



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

AIR FORCE HISTORICAL RESEARCH AGENCY
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

13 January 1997
RSA96/U-4563.dd

HQ AFHRA/RSA
600 Chennault Circle
Maxwell AFB, AL 361126424

Mr. Duane Blair Maples 618
Broad Street Portsmouth, VA
23707-2007

Dear Mr. Maples:

Thank you for your request of 11 September 1996 regarding information on the B-29 aircraft, Serial No. 42-24694. We regret the delay in providing you with this information, but budget cuts have drastically reduced our staff and delayed our response time. Enclosed is a photocopy of the aircraft record card for Serial No. 42-24694 taken from microfilm, and a guide to its interpretation. We regret that some of the information is difficult to read due to the poor quality of an original document and inherent limitations in all copying processes.

With this letter I am sending you a list of unit histories for the 500th Bomb Group during World War II which are available on microfilm and an information sheet containing instructions for ordering the microfilm. These rolls may contain information about the 881st Bomb Squadron which you will find useful. I have searched our holdings for information on that squadron but found nothing listed. I am, however, enclosing a brief article on the 881st from Combat Squadrons of the Air Force: World War II.

We hope this information aids you in your research.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dixie Dysart", is written over a horizontal line.

DIXIE DYSART

Archivist /Inquiries Branch

Attachment:

1. Aircraft Record Card
2. Guide to interpretation of individual aircraft records

INDIVIDUAL AIRCRAFT RECORDS

THE AIR FORCE HISTORICAL RESEARCH AGENCY Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6678

This distribution describes the AFHRA's individual aircraft record collections and modes of their production. It should be noted that after 1 July 1995 the Agency can no longer provide transcriptions of individual records to unofficial patrons. For interpretation guidance, please see the AFHRA's distributions on interpretation of the Large Cards, Small Cards, and Computer Ledgers.

The Agency's Aircraft Record Collection

The AFHRA holds individual aircraft records for almost all aircraft once or presently in the USA inventory. These records begin in 1924 and continue to July 1990 and appear to be about 98 percent complete (records for many aircraft of the early 1920s, a few during 1924-1950, and aircraft in highly sensitive reconnaissance programs, for example, are not available). Each set of aircraft records has its own unique characteristics, but for most planes one may learn its manufacturer; place of production; date of entry into the inventory; units of assignment; duty stations; and something of the final disposition. Among the data never given are maintenance information or crew members or W.W. II unit assignments overseas (Z. assignments ARE stated). The individual aircraft records thus are a priceless historical resource, if they have pronounced limitations as regards interpretation, availability, and accessibility. Over time, the format of the records, the recording medium, the information entered, and the data entries have passed through five major stages:

Large Cards - ca. 1924-Feb. 1955. During this period records were kept on several types of paper cards ca. 9 x 11 1/2 in., many now available only on micro film. Entries are handwritten and machine-posted, usually in an alpha-numeric code. One or two cards are normally necessary for an aircraft's history during this era.

Small Cards - Feb. 1955-June 1964. In February 1955 aircraft record keeping was converted to a system of *smv.A*, automated posting cards ca. 3 x 8 in., usually generated annually or semi-annually. Data was entered in an alpha-numeric code system broadly similar to the large cards but differing in numerous details, including marine unit designations, distance fields, and absence of station numbers. One to about ten small cards may be found for each aircraft in this era, plus large cards for any service before February 1955.

Computer Ledgers - June 1964-Apr. 1980. In mid-1964 aircraft activity reporting was converted to a computer-generated annual inventory report presented on fan-folded ledger sheets. Under this system, an aircraft's recorded activity for a calendar year must be extracted from each year's inventory report. Depending on a plane's duration of service, as many as sixteen inventory reports (including two for 1964) must be examined for entries. Data entry codes and data fields for the ledgers are quite different from either large cards or small cards.

Microfiche - May 1980-July 1990. Beginning May 1980, the USAF produced monthly inventory reports on microfiche, copies of which are held at the AFHRA. These microfiche use much the same data entry coding as the earlier computer ledgers.

REMIS - July 1990 - Beginning in mid-1990 the USAF instituted the so-called REMIS (Reliability & Maintainability Information System) computer data base which, among other functions, tracks individual aircraft in the inventory. The AFHRA has a data link connection for the retrieval of individual aircraft activity since mid-1990.

Reproduction and Public Availability

Individual aircraft records from the Large Card and Small Card periods only (i.e., down to June 1964) are available to the public in the form of photocopies (some from microfilm). Large quantities of aircraft records from the Large Card, Small Card, and Computer Ledger periods can be purchased on 16mm microfilm in the following series:

Series ACR - Large Cards. Aircraft out of the inventory by 1951. 118 rolls.

Series OACR - Supplement to above, records out of file. 10 rolls.

