

**(Retyped from microfilm by Mona Keehn)**

44<sup>th</sup> BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

1 Jun 44

Office of the Historical Officer

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SQUADRON HISTORY -- February, March, April, May

The events of these four months will long be remembered by the Officers and Men of the 44<sup>th</sup>. Time and again we have had our share of the "sweat and tears" of Mr. Churchill's historic phrase. It has not been an easy time. We've had plenty of trouble, more, perhaps, than we deserve, but we're here now, completing the final touches to whip the Squadron into combat flying shape, and soon, we'll be "ready to go." The Officers and Men of the 44<sup>th</sup> are to be commended for their splendid efforts and hard work during this period. In the space of these four months we saw the completion of training in the States, delivery of our combat ships, flying them to the theater of operations by our combat crews, and, we already had our first taste of combat operations.

On 1 February 1944, the Squadron strength was 62 Officers and 98 Enlisted Men.

On 1 February, we were still training combat crews in Pratt, Kansas, on B-17 airplanes. We had no B-29's. Training consisted of high altitude, bombing and navigation flights, long range missions, and practice in formation flying. No date had, at the time, been given for the completion of our training, and an overseas move [move], but when, on 12 February,

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the maintenance squadron assigned to us. departed from Pratt for it's overseas destination we realized that we were getting close to our final stage. Sure enough, on 20 February, the first party, consisting of 2 Officers and 1 Enlisted Man, were ordered to leave Pratt and proceed overseas via ATC.

It was around this time that our partially modified B-29's began to arrive. On 24 February the first one, no. [#] 214, came in and was assigned to Major J. D. White. Airplanes then came in two and three days apart, and on March 17 our complement of B-29'ws was completed with the arrival of ship no. 248.

The arrival of the airplanes marked the beginning of a period which we facetiously call "The Battle of Pratt." Many modifications which should have been accomplished at the various modification centers were not completed, and almost every airplane needed engine changes -- many of them all four. The departure of our regular maintenance squadron for their overseas station had left us with a terrible shortage of experienced personnel, and we had no choice but that everyone, including Pilots and crew officers, do the necessary maintenance work. For a long while, sleep or recreation was only something to be pleasantly remembered, as the crews worked day and night to get the airplanes in shape for the overseas flights. Combat crews, fortunately, were able to make all the necessary engine changes, but there was insufficient time and personnel for most of the inner modifications, and civilian help had to be

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called in. The airplanes were in bad shape. The worst example was ship No. 214, the first one assigned to the Squadron.

The crew worked day and night on this ship from the day it arrived through the middle of March, but it finally had to be written up as a bad job and a new ship was assigned. It is of interest to note even the new ship No. 241, had and still has, plenty of faults, although the combat crew put it in good enough shape to fly over here. It gives trouble today.

Due to the condition of the airplanes, no flying, at all, was done from the last week in February until the third week in March. Around this latter time our first test flights were run. Long range ten hour missions were made to test fuel consumption, and instrument calibration flights of four to five hours duration were made. Also, at this time, preparations were completed to send six of our fifteen crews overseas by a combination of ship and ATC route, and for nine crews to fly the airplanes over.

A week or two prior to the final preparations, the general confusion of the "Battle of Pratt" was added to by an inspection visit by a group of high ranking Officers. Shortly after, General Arnold came down, inspected and commended our combat crew personnel and to the satisfaction of all, expressed himself bluntly in regard to the poor work the "Feather Merchants" had done. At this time he also expressed his desire

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that every man in the organization be given seven days leave before the final departure. This last was very pleasant news, but, inasmuch, as the Group had a definite departure date to meet, it was decided to put the question to the combat crews as to whether they should or should not take advantage of it. An overwhelming majority of the personnel (on actual count ninety eight percent) decided on three day passes instead of leave or furlough time so that they could leave on schedule. Such was the spirit of the 44<sup>th</sup>.

At 0100, 4 April 1944, Captain Meuller, flying ship No. 322, and Captain Lyons, in ship No. 319, took off from Pratt for Presque Isle, Maine, for the first leg of the flight overseas. Ship 319 had trouble, was forced down at Syracuse, New York, and stayed there for a day. Ship 322, continued on to her destination. 319 too off from Syracuse on the morning of April 5<sup>th</sup>, flew to Presque Isle, met ship 322, continued on to the next stop, Gander Lake, Newfoundland, and on the evening of the next day both ships took off for Marakech, French Morocco. Half way across, in the vicinity of the Azores, the engineer of ship 322 found his fuel transfer system inoperative, and could not transfer gas from his bomb-bay tanks. The crew did a magnificent job of "sweating out" twenty seven hundred and fifty miles on the fuel in their wing tanks only, but arrived in Marakech with no difficulty. The route continued

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from Marakech to Cairo to Karachi to the final destination, Chakulia.

It may be of value to note that all along the route practically no B-29 maintenance was available, and, addition, airplanes were required to use, that they believed to be, a poor grade of gasoline. Ship 322 had to wait seventy-two hours in Cairo, alone, to gas up. All along the route each field would inform the airplane Commander that maintenance would be available at his next stop. But, it wasn't until the ships finally arrived in Chakulia, that it did become available, despite a bad shortage of parts.

