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

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2 July, 1944

SQUADRON HISTORY
1 June, 1944 to 30 June, 1944

Anticipation was the keynote of the first few days in June. All of our planes were grounded with the exception of two that had been converted into tankers -- #250 and #241. Concentrated maintenance work was accomplished on all of the combat ships and both maintenance and combat gave "their all" to get the planes ready for -- something. No one knew exactly why the hustle and bustle, but all were on one mind in thinking and hoping that perhaps at long last the thing we were created for -- COMBAT -- was about to come to pass.

The Squadron had not long to wait. On Sunday, June 4, 1944, a general briefing was held in the Post Theater. Seven crews from the Squadron attended, and then were informed that they were to go on the first combat mission of the B-29. The briefing was very general with the thought in mind that all matters not pertaining directly to the target -- would be taken up later. It was stressed that this was a shakedown mission. At the completion of the briefing, General Saunders, made a few pertinent remarks which brought the house up to fevered pitch. He ended up by saying, "Hit those Jap Bastards hard, for they are Bastards". Every one was in agreement.

There was a lot of work to be done by the crews to get the ships ready for take-off early the next morning. Maintenance personnel and combat crews all pitched in to make sure that everything was shipshape. For wasn't this the first combat mission of the B-29 -- and weren't they the first men to participate in the mission? It was a matter of personal pride on the part of each man to see that his job was well done, and to see, that because his job was well done, the planes would get to the target and more important get back home again.

June 5 was the eventful day. The crews were awakened at one a.m., and at two a.m., ate a hearty breakfast at the 44th Squadron Mess. Final briefing was held at the Group S-2 briefing room at three a.m. It was only then that the crews learned the target they were assigned to hit; the route to follow; the altitudes to fly; enemy fields they would pass over; enemy planes they might meet; positions of AA installations in the target area; evasion and escape procedure and air-sos rescue information.

SECRET

SECRET

The primary target assigned was strategically important to the Japs -- the Makasan Railway Workshops at Bangkok. The secondary target was the Mingaladon Railway yards at Rangoon. The target information supplied was very complete, and the men left the briefing room confident that they could find the target and hit it. On maps, supplied to Navigators, was drawn enemy airfields they would pass over enroute, enemy AA installations and enemy radar installations.

At six a.m. the first airplane of the 44th Bombardment Squadron (VH) started down the runway, and by six fifteen the last of six airplanes was airborne. Seven planes were originally scheduled to take off. They were as follows:

Lt. Col, James Ira Cornett	Ship no. 289
Major Donald Roberts	268
Major Neil Wemple	290
Major James V. McWilliams	297
Captain James E. Lyons	319
Captain William Mueller	322
Captain William R. Hunter	348

All planes were airborne with the exception of 348. This ship had been worked on throughout the night by Captain E. O. Berry who was assigned to the ship and his whole crew, plus the maintenance crew. But their valiant efforts were in vain, for at take off time 348 was unable to take to the air.

The original plan was to have the planes fly a four ship formation. This was done so far as possible, but the weather was bad, and on making ascent through the overcast the formation broke up and the planes proceeded on toward the target as single ships.

About one hour and fifteen minutes from the target, Captain Lyons, in ship 319, attempted to transfer fuel and found the fuel pump inoperative. He returned to the base.

At eleven fifty the men of the 44th found themselves really in the war, for it was at that time that the first ship, 297, piloted by Major McWilliams, entered the target area. Flak was moderate, but came to within 300 yards of 297. Other ships of the 44th arrived over the target at later times and experienced very little flak. A few bursts were seen behind and to the right. Fighter intervention was meager, and was experienced only by Major McWilliams and his crew. One Osxxx made a pass from eight o'clock, then came around the tail. The tail gunner Tech Sergeant Henry T. McCann, got the Nip in his sights and let him have a few.

SECRET

SECRET

When last seen the Jap was smoking and going down. Tech Sergeant McCann claims a probable.

When bombs were "away" the planes turned homeward bound. The trip home was uneventful until landfall was made. At that time back at Chakulia a wind and rainstorm of monsoon proportions descended on the heads of those left behind to "sweat out" the homecoming. It seemed doubtful that any plane could have landed at Chakulia. The doubt proved well founded for not a single plane from the Squadron landed at home base. Rather they were scattered at Kharagnur, Kaliakunda, and Armada Roads in the vicinity of Calcutta.

