Colonel Carl P. Walter (retired)

The following is part of the recollections of a career officer in the United States Air Force in his own words.

There are many interesting episodes that Carl was involved in before and during his WWII service in Panama, the states, and the Pacific theater.

These were transcribed from tapes he recorded from 1987-1995. This work is just a part of the family history and childhood memories he has recorded.

Carl Walter now lives in Chagrin Falls, Ohio
He is 95 years old in 2010

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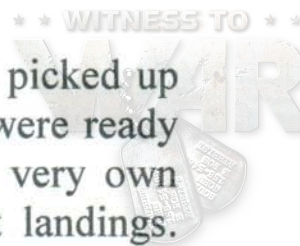


By February, 1945, we were at the end of training and picked up our shiny new planes fresh, off the assembly line and were ready for combat. As soon as each crew was assigned their very own aircraft, we noticed greater care in flying and in soft landings. Some of the crews, in order to pick an extra knot or two of airspeed, went out and waxed their airplanes from nose to tail. All of the ground crews and some of the staff were picked up, put on trains, and headed for the port of embarkation for the Pacific. the cadres of the next group to follow us then took care of us for the few weeks as we prepared and loaded up to follow our group by air.

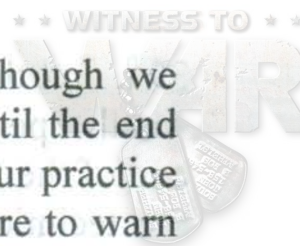
Each combat crew was to ferry their own airplane and a few staff members such as myself. Each aircraft was loaded with spare parts and supplies and equipment as dictated by the wing and all remaining space was filled with the crew baggage and other goodies that the men wanted. For example, our group elected to take a large commercial ice cream freezer and a complete knock down commercial laundry system. My plane also took a complete foot operated dental chair for the group. I took very little except a short wave radio so we could pick up Tokyo Rose and the Army Air Corp radio broadcasts. I did not take a camera and I have regretted it ever since.

Those of us who had families packed them up and had sent them home, although a number of the wives refused to leave until we did. Mary was one of these wives, and along with Mary Tibbs, the wife of Chuck Tibbs, the airplane commander I was riding with, was down there at the field to see us off. Our first leg was very short, just up to Lincoln, Nebraska where we finished loading. We kissed our wives goodbye and flew off to Lincoln, landed, and went to the local hotel for the nights' billet. who should I find in the hotel lobby but Mary and her friend, Mary Tibbs. They had raced up by car to be there before us. As a side note, they had had a couple of drinks and were in a happy mood and were conducting a beautiful knees contest between them.

The ferry operation went without a hitch. The next day we left Lincoln, we stopped at Fairchild Air Depot in California, and then on to John Rogers Field in Hawaii, which is now part of Hick ham. Quadulan and then we landed on Guam. This was the day after the Marines had declared the island of Guam secure. Security is a technical term that meant the airfield was out of the range of small arms fire.

The area all over the island was littered with burned out tanks and there were still Japanese bodies lying out in the underbrush. The port of Beganya was pretty well torn up. During the entire time we operated there, there was always a Marine guard patrolling the perimeters of our airfield. There were still small groups of Japanese soldiers operating in the remote corners of the island and Japanese stragglers and fugitives on the outskirts of our camp. One of the favorite stories of course, is that a couple of Japanese dressed in American uniforms and helmets pulled down were picked up while in the chow line trying to get something to eat. It is confirmed that they did pick some Japanese stragglers in our ammunition dump just outside the field perimeter. They were not hostiles and they were just trying to survive. There was no organized resistance among the stragglers, but there were definitely small groups of Japanese fugitives trying to survive in various parts of the island until the end of the war.

Not far from the island, perhaps thirty miles away, was the island of Rota. This island had been bypassed by US forces when they reclaimed Guam; it had a little air field but no Japanese planes there. We used it for target practice while we were in Guam. The



Japanese had a communications station there and although we thought that they were starving to death, they survived til the end of the war without any molestation from us, other than our practice bomb runs. They used their communications system there to warn the Japanese home islands whenever our B-29s took of on a mission. This was considered a relatively minor irritant and not worth spending any more American lives to shut down.

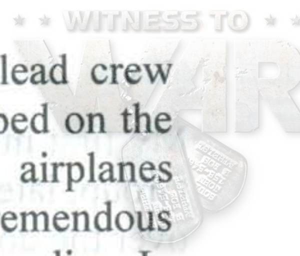
On our arrival, the airfield at Guam had one blacktopped runway and another one under construction. Everything else was mud left from the jungle that was cleared out of the way for our encampment. Where there wasn't mud there was coral dust swirling around the entire area. Our ground echelon arrived at about the same time as we did and we immediately put up the tent compound in which we lived for the first month or so. The first building we put up was a wood mess hall and it also served as the briefing room. Each of the four groups that made up the 314th wing had its own area spaced alongside the runway. Wing headquarters under Brig. General Tommy Powers had its own headquarters and operations building somewhat remote from ours. To our dismay they appropriated our ice cream making equipment, "for the good of the entire wing" so they said. They also took over our laundry equipment that we had brought and this became a really appreciated service for everyone. The Seabees, whom we learned to love, were very efficient at getting Quonset huts set up for our needs both operations and maintence and eventually as living quarters for the crews. Our group commander, Fish Reynolds, horns waggled them out of a couple of Dallas huts and had them erected side by side with a covered patio between. He and his deputy shared one and Johnny Reiber, the group executive, and I shared the other for the remainder of the war.