During this time the remainder of our ships in Pratt were completing their final arrangements and taking off for the long journey. Following is a list of airplanes, airplane Commanders, and departure and arrival dates. All ships experienced maintenance difficulties, enroute, and poor fuel. None had a really easy trip.

<u>Ship No.</u>	<u>Commander</u>	<u>Departure Date Pratt AAB</u>	<u>Arrival Date Chakulia AAB</u>
322	Capt. W. L. Meuller	3 April	12 April
319	Capt. J. E. Lyons	3 April	17 April
289	Lt. Col J. I. Cornett	6 April	18 April
250	Capt. W. A. Hunter	6 April	3 May
348	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. W. O. Berry, Jr.	6 April	4 May
290	Maj. N. W. Wemple	8 April	19 April

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297	Maj. J. V. McWilliams	9 April	7 May
241	Maj. J. W. White	9 April	7 May
268	Maj. D. W. Roberts	9 April	29 April

Here at Chakulia, in the meantime, the Second Bombardment Maintenance Squadron, which was attached to the 44<sup>th</sup>, had already arrived, but the field was not yet in first class operating shape. We had living quarters and messing facilities prepared for combat personnel, thanks to the efforts of our three-man advance party, which had arrived on March 20, but we had an acute parking problem for the airplanes, and a transportation problem for the crews. Because of the weight of the airplanes, it was found necessary to build special concrete parking blocks, quickly, on the parking runway, and all airplanes as a result, were and are, parked close together with no facilities for dispersal. Dispersal areas and a new runway are in the process of being built and should be ready for use very soon.

Maintenance work on airplanes the first few weeks was necessarily slow, principally due, as mentioned before, to the shortage of spare parts. All ships needed work. The problem was further added to by a shortage of fuel.

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came over via ATC and had not flown for several months.

On 7 May 1944, Lt. Col. Cornett, in ship 289, and Capt. Lyons, in 319, took off for the Squadron's first cargo ferry flights over the "Hump," to the advanced base. These were the first of a series of flights made by all ships and crews. For the first few flights Co-Pilots were left behind and all airplanes carried two and three first Pilots in order to check them out on the route and terrain features.

These missions, listed as actual combat flights, were fairly successful for the Squadron. to date 14 "Hump" flights with no losses or severe damages to either ships or personnel have been flown. Only two flights were forced to return to the base before completing their mission due to mechanical failure. Up until the last ten days of May ferry missions were performed by individual ships, but, within the past few days, crews have been briefed for flights over the "Hump" using four and five plane formations, and flying a more direct route. This is still in the testing stage and it will be necessary to check fuel consumption data very closely.

Along with ferry flights over the "Hump," gunnery and bombing missions, for practice, were scheduled on the same [illegible]. A directive from Bomber Command [The remainder of the page is mostly illegible. It seems to refer to "radar bombing" practice, and difficulties with the radar equipment.]

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(ling) radar equipment, which was complicated by a shortage of necessary parts, not all ships have flown radar missions. To date, however, we have flown a total of five radar missions, but, the Squadron is considered "Checked Out" on this type of bombing. As of 24 May, all radar operators, too, were "Checked Out" as efficient, and have since been assigned to their regular combat crews.

On 4 May 1944, the 44<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron and the Second Bombardment Maintenance Squadron were combined into a single unit as the 44<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron. Lt. Col. James Ira Cornett continued as Commanding Officer, and, Major William H. Gaoke, former Commanding Officer of the Second, assumed the duties of Executive Officer. All administrative duties were combined and as of this date we are functioning normally as one unit. Living quarters for combat crew personnel and maintenance have not yet been combined, but, will be, upon completion of our permanent barracks, now being built.

In regard to the general performance of the B-29 airplane, while no outstanding difficulties have been encountered, it is the opinion of Lt. Col. Cornett that there is some difference in performance since its departure from the States. The airplane apparently is not performing at [illegible]. Whether it is the result of barometric pressure [illegible] [illegible] or something otherwise unrelated [illegible] [illegible].



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The following incident is considered of value in this history. It occurred during Capt. W. A. Hunter's overseas flight in ship No. 250, on the overwater leg from Gander Lake, Newfoundland to Marakech, French Morocco. Flying at 9000 feet, with a power setting at 35 inches of mercury and 2100 RPM, about 3 hours out of Gander Lake, the fuel pressure dropped suddenly on No. 1 engine and the Pilot immediately feathered the prop. Weather conditions made return to Gander Lake impossible and it was decided to continue on course with three engines. An effort was made to revive No. 1 engine but was not successful. The remainder of the flight was made in eight hours and 25 minutes, at an IAS of 155-160 mph, two hours of which were on instruments. Some altitude was lost during the effort to revive the engine but was later regained. The power setting for three engines was increased to 35 inches mercury and 2300 RPM. The average weight for the flight was 122000 pounds. The airplane was landed safely at Marakech.

The Squadron strength as of 1 June 1944) with combined Squadrons) is 102 Officers and 453 Enlisted Men.

(signed)  
IRVING L. GOTTLEIB  
1<sup>st</sup> Lient., Air Corps  
Historical Officer.