Some of the planes ran into trouble on landing, and it was only because of the high degree of skill attained by these men in flying the B-29 plus the Grace of God that they are here today to tell the story.

On the return flight from Bangkok, after successfully bombing the target, ship 289, piloted by Lt. Col. Cornett, encountered extremely bad weather, that, plus a fuel problem, necessitated starting a let down about twenty minutes out of the target to conserve fuel. They ran into several weather fronts and squalls that were extremely turbulent, with heavy rain. When about two hundred miles from the home base, #4 engine began cutting out and it became necessary to feather it. Since Chakulia was closed the pilot elected to land at Kharagnur.

As they were flying the traffic pattern, a terrific rain squall with heavy winds broke over the field. They had no other choice but to land, since they had lost their #4 engine and were very low on gas. Throughout the entire traffic pattern the ship was being thrown about as though it were a kite. As they turned on the final approach their troubles really began as they had a terrific wind in gusts varying from a cross wind to an almost direct tail wind. Since there was a blinding rain it was impossible to see out of the ship, and Col Cornett, was forced to open his window to line up with the runway. Suddenly the left wing went down, and with great skill and superhuman strength Col. Cornett, with the aid of the copilot, 2nd Lt. Gaston, got it up. Almost immediately it went down again. Then back up and just as they leveled off for their landing their right wing went down. Had it not been for the quick thinking and the unbeatable skill of the pilot and the "Grace of God", there is no doubt they would have crashed. The entire crew to a man seemed to realize just how lucky they were and most of them got out of the ship and kissed "the good earth".

SECRET

Major Roberts, flying 268, was running to low on gas to make the prescribed dog leg, and so went direct from Bangkok to Chakulia via Rangoon. He started his letdown at 200 feet a minute, shortly after leaving the target. He attempted to get into Chakulia and in doing so down to 1,000 feet. A terrific rain squall was in progress over the base, and he was forced to turn toward Kaliakunda. As he made his approach to land at the latter base, the ship was hit by a 60 mile an hour gusty crossing from the right. It was necessary for him to come in checking about 45 degrees. Despite the fact that there were airplanes on both ends of the runway, he was forced to land. There he did not have enough to try and go around again. Just before he turned in to the runway Major kicked hard to the left and the plane bounced in. As soon as the ship left the ground again, he put full right engines on and slammed the plane in on three points. To the surprise and delight of the pilot the landing gear stayed on and with full left brake and with 4 engines in [illegible] they kept their ship straight and level. It is to the crew, {illegible} pilot and copilot, 2nd Lt. John J. Harvell, they were able to land without any damage being sustained.

If there ever was a doubt as to the loyalty of the maintenance crews to their combat crews, the thought was dispelled when the planes failed to land at Chakulia. The maintenance crews who has worked throughout the night getting the planes ready had waited throughout the day for the planes to return -- refusing to leave their stations to get some sleep until they had received definite assurance that their planes had landed safely. This clearly indicated that any petty differences which may have existed before the mission were no non-existent and the mission has welded the Squadron into a unit where all was for one and one was for all.

The next day all planes returned to Chakulia.

Statistics on bombs carried and bombs dropped by:

<u>Ship No.</u>	<u>Pilot</u>	<u>No. 500 lbs. carried</u>	<u>[The rest of this data entry is illegible]</u>
289	Cornett	Illegible	
268	Roberts	10	
290	Wemple	Illegible	
297	McWilliams	“	
322	Mueller	“	
319	Lyons	“	

On June 9 our planes were scheduled to resume "Hump" operations, that is, delivering gas, oil, and cargo across the "Hump" into China. At the last moment, however, it was announced that only the "tankers" would fly the "Hump". All other planes were to be grounded and "super-maintenance" done on them. Once more everyone felt that something was up -- but what -- no one knew. Despite the uncertainty crews worked hard getting the ships in razor sharp condition. On the twelfth a general briefing of crews was called at the Group briefing room. The only information given out at this briefing was the enemy ground situation in Eastern China and the location of friendly airfields at which landing could be made in the event of any trouble. After the general briefing the crews of the 44th were taken over by the Squadron Intelligence Officer, 1st Lieut. Irving L. Gottlieb, and he went over the enemy ground situation in greater detail and gave some information on evasion and escape in Eastern China, Northern China, and Formosa. Prior to this time the Squadron Intelligence section had prepared the navigational charts that were to be used on the mission by drawing on them the enemy areas in China plus the friendly landing fields in China. These charts were passed out and received with enthusiasm by the Navigators.