The single runway that we started with was served by a taxi strip on either side. Off the taxi strips were taxi ways that led to into the parking areas and revetments for each group, the 19th, the 29th, the

39th, and the 330th Bomb Groups. The control tower consisted of a small, open roofed, platform about 12x12, set up on stilts at one end of the field. Specialized maintence such as engine changes and the technical specialties had their own little areas set up at odd places around the field.

The runway was about 12,000 feet long and had another 1,000 feet of crushed coral overrun and then led off into the jungle. About a half mile beyond you were over the cliff and then over the ocean. There was about a 200 foot drop from the elevation of the field to the surface of the sea. On heavy takeoffs an aircraft would stagger along just above the treetops until it got over the cliff and then would drop the nose slightly in order to pick up enough airspeed to clear the waves below. This was a little trick that saved many crews on takeoff. The other end of the runway extension led off across the jungle onto some gently rising territory and some low hills 2-3 miles away from the runway. All takeoffs were however, to the north and over the cliffs and over the ocean since that was where the prevailing winds came from. The buildup of the camp was rapid and we became good friends with the Seabees on the island, as they had a large supply of building equipment and were very cooperative.

The establishment of the 21st Bomber command headquarters at Aganya and the arrival of General LeMay had an immediate and major impact on us. Gen. LeMay's director of maintence set up a centralized maintence system in which all the equipment specialists on aircraft systems were taken from the individual squadrons and groups and pooled in a wing maintence assembly line type operation. The individual ground crew chiefs were left with their airplanes but were not allowed to do anything other than first echelon type maintenance. Anything other than a change out of black boxes, or a change of a propeller governor, or change of a tire, meant that all other maintence had to be done by the centralized shops.



LeMay was very much in charge. He sponsored the lead crew concept, which meant that aircraft in formation all dropped on the lead bombardiers signal instead of the individual airplanes bombardier. This gave us good patterns but this put a tremendous responsibility on the single lead airplane and its bombardier. In LeMays' world if that lead bombardier did not do a good job, the first time or any time, his career was finished.

LeMay was also very PR conscious. on the way out many of our crews had had special insignia or pictures painted on the nose of their aircraft. Names of wives, pin ups, and other names had been added to the noses. In some cases the decorations were somewhat bloodthirsty or gory. Our crews and others to follow were shocked then he ordered all additions of nose art and decorations to be eliminated. he did not want to further the rumors among the Japanese that all American pilots were all bloodthirsty murderers.

His antipathy toward nose art was finally softened a little by his staff and by the strong crew reactions so a compromise was found. The port side of the nose could have a favorite pinup girl but the starboard side nose could only have a "city of ..." using a real city name for identification. LeMays' purpose was to send back to the home city of the aircraft news photos for public relations to keep up home front enthusiasm and sell war bonds. When and if the crew finished their missions successfully, they were expected to visit their named city and participate in public relations rallies and such on their way home.

In any event serious training began immediately. Target study of operational real targets was first priority. We were flying day and night checking out our bomb racks, guns and gunnery systems, the CEP and runways. We used the aforementioned island of Rota as a bombing range. The commander, deputy, and I rode a shakedown mission as supernumeries with a crew from one of the other groups. The 19th, 29th, and 39th groups arrived a week or so ahead of us and were already operational.

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My first mission was to ride with a Major Jack O'Neill of the 19th Group, later General O'Neill, on a daylight formation bombing run over the docks at Nagoya. I flew that as a supernumery squatting in the aisle between the pilot and the co-pilot, listening to the chatter of the gunners calling out the fighters and watching the formation and the target run. We had no particularly problem and lost no aircraft on that mission though we did pick up a few holes in the wing. We did make one mission to the Truk Islands more or less as a training flight because although there was flak, there were no fighters there. This gave our navigators and the bombardiers experience and we were declared operational.

We got our first frag order for our first mission, an individual night bombing on an oil refinery on the coast well north of Tokyo. It turned out to be the longest mission up to that point in the war. It was a fourteen hour mission and a rough one for green pilots. Although the bombing would be by individual aircraft and at night, the group commander wanted to fly the first mission. I did the briefing and everything went like clockwork until it was time to start the engines in the hardstands. I might mention there was just one taxi strip and all aircraft were suppose to fall in sequence behind the group commander as he taxied down the strip to the takeoff end and then we would be taking off one minute apart.

On that particular day when I signaled the group commander to start his engine and begin taxing out, to my horror, he turned the wrong direction up the taxi strip departure end, instead of toward the take off end. Each aircraft in turn obediently followed him in trail, in the wrong direction, and there was nothing I could do to stop it. The net result was each of the other wings got off one by one as planned, but our wing had to sit waiting at the wrong end of the runway and then taxi to the correct position and finally get off at least a half hour late. This was a major embarrassment to the group commander but we were amazed that LeMay never heard of it. We never made that mistake again.

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The first mission also brought our first tragedy. That morning as the aircraft straggled back, very low on fuel, they encountered a short rainstorm right near the approach end of the runway. One young pilot, Lt. Zigley, came in a little too low, blinded by the rain and struck a tree. He climbed up again and tried to make an emergency landing at Aganya but crashed and the entire crew was killed. Only then did we find that this fine young pilot was the nephew of our wing commander and had been raised by him as his son. They had kept it a secret through the entire year we had trained together.

Like every unit we had loses in combat as time went on. I lost track of individuals, names, and circumstances and after forty years I cannot remember in detail. Some crews just never came back to base. Other crews whom we saw the parachutes go out but never heard of their fate. Of some eighty four parachutes that we were able to account for from our group over Japan, in other words eighty four people who probably made it to the ground alive, only four came back after to war. The rest either died in captivity or were killed when they landed as far as we could determine.

