

(Retyped from microfilm by Mona Keehn)

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44th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (VH)
Office of the Historical Officer
APO #631

2 September, 1944

SQUADRON HISTORY
1 July, 1944 to 31 July, 1944

The first few days of July found the Officers and men of the 44th Squadron wallowing in the heat and stickiness and rain of a typical Indian Monsoon season. Spirits continued high, however, despite the seasonal difficulties, due to the continued publicity of the mission to Japan the previous month. Fame had been gained as an organization in June and now in July certain individuals were being recognized by national publications. July 15th issue of YANK magazine told the story of the Yawata raid as it was seen from the plane of Captain R. A. Harte. The excellent article was written by a Yank correspondent, who accompanied Captain Harte on the raid. The news articles concerning the "death" of Lt. Col. J. I. Cornett was read with disgust by members of this organization. Jap propaganda had come out with the story that the Colonel had been shot down over Japan and had subsequently been executed. This was indeed humorous to the members of the Squadron who could daily see the Colonel, in good health, doing his job as Squadron Commander.

In early July new quarters for enlisted men and Officers were finally considered adequate and the slow progress of moving commenced. This was completed in about three (3) days and the men settled down to fixing their quarters as best they could to remind them of Shangri-La -- the United States.

On 5 July, two (2) planes of the Squadron, #290, piloted by Captain R. O Berry, and #297, piloted by Major Joseph White, were alerted for an impending mission. Briefing was conducted at the rear area, Chakulia, in contrast to the first mission against Japan when it was held at the Forward Area. The target assigned to the Squadron was Nagasaki, Japan. The following men were to make the mission:

<u>Major Joseph White (#297)</u>	<u>Captain E.O. Berry (#290)</u>
2 nd Lt. D. B. Punnett	1 st Lt. L. A. Thomas
2 nd Lt. E. H. Lossing	Capt. W. W. Walters
2 nd Lt. R. K. Lantz	1 st Lt. J. L. Ohr
F/O C. H. Bradley	2 nd Lt. R. L. Barg
S/Sgt. S. Laube	T/Sgt. M. Bresnek
Sgt. R. T. LaVallee	2 nd Lt. W. R. Muller
Sgt. A. G. Beck	Sgt. Gregorio

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T/Sgt. L. Sandrick	S/Sgt. J. P. Glennon
Sgt. C. E. Gorman	S/Sgt. B. E. Kinzer
S/Sgt. M. Young	T/Sgt. E. L. Robertson

On 6 July, #290 took off on what appeared to be a routine "Hump" mission and landed safely in Hsingching the same date. At approximately the same time, Major White took off in #297 for what started out to be a routine mission over the "Hump". Take off was normal and F/O Bradley reported to Major White "Airplane running normal - o.k. to start clime". The pilot nosed the plane up on course to Hsingching. As the plane reached 800 feet absolute altitude #4 engine cut out for a moment but ran normally again until suddenly #4 engine again started cutting out violently and the throttle worked down the quadrant to the clock position. As the oil pressure was dropping and oil temperature was going up, the pilot elected to feather the prop and return to the field. Attempt was made to feather with no effect. Number 4 windmilled at about 2200 rpm and the engine itself was about 2600 centigrade. F/O Bradley looked out the window at #4 engine which was shaking violently in its mounts and it appeared ready to fall off any minute. It started to smoke and looked like it might burn. The Engineer closed everything tight and set the exstinguishers. At that moment flames were seen around the exhaust, licked up the wing and extended back to the horizontal stabilizer. Number 1 exstinguisher was pulled and had no apparent effect. Number 2 was set off and the fire started to die down and then went out for a time but soon started again worse than before. Lt. Robert Lantz, the bombardier, who was sitting in the bombardiers seat at the time spotted the field. At the same time the tower instructed #297 to circle the field as #290 was ready for immediate takeoff. This was not a time for politeness, however, and Major White made a straight in approach with full power on the other three engines. The wheels went down -- a gunner reported : "Full left Flap" -- and the wheels hit. Number 4 Tack dropped off and the fire went out -- Major White had brought the plane in at 129,460 lbs. with an engine on fire. What did the boys think of it? F/O Bradley put it - "Oh well, what are we getting flying pay for".

On the afternoon of July 7th #290 patiently waited its turn on the taxiway for a take off to blast the Japs at Nagasaki. Captain Berry taxied to the runway and tested his engines. All went until he tested #4 and then a look of disappointment crossed his face. The left magneto of #4 dropped 113 RPM. He knew he could not take off without undue danger to the plane and crew and he was forced to abort.