The necessity of absolute secrecy was stressed at the briefing and the men were warned that it was unwise and dangerous to even speculate on the target. Loading of planes and bombs was to be done at night and the planes were to take off for Hsingching on the morning of the 13th just as though they were on the regular "Hump" flight.

At about six forty five a.m., the morning of June 13th, four planes from the Squadron took off. They were:

Capt. Hunter	Ship No. 297
Capt. Hart	290
Capt. Gray`	319
Capt. Tisserat	322

The four planes landed at Hsingching after a routine flight.

On June 14th ship 289 took off with Lt. Col. McGinnity, Group operations officer, in the Pilot's seat and Capt. Jack Eigenmann as copilot. On the plane too, was Capt. Donald Starkey and Capt. Glenn McCutcheon. These latter two had a few days previously been called to Bombay Command Headquarters at Kharagpur for a thorough briefing of the impending mission. It is to their credit that not one iota of information came from their lips about the mission.

SECRET

On the same day ship 268 piloted by Capt. Moore attempted to take off but was unable to do so due to technical difficulties. However, on June 15, 268 took to the air. Upon arrival at Hsingching, it was not in commission due to two collection rings being burnt out and hence was unable to take off for the target.

In addition on June 13 Capt. Paul S. Anderson, Squadron Surgeon, and Capt. James A. Conway, Squadron Operations Officer, took off for the forward area to do their part on the impending raid.

The experiences of Capt. Harte and his crew is typical of the experiences of other crews who participated in this mission. and will be presented here.

The planes arrived at Hsingching on June 13, 1944, without any idea of what their actual mission was to be. They were informed that ships were to be in commission by 4 p.m. on the 14th. The entire combat crew together with the crew chief who had accompanied the combat crew up to the forward area worked diligently on the ships.

This super-maintenance work continued throughout the day of the 14th. Fusing of bombs was done the same day.

On the evening of the 14th the crews were told there would be briefing at 9 a.m, on the 15th.

At 0900 on the morning of the 15th the crews filed into the briefing room. They took their places rapidly since each crew had an assigned place to sit. When they walked into the room a small portion of the map on which briefing was to be based was visible -- the course line went northeast which indicated that the target was -- APAN. Col. Harmon opened the briefing with a talk on security and asked all in the Grp room to look around to make sure there were no strangers present. General Wolfe, Commanding General of the Bomber Command, wished all "good luck and happy hunting".

Major Soberak (?), the Group S-2 gave his portion of the briefing. The Japanese Mainland was the target -- The Imperial Iron and Steel Works located Yawata. Excitement reached fever pitch in the briefing room. This was the best target Japan had to offer. If the Superfortresses knocked this target out, they were making a tremendous dent in the Jap ability to put out vital war materials. The briefing was good. There was some doubt as to just what would be found in the way of opposition on the Jap mainland. However, Fighter planes in Eastern China were [illegible] flak that might be encountered over the target. The nearby [The rest of this page, 2 sentences, is illegible]

SECRET

Squadron History, Cont'd.

they were to contact the home station who in turn would contact the subs, who would endeavor to pick up any crews that were forced to ditch. Major Luna, the Assistant Group Operations Officer then went over the course in detail and then gave the order to take off. The plan was to send three pathfinder ships over the target at an altitude of between 8,000 and 14,000 feet. All other planes were to go over the target singly between 14,000 and 18,000 feet depending on how much gasoline they had. After operations briefing, weather and communications gave their information and pilot's kits were given out. As a final touch the Chaplain took the floor and gave forth with a prayer. The occasion was very solemn.

After briefing crews went to lunch and then stood by their airplanes until take off time. In the afternoon the line was filled with reporters. So many, they got in the way. At the last minute Capt. Harte briefed a "Yank" reporter who was to go on the mission with him.

The planes carried the following: 8 x 500 pound SP bombs, three bombay gas tanks, as well as 100 gallons in the auxiliary wing oil tank. 500 rounds of ammunition in each turret except the tail turret, which carried 2,000 rounds of 50 caliber as well as 20 mm. Ships weighed approximately 132,000 pounds on take off.