One other plane lost an engine returning from a mission to Nagoya, and dropped out of the formation as he could not keep up with the formation. It fell prey to Japanese fighters in full view of our gunners who were unable to do anything to help. For some reason they never informed the lead crew or formation commander so he could slow up the formation and provide some gun protection for that aircraft. One pilot coming back from a long mission at night got lost over the ocean and was picked up by ground radar and was given a vector to fly but it was the reciprocal he should have flown. He ended up ditching in the China Sea and lost five men.

Another of our pilots, a Lt. Bower, lost an engine shortly after taking off over the cliffs. He successfully salvoed his whole bomb load into the ocean and, fully loaded with gas, circled the field to

attempt landing on three engines. He missed the landing and stalled and spun out and crashed just below the cliffs. The area was still in Japanese hands and we had to wait for daylight and the Marine guards cover. We found pieces of aircraft and pieces of bodies all over the desolated site when we found the plane. Surprisingly enough we found an intact tail section of the aircraft and from inside we pulled a somewhat dazed tail gunner from the wreck. He suffered nothing more than a broken jaw. He was the armament officer of the squadron who had decided to go along on this mission for the experience.

A number of us, including myself at one time or another, had to make emergency landings at Iwo Jima due to the shortage of fuel or due to battle damage. Even though the island was not totally secure, it save the lives of many B-29ers. I remember landing, getting patched up, and flying out of there one afternoon and learning that the same night a bunch of Japanese had broken out of their sealed in caves and had rampaged through the fighter pilots billeting tent area and throwing grenades and shooting, an area we might have been sleeping over in.

Battle damaged aircraft that got back as far as Iwo Jima but unable to land safely were waved off and ditched next to the shore as to keep the one runway free of damaged aircraft. One of my groups ended a hairy mission more or less in that fashion.

The 458th crew over the target on the bomb run took a direct hit by an 88 millimeter through the nose. The round came in under the bombardier's elbow, exploded in the pilot's instrument panel and blew that and most of the controls and the pilot to bloody pieces. Everybody of the five in the forward compartment were wounded but not completely incapacitated. The co-pilot, a young 21 year old Lieutenant, was hit in three places but managed to get the plane under control and out of its spin, and headed it back toward Iwo and with the help of the others in the forward compartment who

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patched each other up, flew it all the way back. Unable to land the aircraft because of the damaged controls, Lt. Bob Walliver, the co-pilot, bailed the entire crew and himself out safely and let the plane fly on out to sea with the dead pilot still in his seat. The rest of the crew landed relatively safe and sound near the field and Bob Walliver got the Distinguished Service Cross presented to him by General Spotts when he recovered.

By the end of April 1945 we fell into the routine of missions every third day. On daytime formation missions the group commander or his deputy would fly as lead command pilot and occasionally I also got this duty. The wing doctrine said that the command echelons would not have their own crews and so we did not have own aircraft or crew and we flew with the lead aircraft when we flew. Except our group had its own doctrine. When a new crew came in to our group they would orient with several practice bombing missions against the innocuous Japanese strip on Rote Island nearby. The squadron commander or squadron bombardier would monitor this and instructed the crews. Then they would be assigned to go with another experienced crew along on a real combat mission as observers. Finally either deputy group commander, Doug Palhamous or I substituted for the copilot and went out with the green crew on its first solo mission. This meant that nearly half my missions were with a green crew on their first outing, not exactly what I would have preferred.

General LeMay's doctrine held that, contrary to the old way of things, was that the group was the combat unit rather than the squadron. Many of the squadron responsibilities were transferred to the group. For example, all the maintence officers were under the group maintence chief and all the armament personnel were responsible to the group armament officer. In my little group operations section I had all the squadron operations officers as my assistants.

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I sometimes felt sorry for the squadron commanders because they were still responsible for the conduct, efficiency, and morale of their men but the training programs and even aircraft assignments and fuel loads were decided by the wing command. Wing doctrine forbade them to even have their own special lead crews but we at group closed our eyes and commanders had their own personal crews which included their own bombardier, navigator, and etc.

Perhaps I'd better describe the mechanics of operation in the combat zone. Some 18-12 hours before each combat mission, LeMay's staff at bomber command would teletype a "FRAG" order to wing headquarters at North Field. This would give us our target, the type of bombs and their fusing, the release time, the altitudes, the initial point, the units that would participate, and usually the number of airplanes desired. This was supplemented by intelligence information and estimates as to the resistance we would meet. We always had plenty of reconnaissance maps and photos and radar simulation maps etc. for target study for any and all possible targets. The wing would then work up and give us a wing order of battle the group precedents, taxi and take off times, radio frequencies, locations of dumbos and rescue submarines, and sometimes alternate targets for emergency use. With this "FRAG" order and its supplement group operations would go into action.

We would check plane availability with the maintence officer, a squad officer checked crew availability, and we would make crew and aircraft assignments and formation assignments and establish the bomb load and fuel loads for each plane. We'd set up spare aircraft in case of mechanical difficulties on the run up and establish preparation and intelligence briefing time lines and other preparations for the crews. All this would be done in one or two hours. All checking was then sent for approval by the commander, Colonel Reynolds.

Crew and aircraft assignments were always a touchy issue. We tried not to send crews on planes that they were not familiar with. Lead crews always got their same planes unless there was a mechanical problem. Then they might preempt the aircraft from another crew that was in good maintenance and mechanical shape and had a well proven bombing system. When new crews arrived from the states with aircraft with newer systems, calibrations, and modifications, they were often taken away from them and given to the lead crews to use. Since all the other squadron bombers dropped on the lead bombardier, he and his equipment were the key to the group's success.