On the evening of July 8th, B-29 #42-6289 was being prepared for one of its regular missions over the Hump. It was scheduled to take off on the mission the next evening. The ground crew in the early part of the evening devoted most of their time to the problem of putting the aircraft to the best

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mechanical shape as possible. In consequence the gigantic problem of servicing the aircraft with its thirty tons of fuel was not started until about ten o'clock in the evening. The bomb bay tanks were the first serviced and that tank was but half completed, only the two forward upper tanks had been filled when the time came to take off for the midnight meal. Upon their return to the ship it was discovered that the upper tanks had started to siphon fuel out of the overflow lines and as a result there were large pools of gasoline lying around on the ground under the plane's mid-section.

The servicing of the plane continued but S/Sgt. J. J. Belknap, crew chief, ordered one of his men, Corporal Karl Schott, to get a broom and sweep the fuel away from under the plane and to spread it out so that it might evaporate more quickly. S/Sgt. Emil Pererson of the ground crew at the time was working inside #4 engine nacelle replacing a defective engine control pulley. Sgt. Belknap then returned to the front bomb bay to continue the service.

Cpl. Schott set about the task of getting the gasoline away from the plane, doing his work by the light of an ordinary mechanics drop cord. In some way, during the process of sweeping the drop cord fell to the ground, the bulb exploded and the fuel on the cement hardstand quickly caught fire. The warning was spread, Sgt. Belknap jumped out of the bomb bay and ran out in front of the craft, catching fire to his clothes during the course of his egress. The clothing fire was quickly put out by the simple process of rolling on the ground. Sgt. Pererson at the same time beat a hasty retreat from the inside of his nacelle. The problem of fighting the plane fire then arose. The station fire truck was quickly notified of the fire, but action at the scene of the plane pending their arrival was rendered impossible because of the fact that the fire extinguishers on hand were found to be empty, carbon dioxide having been a "not on stock" item on the field for some three weeks previous.

In about five minutes, the station fire truck arrived at the scene, but by that time the fire had spread too thoroughly to be stopped. The bomb bays of the plane were already burning, the oxygen bottles had exploded and the plane had even then broken in the middle and had settled down to the ground. From that time on the sole hope of the fire fighters was to prevent the spread of the flames to the other huge planes sitting in nearby hardstands. The other B-29's of the Squadron each had one fire guard posted on hand, and one plane, #42-6250, was taxi-ed out of its stand to a position of safety.

All personnel working about the plane escaped injury from the conflagration, but the plane itself was completely destroyed in a few hours. Fortunately all fuel tanks were full at the

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time of the fire so, there were no big explosions. The bullets in the plane's gun turrets were set off from the heat, but no one was injured from such random firing. No other planes were damaged. The total loss to the Squadron as a result of the fire was one B-29 airplane, no personnel, some maintenance and personal flying equipment and refueling unit truck and trailer.

Late in the afternoon of July 16, 1944 Lt. Thomas J. Connelly, engineering officer of the 44th Bombardment Squadron, was advised by officials of the 40 Bombardment Group that a new B-29 had just arrived on the field and had been assigned to this Squadron. The plane was immediately moved into the 44th area and on the following day the task of checking the new addition was undertaken. The plane, A.A.F. #42-24503, proved to be one of the latest models of the B-29, a product of the Boeing Wichita plant. The main external differences between the new plane and the older models which the Squadron then owned were the additions of two .50 calibre machine guns to the forward upper turret, and the factory installation of de-icer boots on the leading edge of the wing and stabilizer surfaces were also new developments. Further investigation showed that the bomb bay fuel system had been radically altered in that the 1370 gallon tank had been installed in the center wing of the plane, between the two bomb bays, and only two bomb bay tanks were installed in the forward bay, both being installed horizontally, whereas the older models had three tanks in the forward bay, two vertical and one horizontal.

In consequence of the fuel tank modifications, the main oxygen system bottles had been moved and were located throughout the plane, to located in each main wheel well, some in the unpressurized tail section, and others along the bomb bay catwalks. Inspection of the engineers panel showed that the arrangement of the instruments was changed into a series of logical groupings, the older planes having had the instruments placed on the panel with little semblance for order. One new instrument was added, a cabin differential pressure indicator, designed to show the differential air pressure between cabin and outside air. Other changes, such as the omission of the pilot's emergency ignition switch, modification of the emergency landing gear to prevent accidental retraction while the plane is on the ground, seem to be in accord with late technical order modifications now being sent out for compliance on the earlier models.

A complete inspection of the airplane itself, lasting some six days, revealed no startling flaws. One front exhaust stack on engine #4 was found to be burned, but that was not deemed abnormal in the light of Squadron experience on the older planes,

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at least in view of the fact that the plane had 86:05 hours on it at the time of its assignment to the 44th. Also one exhaust bracket was broken on the same engine, and the ring cowl on that showed several bad cracks. In the course of the inspection, all valves on all engines were checked and in many cases the valves had been adjusted with the marking holes improperly lined up, thus preventing lubrication of the valve rocker arms. a compression check of all the cylinders showed that all were in good condition in that respect. All spark plugs were changed, USGC plugs being installed for a test of their efficiency as compared to the Em6's which had been the only plugs available.