In order to conserve gas the planes were towed out, from their parking places on the runway. At approximately 4:15 P.M. the ships thundered down the runway and after being airborne turned their eastward. The weather was much as briefed. Capt. Harte's ship then went up to 10,000 feet. Navigation was very difficult because the plane was flying an undercast and an overcast. It was impossible to navigate by celestial or pilotage. In order to avoid flak locations in China Capt. Harte flew a jagged course. After hitting the China coast it took only one minute for the radar operator and navigator to locate their position. Nothing at all was seen over China. The initial point was a small Island about 42 miles northwest of the target. Without radar it would have been impossible to have hit the initial point.

As they approached the IP, Capt. Harte climbed to 18,000 feet. From the IP to the target the bombardier wanted to put the bombay doors down but Capt. Harte said no. Instead, he called the radar operator, 2nd Lt. E.M. Greenburg, but the latter would say nothing but "Straight ahead". He was however, apparently cool, calm, and collected, because he continued to hum and whistle over the interphone. To quote Capt. Harte, "The radar operator was not in any position to see searchlights or flak or he probably wouldn't have been whistling."

After turning from the IP to the target the searchlights were turned off momentarily. Then broke on again. Suddenly the radar operator yelled: "I got the target, I got the target", and gave and gave a five degree correction to the right. Then, "Hold it Steady." Lights lit up the wings and nacelles. There were several cone shaped lights which were apparently getting the range on various ships. No cones focused on this ship however, and presently the plane passed out of the lights. After spotting the aiming point the radar operator counted so many seconds and then released the bombs. The ship was over the target at 18,000 feet at an indicated airspeed of 205 miles per hour. After bombs away, the bombardier hit the salvo switch and the left gunner checked to see that all bombs were out of the bomb bay, then the copilot let out with a classic line: "Let's get the hell out of here".

A turn was made to the right away from the target and power was advanced while in a slight dive. Airspeed was increased to 240 miles per hour indicated. Altitude was varied continuously to throw off flak. Enroute back the radar operator reported anything that resembled enemy warships and course was altered twice to avoid them. On one occasion he reported seven planes flying toward them, indicating that perhaps the Japs were sending fighters over. The trip back was uneventful.

After landing they were met at the plane by Capt. S. L. Truesdale, Ass't. Group S-2 who interrogated them on hot news. Then they were taken to the interrogation room. After interrogation the reporters took over. Everyone was very tired though and desired to sleep more than anything else. The mission was fourteen hours long.

The above represents experience which is typical of all crews who participated in the raid of Japan. The first ship back from the mission, was 297, piloted by Capt. Hunter, this despite the fact that he was 12th to take off.

Statistics on bombs carried and bombs dropped by the 44th:

<u>Ship No.</u>	<u>Pilot</u>	<u># 500 lb. bombs carried</u>	<u>Bombs on target</u>
289	McGinnity (Eigenmann - Aborted due to engine failure)	8	0
297	Hunter	8	8
319	Gray	8	6
322	Tisserat	8	8
290	Harte	8	8

"Superfortresses bomb Japan" was the headline that greeted an anxious people back in the States. This was what they had been

waiting for since the day General Arnold announced the Japs would soon feel the wrath of the U. S. Air Force. The screaming headlines knocked the news of the European invasion from the front pages of the nation's newspapers. General Arnold sent a message of commendation. The Squadron was proud -- every man in it and justly so. Everyone had taken part in this immense undertaking and every man's part, however small, was necessary for the success of the mission. The fact that every ship in the Squadron returned without a single casualty testifies to the fact that all in the Squadron did their best, and their best was good enough so that Tokyo Radio in announcing the raid, commented, "We regret the bombing of Yawata".

Bu June 18, all ships of the Squadron had returned to Chakulia and were ready to return to a routine existence.

To add further to the troubles of the Nipponese, the Squadron, this month transported 20,840 gallons of aviation gasoline to the forward base in China.

There were a total of 396 hours and 50 minutes of combat time flown in June. Broken down, this represents a total of 263 hours and 10 minutes of transporting wet and dry cargo, over the "Hump" and a total of 133 hours and 10 minutes of actual combat operations against the enemy.

June 19 again brought separation of the Squadron and divided the 44th into the 44th Bombardment Squadron (VH) and 2nd Bombardment Maintenance Squadron. This is reflected in the Squadron strength, s follows:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Enlisted Men</u>
June 1	103	453
June 18	103	451
June 19	34	92
June 30	34	93

(signed)
IRVING L. GOTTLIEB
1st Lieut., Air Corps,
Historical Officer