Since we had two bombays, bomb and fuel loads were somewhat interchangeable. As we got experience and kept records on performance and fuel consumption for each plane and crew, we began a program that lacked enthusiasm by the crews. The nearest thing to General LeMays hard iron heart, next to low CEP, circular air probable, was of course tonnage of bombs on target. Even though we had much further to fly to reach targets than the B-29 bomber groups on Saipan and Tinian, he refused to understand why we couldn't carry as many bombs as those groups. Though as an ex-navigator he knew damn well why. So soon our eager beaver armorers figured out how cluster a double layer or extra bombs to the same shackles and racks that held a basic load.

The operations were always under pressure to lighten the fuel loads to compensate for the extra weight. Like handicapping horses at the track. The squadron operations officer and I kept detailed records of how much gas that each plane went out with and returned with. We found that Some crews were stingier with fuel and that it was always changing according to crews, maintenace of the engines. We began to handicap the planes and crews and that determined the amounts of fuel and bomb weight each mission carried. This was a very unpopular idea among the crews, but who said life was fair.

Luckily for the squadron and group operations staff, we did not lose an airplane because of this. Several planes did have to divert to Saipan for more fuel on their way home however. If that system had really screwed up the staff would have been guests of honor at a necktie party I believe.

As the crews became more experienced, we were making regular, if hairy, night takeoffs grossing more than 142,000 pounds. This on an airplane that was designed for gross weight of under 125,000 pounds. Another source of considerable discussion was the ammunition loading. With the new computing remote gun sights, the new computer put in the lead and the gunner just had to track the target accurately. The old time gunners and bird shooters who were used to leading their targets did not like this system. The ops analysts just wanted the gunners to keep their sights on the targets as they felt the tracer trails would divert the gunners from their job.

On the other hand many gunners and crews felt that the sight and the scream of multiple tracers from the B-29 had a severe psychological effect on the attacking Japanese pilots. I leaned this way myself after having watched a large number of Japanese attackers (Tonnies) form up and turn on us from 10 o'clock around to 2 o'clock ahead and begin firing on us. Their formations suddenly broke down and ran…….

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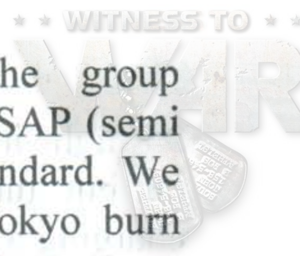

Ammunitions loadings decisions were left to the group commanders and Colonel Reynolds choose to use four SAP (semi armor piercing) rounds to each tracer round as our standard. We used that throughout our operations until our later Tokyo burn missions at night, when General LeMay decided that we were shooting each other up, and he ordered us to leave all guns except the tail guns unloaded.

Back to the mission briefings… I usually did the briefings, giving the crew assignments and targeting info and timetables, etc. The intelligence officers then gave the Intel briefing, giving flak and fighters to be encountered, which usually brought laughs and snickers from the experienced crews. The bombardiers and radar officers then spent a couple of hours pouring over the charts which they'd done many times before. We normally had a last meal about two hours before take off even though we may have eaten a few hours before. "Fish" Reynolds our commander insisted on this. Then to the flight line about an hour before takeoff.

Start engines and taxi was nicely synchronized and complete radio silence of course prevailed. We always took off to the north over the cliffs. The take off controller and flight operations officer would sit in a jeep at the liftoff end of the runway with a clipboard, stopwatch, and Aldus lamp. The first off would taxi into position, line up, close his bombay doors and begin to power up and the operations officer would flash him a green light to start his roll. The next aircraft would taxi into position and hold. The operations officer, who was usually me, knowing that the first aircraft was off safely would flash the next, a red and then a green light and so on, and so on. If I was flying on the mission, the squadron operations officer who was usually Major Chuck Weber would run the gun and keep track of the takeoffs.

At night it was quite scary. The airplanes put their landing lights on but turned downward during taxi and lineup. They come charging at us out of the dark with the engine exhaust flaring, and the lights pointed down, they whip by us with a roar and skim the overrun and the jungle and vanish into the dark over the cliffs. Amazingly they never lost one in the six months on take offs. Although one night an aircraft took off with his bombay doors still open, over 138,000 pounds, and just barely made it.

The flight crew technique was also standard. When the plane commander got my signal to roll, it was fire wall everything and don't anyone look at the carburetor and cylinder head temperatures. The bombardier would sit in the nose looking down at the landing lights on the ground as the runway went by. When the tires began to rumble the pilot would know he was past the hardtop and on the last 2,000 feet of coral overrun. He would physically horse the groaning airplane into the air in a semi stall and continue. The bombardier meanwhile is looking first at the coral ground below, and then the jungle brushed the underside as they struggle up. When the jungle suddenly disappears, he would yell to the pilot as they pass the cliff. The plane commander drops the nose a little, eases down a couple of hundred feet where they could get a safer flying speed and levels off just above the waves. Everyone at that point takes a deep breath. They have made it.

The B-29's were never able to fly high nor in formation except in daylight and within range of the Japanese fighters and close to the coastline of Japan. Again, the fuel consumption was always the big problem. In addition, in spite of all the modifications, the right engines still had the tendency to swallow valves from overheating when you got above 20,000 feet. This happened particularly when you were working the throttle when in formations.

One of the 330th group radar operators devised a formation assembly technique, eventually used by most of the wing. It consisted of the lead aircraft initiating a four minute even circle maneuver at a specific coordinated time over a turning point and where each assembling plane would know exactly where the leader would be and with correct timing would be able to fall into correct position and altitude and direction without the "crack the whip" maneuvering. It sounds complicated but it usually worked.
I was flying lead in one of these assembly operations at the entrance to Nagoya Bay one morning and saw parachutes going down into the bay from another wings' B-29 that Japanese fighter had just downed. Then I saw a US submarine surface inside the baby fences and pick them up put of the water. He was a very gutsy skipper.