After two test flights the plane was pronounced fit for active duty and was immediately prepared for a combat mission scheduled to take place the latter of July. For this mission one front bomb bay tank was moved to the rear bay, thus leaving one tank in that bay. No special maintenance was required except the replacement of the tail gunner's oxygen pressure signal assembly which was discovered to leak, and the patching of a hole in the entrance door to the nose compartment.

About the 25th of July word was received to get the planes ready for a job. As always, the maintenance crews dug in to get the Squadron planes in Commission. Between the 25th of July and and the 27th of July airplanes 290, 319, 322, and 503 proceeded to the forward area at Hsingching without mishap. Upon landing the aircraft were given daily inspections and the ground crews stationed at Hsingching noted the items needed and procured them immediately thus speeding up the maintenance on the airplanes. In the day or days, whichever the case might have been, before the briefing, the planes were cleaned and personnel gear was stowed at the positions. In short, the aircraft were made ready to go at a moments notice.

In the evening of July 28th at 1830 a general briefing was held. The briefing covered the Primary, Secondary, and last resort targets. The primary target was the Shawa Steel Works at Anshan, a highly important Japanese industrial target. The coke ovens were designated as the aiming point. Briefing covered routes, formation, take-off procedures, the enemy ground and air situations, evasion and escape, weather and communications. General briefing was followed by special briefing for all concerned.

The morning of July 29th the planes lined up at the south end of the runway so that takeoff would require as little lift time as possible. The 44th flight would be led by Major Joseph White in plane #503; with Captain James Lyons flying number 2 position in #319. Captain Raymond Moore flying number 3 in #290 and Captain Graham Bleiler flying position 4 in #322.

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At approximately 5:37 AM (LCT) plane #503 was airborne and the other airplanes of the flight followed at two minute intervals. The lead plane flew two double drifts to enable the three others to join up. Captain Lyons and Captain Moore fell into formation in approximately fifteen minutes. Captain Bleiler was unable to join the formation but rather fell in with a flight from the 468th Group. As a result, the number 4 position of the 44th flight was empty going to and coming from the target.

In formation the ships climbed to 10,000 feet and stayed there until occupied territory was reached. Over the occupied area the planes climbed to 15,000 feet but due to a heavy overcast were forced to ascend through the overcast. At 20,000 feet the weather was no better so a frontal penetration was called for and a descent through the overcast was successfully completed and the ships were again flown in close formation at an altitude of 15,000 feet. The formation broke out in the clear on the north side of the gulf of PO-RAF and then flew on course to the I.P. The target was easily picked up and the aiming point stood out clearly. Circumstances indicated that this was the first flight over the target as there were no cheary fighters nor anti-aircraft to disturb the bomb run which was 130 seconds. "Bombs Away" came at 10:58 (LCT). Aircraft #290 released its bombs after #319 and then #503. The latter plane suffered a bomb release failure and was forced to salvo its bombs. The the bombs of #290 and #319 hit the target directly while #503 bombs went over the aiming point and into the railroad yards.

Much to the chagrin of the respective crew members no enemy fighters were seen but the tail gunner, Sergeant Mieczslaw Smola, and the bombardier 1st Lt. Maxine Montgomery reported flak bursts at six and twelve o'clock. Pictures were taken of the target area and also of the area that the flak bursts reportedly came from.

Aircraft #348. flown by Captain E. O. Berry, was scheduled to fly with the 395th Bombardment Squadron. When almost at the primary target he was forced to feather an engine and return to the base. Enroute back he bombed the target of last resort, the railroad yards at Chenghsein. Bombing was accomplished at an altitude of 13,500 feet and the bombs were observed to hit directly in the center of railroad trackege at a point where the tracks are six wide. Special commendation is due Captain Berry and his crew for their fine job in bombing successfully on three engines.

On this mission the Squadron dropped a total of 32 x 500 pounders on the primary target and 8 x 500 pounders on the target of last resort.

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27 July 1944, in accordance with checking Co-pilots off with pilots on B-29's, the following officers were rated 1st ?? by Major W. Wemple:

- 1st Lt. Mansel B. Clark, Jr.
- 1st Lt. Richard H. Covey

The Squadron continued to supply its quota of gasoline and and cargo over the "Hump" by transporting 20,660 gallons of 100 octane gasoline, 400 gallons of oil, 12 passengers, and 2703 lbs of dry cargo. This was accomplished in three tankers and fifteen combat missions.

Squadron Strength -- Forty Fourth Bombardment Squadron.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Enlisted Men</u>
July 1	84	96
July 31	84	96

(signed)
IRVING L. GOTTLEIB,
1st Lt., Air Corps
Historical Officer