipated that Kukina Oka, a large pentagonal peninsula just north of the target, would show up clearly on the radar scope, as would Maeda Anchorage which separates Kukina Oka from the target area. As it happened Kukina Oka was also filled with large installations to such an extent that “glare” on the radar scope obscured Maeda Anchorage and made identification of the target extremely difficult.

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In any event, Japanese propagandists hit a new high explaining away the attack on their homeland. "We should not think," said one Jap propagandist as reported by OWI, "that we have been passively attacked, but rather that we have actively pulled the enemy toward us."

Most of the planes returned to Chakulia within the next three days but a few were delayed a week or more with engine changes.

On 18 June, Col Harmon, justly proud of the fact that all 40<sup>th</sup> Group planes had not only returned safely from Japan but had also been able to gas up at A -1 and return to Chakulia (barring mechanical difficulties), received the following wire:

AN ALL OUT EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO DELIVER ONE HUNDRED OCTANE GASOLINE PARKEN CARMICHAEL HARVEY ENGLER HARMON FROM SAUNDERS PARKEN TO ABLE DASH 5 AND ABLE DASH SEVEN REPEAT ABLE DASH FIVE AND ABLE DASH SEVEN LETS BRING OUR BOYS HOME

It may be recorded here without further comment that an enlarged copy of this message adorns one wall of the Colonel's office.

Cargo flights, which had been resumed shortly after the Bangkok mission, continued during the Yawata raid, the only deviation being that for a few days following the latter mission 40<sup>th</sup> Group planes carried fuel to advanced bases A -5 and A-7 in order to "bring our boys home."

General Orders #3, Headquarters 40<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, dated 19 June 44, rescinded General Orders #4, dated 4 May 1944 amalgamating all Maintenance Squadrons with their respective Bombardment Squadrons. (Incl 1)

By 40<sup>th</sup> Group Special Orders dated 23 and 25 June all Squadron Intelligence personnel were placed on Special Duty with Group Headquarters. This was found to be necessary due to the fact that the Group S-2, having been ordered to consolidate all intelligence functions in the Group instead of following the usual arrangement of Four Squadron Intelligence Sections, did not have the necessary control over Squadron personnel. It was not that relations between the Group and squadron S-2's were unsatisfactory, but rather that the Group S-2, as a staff officer, did not have the authority to give direct orders to Squadron personnel. In addition there were frequent conflicts between the plans of the Squadron Commanders and those of the Group S-2 so far as the use of Intelligence personnel was concerned. This constituted a considerable problem which was not solved to everyone's satisfaction by placing squadron personnel on special duty with Group Headquarters, but at least resulted in the work being done more efficiently. The general consensus of everyone concerned is that reverting to squadron S -2 sections would be much more satisfactory. During missions when the Group becomes a tactical unit all S-2 functions could easily be consolidated under and directed by the Group S-2. At all other times, i.e. during normal, routine operations, a consolidated group section is not considered necessary.

On 27 June the 40<sup>th</sup> Group (along with the 444<sup>th</sup> and 462<sup>nd</sup>, and 468<sup>th</sup> Groups) received a secret letter from 58<sup>th</sup> Wing subject: B-29 Transport

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Goals for Period 20 June to 31 July, dated 26 June 1944. This directive set a goal of 157,250 gallons of aviation fuel for each Group to be transported to the forward area. In order to arrive at this goal the following assumptions were made:

- a. Five (5) trips per month per tanker average off -load, 2000 gallons of fuel.
- b. Four (4) trips per month per non-tanker average off-load, 850 gallons of fuel.
- c. During the period 20 to 30 June, non-tanker to make only 50% of the number of trips they will make during any 10 day period in July. This assumption was reached after considering the necessity of accomplishing necessary maintenance of the last tactical mission.

By the end of June the Group was behind schedule to the extent of approximately 7500 gallons. Final figures will be given in the July history.

From 7 June (when cargo operations were resumed ) to 30 June (inclusive), 50 B-29's flew the Hump to A-1; only two aborted after take-off.

During the last four days of the month all Group staff sections as well as squadron operations sections moved into the "E" building on the line. The control tower in one corner is not yet completed so the old one is still in use at the end of the month. Also, despite a thatched covering, the roof leaks in a multitude of inconvenient places during the monsoon rains. But Group Headquarters is finally together under one roof and the saving of wear and tear on jeeps and shoe leather is well worth a dribble down one's back.

Lt Col Louis E. Coira, Deputy Group Commander, was promoted to full Colonel in June, and Captain William M. Hilt (Group Radar Officer), William J. Rivers (Group Communications Officer), Thomas S. Carroll (Group Weather Officer), and Louis E. Scherck (Group S-2) obtained their Majorities.

Included with this month's History are a photograph of the Group Staff (Photo 10), as aerial photograph of Chakulia Army Air Base (Photo 11) and various scenes taken on the Base. (Photo 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19) Wherever necessary, additional information is given on the backs of the photographs.

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

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Incl. #1

**HEADQUARTERS 40<sup>TH</sup> BOMBARDMENT GROUP  
APO 3631**

RRH/rh/c

19 June 1944

**GENERAL ORDERS)**

**NUMBER            :**  
**3)**

- 1. General order No. 6, this Headquarters, dated 4, May 1944, amalgamating squadrons in this Group is rescinded.**

**By Order of Colonel HARMAN**

**R. R. HOLMAN  
1<sup>st</sup> Lt., AC,  
Adj.**

**OFFICIAL**

**R. R. HOLMAN  
1<sup>st</sup> Lt., AC,  
Adj.**