I had previously mentioned the rescue techniques. on all missions to the Japanese mainland, General LeMay and his staff set up a string of two to four rescue submarines called lifeguards to pick up B-29 crews who may have had to bail out or ditch off the Japanese coast. Over each of these he stationed a B-29, referred as a "dumbo", to provide homing signals and protection as needed. Their ten 50 caliber guns would anilliate any Japanese gunboats patrolling the area.

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We got used to wearing our flak hats and vests quickly even though they were very uncomfortable. We could not wear our parachutes continually because of the flak equipment. The chest pack parachutes were stacked next to our seat along with a lanyard attached to sea survival packs and hopefully would go out the plane with us.

After we started operations we did a lot of things not exactly by the book. Our combat aircraft came with flak curtains to hang around the cockpit, supposedly to keep flak fragments from ricocheting around. The crews very quickly took them down and carved them up to sit on and also to come up between the legs and lap. Protecting a most vital area overlooked by the designers at home. though against standard operating procedures, the crew also decided to go into combat pressurized and nobody experienced really explosive decompression. We never spent much time in the tunnel either during combat where it most likely would have occurred. I think I also mentioned the radar operator who, when a chunk of flak opened a small hole next to his seat, just slapped his ham sandwich lunch over the hole and kept going. Most of the blister gunners fashioned their own rope safety harnesses to keep themselves from being blown out of the plastic bubble if it was shot away. Especially since that actually happened and was photographed in another group. In that case the poor gunner had made his own rope harness and was pulled back into his plane by his buddies and the guy did survive.

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When under attack by fighters, the lonesomest and most nervous man in the plane was the co-pilot. Everybody else in the crew was tracking targets or firing guns and flying the craft, etc. He, like the vice-president, was merely waiting and waiting and waiting. I went through that experience a couple of times and was not at all consoled by the information that our 50 caliber guns had a more effective range than the Japanese fighter 20 mm cannons. The radar man and navigator kept their cool by never looking outside at the hostiles or the flak.

Chuck Weber, who had toured out with the 8th Air Force before joining the 330th B-29 group, said the Japanese fighters and flak was much less intimidating than that of the Germans. The Japs had lost the cream of their Air Force at Midway before we arrived, and we faced more student pilots getting their on the job training. Their flak and search lights weren't bad. At one point they tried air to air bombings. Flying over us and dropping little phosphorous bombs down on us. If they hit, you had a fire you could not put out. The only air plane recorded to be downed by these was a brand new B-29 named the "General Andrews" that had arrived with much public relations hoopla. On its first mission, and with a gaggle of reporters and cameramen on board, the airplane caught one of these missiles in one engine intake, caught fire, and the craft was destroyed. So much for public relations.

It was my observation that the Japanese fighter pilots we met broke off their attacks early if the tracer tracks were close. We did get fewer attacks when we were flying on top of good solid overcast. It seems that the green Japanese pilots couldn't handle instrument flying as well as we did.

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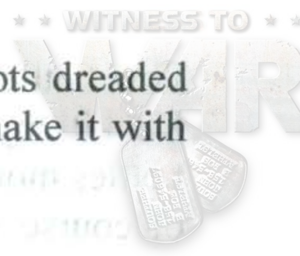
Their spotlights were radar guided at night and a lot of their flak was barrage type and some was also laid on by radar tracking. At night their night fighters would lay back in the dark but when the search lights acquired a B-29, look out, because they would close up dead behind and hose you down with their 20mms. Despite this I think our crews generally preferred night missions. Even though the take offs were hairy and ditching at sea at night was strictly non habit forming. On such night missions there were daylight take offs and daylight returns, no strenuous formations, fewer fighters to face, and especially the fact that the newer bombardiers got the chance to do their own thing and prove themselves instead of merely dropping on lead command.

We found that the Japanese fighters did not follow us out to sea very far. This was due to their inherent range limits of their aircraft and also the Japanese general shortages of aviation fuel. We had pretty well destroyed their refinery capacity by that time, 1945.

Once clear of the east coast of Japan and out of fighter range, the crews relaxed. If on a daylight mission, the formations would break up, we would fly lower altitudes at moderate power settings in order to conserve fuel on the way home. The rest of the crew would relax and sometimes break out the cold Coke-Cola they would stash in the bombay and even sometimes sleep. The pilots and the navigators, however, had to sweat out the fuel consumption and the course home. We still had five hours or more of flying to get there. When you reached your station there was terrific competition and traffic congestion on the final approaches, especially as Guam was plagued by the frequent summer thunder storms. Since all aircraft flew roughly the same profile and all arrived back home at about the same times, many of them very short on fuel. It was "dog eat dog" on the final approach as many pilots broke radio silence to yell for priority with engines shot up,



empty fuel tanks, and sometimes wounded aboard. Pilots dreaded having to go around the field again as they might not make it with the little fuel left in their tanks.

The crews, who were all trained together for a year or more before coming to the theater, were all very cohesive. If one crew member was sick or for some reason couldn't fly with the rest of his crew, he would somehow try very hard to get on as an extra crew on additional missions to make up his mission totals in order to keep up and rotate with his original crew. After early indecisions, the bomber command established a rotation of 35 missions for each crew. This is probably the biggest morale factor for combat crews anyplace.

The ground crews and support personnel was very good for the six months we operated. The climate was good though wet and sticky, the Quonset huts were acceptable, the food was never a problem though it was well known that the navy lived a lot better than we did down at Aganya. Navy supply ships, big reefers, brought a continual stream of fresh produce and liquor into Aganya where it was unloaded and distributed. There was a lot of grumbling at that because the Air Force thought they got the leftovers after the Navy satisfied themselves and this was probably true. I used to look for excuses to go down the Navy command headquarters where I could be sure of getting fresh lettuce and tomato salad, something unheard of in our area.

The enlisted men were not permitted any liquor but the officers got one bottle of liquor ration per week. The good stuff, Johnny Walker Red Label and such, was siphoned off for the Navy officer's mess. The occasional bottle of gin and Chen Lee Black Death was sent on up to North Field for the Air Force officers. Although I did not drink liquor, I naturally took my ration each week as that was legal tender on the island. It was standard that for

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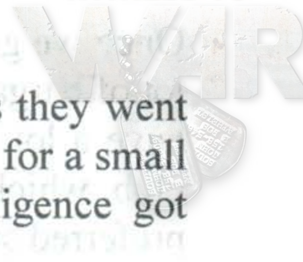
four bottles you could have the Navy Seabees deliver a Quonset hut kit any place you wanted in the middle of the night. For two bottles more you could have it erected for you by dawn to move in, of course we cultivated the Seabees and they seemed to like us. They were somewhat awed by our big B-29s. When they commented on the black on the underside of the planes we assured them that it was not paint but scorch marks on the bottom of our planes from low flying over the bombed areas and burning city of Tokyo.

One interesting incident with the Seabees was, as part of their recreational activities, they had raffles at their camp. On one July occasion they made an arrangement with us to raffle off a ride with a B-29 crew on a combat mission as the prize. Sure enough, we picked an easy night mission, and the raffle winner, escorted by his commander and his buddies, came up and after photos were taken of this proud young kid he climbed aboard for the mission. Something he was probably proud to tell his kids about.

Although the enlisted men were not allowed to have a liquor ration, there's no G.I. in the world who can't find a way to make some form of hooch. By judicious use of canned fruit, vanilla extract, and a minimum of equipment out in the boonies behind the hardstands, they managed to provide their own forms of liquor rations.

I said the food was good there and we had excellent cooks. I am perhaps the only person in the 20th Air Force who enjoyed the powdered potatoes and the powdered eggs so I had no complaints.

We did have first run movies and we watched outdoors sitting on cocoanut logs watching them, often out in the rain until we got a mess hall built.



I might mention that when crews landed from missions they went directly to debriefing but stopping at the flight surgeons for a small shot of whiskey and a cursory checkup before intelligence got them.

Oh yes, they had Red Cross girls once in a while as well. They would show up with their escort (or chaperone) in a cloud of dust just before the flights landed. By prearrangement, our cooks would fix a big tray of donuts for them to hand out. The cameras rolled and flashed as they smiled and joshed with the crews and as soon as the crews were in and had had their donut with photos, the girls piled into their Jeeps and were whisked back to Aganya. I have been cynical about the Red Cross ever since then. I think the cooks who had to prepare all the donuts and to clean up the mess afterwards feel likewise.

Mail came in pretty regularly. I did not keep a diary and most of my letters home are not now much good. They were pretty much cheerful garbage asking about the baby or suggesting future vacations and so forth. To read them now you would think I was off on a church picnic. Like reporting on how proud we all were that the young kid Walliver was getting the Distinguished Flying Cross – it should have been the Medal of Honor. Mary didn't know him, but she had known poor Fred Barrons who was killed on that mission and he wasn't mentioned in the letters. We all kept up the morale in the home front as much as we could.

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Once we got settled in and made friends with the Seabees we did a lot of bargaining and camp improvement. Our group dentist did not have a lot to do and we put him in charge of building an officers club, which he did very well. We did have ball fields but the crews preferred swimming. Every afternoon the off duty flight crews and ground crews who were not on alert were hauled by two and a half ton truck to the Aganya area to the excellent beaches. As usual the Navy had appropriated the best beaches and the very, very best beach had a big sign "Admirals Country- keep off".

As soon as we arrived the tempo of operations began to pick up rapidly. Whereas the first missions might call for six or nine aircraft per squadron, very soon every frag order coming down called for the maximum effort. Near the end we had assigned nearly 60 aircraft per group and fully that many combat crews. While flying at least two missions per week and often three, it was difficult to keep more than two thirds combat ready. We were always changing engines, and patching holes, and swapping components, and cannibalizing one beat-up aircraft to keep another one in the air. Our crew chiefs worked like dogs to keep their planes in the air and had as much pride in them as the airplane commander. When they lost their own plane when it did not return from a mission it hit the chief like a death in the family.

I can remember one loaded aircraft rumbling out for take off and having a prop governor malfunction on the runoff end of the runway. The pilot aborted the take off and taxing like mad in a storm of dust back to his hardstand, the crew chief scrambled up onto the engine stand and started unbolting the prop dome almost before the props had stopped turning. He freed the dome, pulled the still hot and smoking prop governor off with his bare hands and dropped it to his assistant below and single handedly seated another prop governor, bolted it and safety it and replaced the dome and jumped clear. The air plane started engines and the plane commander gunned it back to the runway and took off after its'

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mates disappearing into the night. All happening in ten minutes, and then the crew chief was jeeped off the hospital to have his charred hands worked on. I think he later got a Bronze Star, but that was the kind of crew chiefs we had throughout.

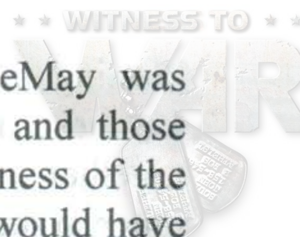
When we began operations, it was all daylight, high altitude, formations bombing with iron bombs, mostly 600 pounds and sometimes 1,000 pound bombs. Our targets were aircraft factories, refineries, and railroad marshalling yards and checkpoints. We also bombed dock area warehouses and any shipping we found in ports. When LeMay arrived the high altitude bombing had not been too effective. He was immediately steamed up by this and especially that we had lost aircraft without getting the target. He called his wing commanders together and told them that he was going to send them over at lower altitude. First at 25,000 feet and if they didn't get their target the next mission they would go at 20,000 feet, if they didn't get the target then they would go at 15,000 feet the next time and then 10,000 feet until they got the target. His philosophy was that it was better to lose a few airplanes once over the target and get it than to lose a whole lot of planes one by one on repeat missions over the same target. This made us uncomfortable but he was right as usual.

He was also quite aware of the effectiveness of fire bombing as had been done over Germany at night primarily by the RAF. The Japanese cities seemed to be ideal targets because of the construction materials they had used in their buildings. Accordingly he changed the bombing patterns and laid on a major effort at night with incendiary and napalm bombing the city of Tokyo. This was not helter-skelter, we all had specific aiming points, and it was designed to start a conflagration that would overwhelm the fire departments and water supply of the city. It was a maximum effort of course.

This time the missions were run at altitudes of 6,000 to 9,000 feet. Though we though this would be suicide, his staff advised us that these altitudes were too high to be in danger from small arms and light caliber fire and too low to be tracked fast enough by the radar of the big heavy stuff. As usual, he was right.

The burning of the city of Tokyo was not intended as a terror attack. We were very much aware that the Japanese war effort was based not on large assembly factory complexes, as in the US, but based on millions of small home industry type component manufacturing. It was done in the homes and then with sub assemblies, and then later assembled into the large war equipment at different locations. The entire population was drawn into the war industry system. This production was spread out over a large area and often over different cities. LeMay felt we had to eliminate all this small home industry that was the backbone of the Japanese war material production, and he did. The first raid was a success beyond all his expectations. It destroyed more than twelve square miles of densely populated urban area. It incidentally killed estimated 120,000 Japanese as we found out later. Despite the hoopla about the bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was more destruction and more death due to this single raid than occurred any place in the war. The firestorm it generated created its own winds coming from all directions; it exhausted the oxygen in parts of the city and thousands of people died from suffocation quite aside from burns.

The firestorm rose into the atmosphere probably 30,000 or 40,000 feet in a dense cloud, turbulent beyond belief, and fire and flames could be seen a hundred miles out to sea. Several aircraft that disappeared that night are thought to had been caught up in that smoke and turbulent column and torn apart over the target. From a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cold blooded military professional point of view, LeMay was disappointed that he had picked that particular area and those particular aiming points. If he had known the effectiveness of the proposed raid with its firestorm and winds created, he would have distributed aiming points in patterns which would have generated far more destruction in that first raid. As it was, the damage from that raid created fire breaks that lessened effectiveness of later raids.

There were a total of four night missions run covering various parts of Tokyo. After that it was decided that we had completed the destruction of the city and its use as a factor in the war. I flew the second and the forth missions over Tokyo and can testify that there was not much there that had not been burned out.

We were quite aware that thousands of people were down there dying in the darkness and in the fiery maelstrom. War is war and to a soldier, anyone making weapons to kill him, regardless of weather his is in uniform or not, that is an enemy. We had not forgotten Pearl Harbor, we hadn't forgotten Baattan, and we hadn't forgotten all the friends who were no longer with us. One of my old friends who had been a fellow squadron commander with me in Panama and in Walker, Kansas, had been shot down a few weeks before over Japan. We thought he was probably in a POW prison in Kawasaki, south of Tokyo. After the raids the reconnaissance photos showed that the prison had also been burned out, probably with the prisoners inside.

We took our losses too in the air. The raids were so organized that the aircraft coming in from the entire wing, some 600 of them, were programmed to pass over an excellent checkpoint on the Izu coast and proceed from there on straight courses to their prospective aiming points in various parts of the city. When some 600 airplanes within an hours' time funneled through a narrow gap, between six and nine thousand feet, were silhouetted by the

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burning city just beyond them, they made excellent targets for Japanese night fighters and AA artillery. We were so close together coming through this bottleneck that pilots could see each other in the sky almost as in formation.

I remember watching an aircraft just ¼ mile ahead of me being picked up by radar directed spotlight and within 30 seconds the tracer fire from a Jap fighter was coming out of the blackness behind us. He began to smoke and the spotlight followed him as he slowly went down until I lost him in the smoke cloud and general confusion.

We hit our target point and released our bombs, made a quick turn to get out of the smoke cloud then made a diving turn over Tokyo Bay. As we headed toward sea we hoped we would not be picked up by any other search lights or fighters.

On night missions the crew could not see what damage they had done until the reconnaissance plane flew over a day or two later. On day missions you could see your bombs strike and the tail gunner would give you a pretty good assessment. It was not official until your strike camera film was developed and photos delivered the next day.

General Lemay used fire bombing on several cities after the Tokyo experience. We were going at such a rate that we ran short of bombs and they could not supply them fast enough. Therefore we went back to daytime formation bombing for a while in June. We concentrated on the seaports and their docks, warehouses, and industrial plants up and down the islands of Honshu and Kyushu.

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Once the invasion of Okinawa began the Navy began to take such terrific losses from the Kamikaze force that they were forced to reorganize as the invasion was actually in jeopardy. They asked Washington to divert the B-29's from their pounding of the cities and industries in Japan. They were to stop the Kamikaze; the only way to do that effectively was to do daylight bombings of every Japanese airfield on the main island where the Kamikaze aircraft and crews were being prepared and the Okinawa fields where they were being launched. We did this by scattering small bombs in large quantities over every small airfield that they could use. The bombs strewed sharp pieces of metal that would puncture the tires and scattered a few 24 hour delay action bombs as well. Rumor was that American prisoners of war were being used to repair the runways but this did not stop the missions. The result of this operation was that the Navy did manage to survive the Kamikaze assaults and we were happy to get back to our primary assignment. As more napalm and incendiaries and fire bombs were stocked, General LeMay resumed our night bombing missions.

Fire bombing was less expensive from a loss viewpoint and was proving very effective psychologically. General LeMay pulled another one which we looked at with horror when it was proposed; he had us scatter about ten million leaflets along with our bombs which called upon the Japanese army to surrender. The leaflets said that, baring surrender, we would burn out ten cities, and he named the ten cities and defied them to stop us. Thereafter we targeted a city each night mission, sometimes the entire wings' mission and sometimes just a groups' mission. By that time the Japanese rail and road system was so torn up that they could not move their anti aircraft guns around to defend these cities. One by one we would burn them out and when the list was down to a few left he would name ten more cities; all this was to spread the risks out and to further confuse the defenders. We anticipated horrible

losses due to them knowing our targets, but LeMay was right and losses at night were fairly light.

Most of the Japanese industrial war production was concentrated along their cities in the coastal areas and the large and small cities were very crowded and very vulnerable to fire. Our crews were becoming more competent with radar and the night bombing was very effective. Generally the Pathfinders would go in with a mix of incendiaries and HE bombs to open up the roofs and start fires. The mainstream of bombers would then follow using the lights of the initial conflagration. Contrary to popular opinion, we each had specific aiming points picked for the purpose of taking advantage of the winds and blocking access for the firefighters on the ground. We went at this plan so heavily that we ran out of fire bombs in the theater by the end of June and LeMay returned to daylight bombing runs at high altitudes. These attacks were pinpointed toward large war industry sites, aircraft factories and refineries.

A new factor was also added to the war. When Iwo Jima was secured, a group of P-51 long range fighters were based there and were used against Japanese airfields and coastal targets. There was a permanent weather front between Iwo and the coast of Japan and the fighters were not set up to navigate this. General Lemay set up a system where a B-29 navigation "mother" would fly over Iwo and collect the P-51 fighters of each mission on his wings and take them through the front in formation to the IP target. The B-29 would circle over the fighters while they did their thing of beating up the airfields and other targets. The fighters had only about 15 or 20 minutes of combat fuel and had to quickly gather about the B-29 for the guided trip back to base. For the fighter that didn't make it back to the "mother" B-29 rendezvous, it was "goodbye charlie". The B-29 had to guide the others back to Iwo before they ran out of fuel.

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Contrary to myth, in the six months we were on these missions I never saw a friendly fighter defending us from Japanese fighters during our raids.

Slight correction… on one bombing mission to Kyushu our B-29s at night, in the dark, turned over Iwo toward Kyushu at the same time as a group of P-51 fighters were climbing up to meet their B-29 navigation escort aircraft on their way to Honshu in central Japan for their morning mission. One confused P-51 pilot apparently locked onto one of our groups B-29s and flew with him, thinking he was headed for Honshu. Dawn came and we rendezvous on the coast of Kyushu and here was one very bewildered and confused P-51 pilot all alone amid our formation. He had no navigation system to get him home so he wisely decided to stick with us.

We went on and dropped our bombs on target and when finished went on home again by way of Iwo Jima. As we approached Iwo he waggled his wings at us in thanks and dropped off to land at Iwo. We don't know what story he had to tell his buddies there. He had been sitting under the wing of our number three airplane until we ran into some flak over our target and when it began to get rough he moved up and sat above the wing where he couldn't see the flashes from the flak coming from below us. He possibly thought that the bulk of the B-29 wing would protect him from fragments of the flak.

By July the Japanese fighter responses were becoming noticeably weaker. We knew that we had pretty well cleaned out their gasoline refinery capability. Their pilot training was obviously very minimum. Flak capability was still pretty good and becoming better all the time. There was still number of industrial targets that needed neutralizing and which had been hit several times before but had been rebuilt and put back into production. One of These e

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was target # 357, the Mushino aircraft engine works on the outskirts of Tokyo, which had already been bombed some seven or eight times with considerable loses.

In June it was the turn of the 330th group to take it on, which we did on a beautiful clear day, surprisingly, we had no losses and got about 30% destruction. This was about par for the course. However one squadron came back with severe battle damages that nearly every aircraft had to be grounded for repair or replacements. By this time we had not only destroyed almost all the industrial capabilities of the Japanese but also by shutting down their sea lanes even in the inland seas and pretty well crippling their railroad systems we had destroyed their ability to move products and food back and forth as needed throughout the country.

It was pretty obvious to us that that were on their last legs economically and would collapse by winter. We were aware of a terrific buildup of support logistics and troops as they began to mass on our island and on Okinawa. In spite of the Japanese situation, we knew that when our troops went in over the beaches the resistance would be fanatic and losses would be extremely high. We knew that, unlike the Germans, they would never surrender and would die by the millions. This even more than the fanatism their troops had shown at Iwa Jima and other land battles.

Those of us who flew over and saw the results of our bombs probably thought that we would be starving them out by spring and possibly an invasion would not be necessary. The impression of the planners back in Washington was obviously something different. This led to the decision to drop the atomic bomb.

Although we had brushed elbows with the 509th bomb group in training and knew they were on Tinian, we had no idea what their mission and armament was. We had been told on a couple of missions that we might see a pair of B-29s at very high altitude over some targets over Japan. This was the 509th on training missions and reconnaissance but we weren't told any more.