Series AC - Large Cards. Aircraft still active in 1951, activity down to Feb. 1955 (end of Large Card era). 75 rolls.

Series ACA - Small Cards. Individual aircraft records from Feb. 1955 until June 1964. 89 rolls.

Series AVH - Computer Ledgers. Annual inventory reports from June 1964 until May 1980. 27 rolls.

LISTS OF ROLL NUMBERS AND THE MILITARY SERIAL NUMBERS ("TAIL NUMBERS") THAT THEY CONTAIN, TOGETHER WITH ORDERING INFORMATION, ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE AGENCY ON REQUEST.

Aircraft records in the Microfiche and REMIS eras are available only at the Agency.

Current as of 8 Aug 95

AFHRA MICROFILM WORKSHEET

The material you have requested may be available on 16mm microfilm described below. The cost for each roll of microfilm is US \$22 for domestic orders or US \$25 for foreign orders. For official governmental purchases, use DD Form 448 (Military Interdepartmental Purchase Request (MIPR)).

Make check or money order for exact amount in US funds only, drawn on an US banking institution, and made payable to "DDO, Maxwell AFB, AL" to the address listed below:

ATTN: Microfilm Orders
AFHRA/RSA
600 Chennault Circle
Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6424

Although the Historical Research Agency maintains rigid microfilm processing quality controls, readability of offered microfilm cannot be guaranteed. While most is highly readable, some may not be because of the poor quality of an original document and inherent limitations in all copying processes. Our microfilm rolls (these rolls hold approximately 2000 frames) may contain information unrelated to your request. Because the Historical Research Agency cannot selectively duplicate portions of any roll, you must accept the entire roll of microfilm to obtain the microfilmed documents indicated.

Many college and public libraries have microfilm readers/printers available for patron use.

Roll	Subject or Document	Inclusive
	<u>Title/"Call Number"</u>	<u>Dates</u> <u>Number</u>
500th Bomb Group		Nov. 1943 to Dec. 1944 B0667
		Dec. 1944 to Mar. 1945 B0668
		Apr. 1945 to Jul. 1945 B0669
		Jun. 1944 to Jan. 1946 B0670

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095211
Roil: 1850
First Frame: 1122
Last Frame: 1171
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095212
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1172
Last Frame: 1187
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095213
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1188
Last Frame: 1235
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095214
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1236
Last Frame: 1282
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-H
IRIS Number: I
Roll: 00095215
First Frame: 1850
Last Frame: 1283
Old Roll: 1351
B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095216
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1352
Last Frame: 1381
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095217
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1382
Last Frame: 1431
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095218
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1432
Last Frame: 1535
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095219
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1536
Last Frame: 1579
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095220
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1580
Last Frame: 1671
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI
IRIS Number: 00095221
Roll: 1850

First Frame: 1672
Last Frame: 1794
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V. 1
IRIS Number: 00095222
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1795
Last Frame: 1889
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095223
Roll: 1850
First Frame: 1890
Last Frame: 2055
Old Roll: B0667

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.3
IRIS Number: 00095224
Roll: 1851 4 450
First Frame: B0668
Last Frame:
Old Roll:

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HIV.1
IRIS Number: 00095225
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 451
Last Frame: 561
Old Roll: B0668

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095226 1851
Roll: 562
First Frame: 907
Last Frame: B0668
Old Roll:

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.3
IRIS Number: 00095227
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 908
Last Frame: 1083
Old Roll: B0668

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-ffIV.1
IRIS Number: 00095228
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 1084
Last Frame: 1236
Old Roll: B0668

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095229
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 1237
Last Frame: 1541
Old Roll: B0668

**Main: UP/0500/BO
GRO I**

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.3
IRIS Number: 00095230
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 1542
Last Frame: 1549
Old Roll: B0668

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HIV. 1
IRIS Number: 00095231
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 1550
Last Frame: 1663
Old Roll: B0668

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095232
Roll: 1851
First Frame: 1664
Last Frame: 2011
Old Roll: B0668

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-ffIV.1
IRIS Number: 00095233
Roll: 1852
First Frame: 4
Last Frame: 202
Old Roll: B0669

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095234
Roll: 1852

First Frame: 203
Last Frame: 567
Old Roll: B0669

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.3
IRIS Number: 00095235
Roll: 1852
First Frame: 568
Last Frame: 861
Old Roll: B0669

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HIV.1
IRIS Number: 00095236
Roll: 1852
First Frame: 862
Last Frame: 1039
Old Roll: B0669

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095237
Roll: 1852
First 1040
Frame: Last 1292
Frame: Old B0669
Roll:

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-ffIV.1
IRIS Number: 00095238
Roll: 1852
First Frame: 1293
Last Frame: 1543
Old Roll: B0669

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI V.2
IRIS Number: 00095239 1853
Roll: 4 328 B0670
First Frame:
Last Frame:
Old Roll:

Main: GROUP/0500/BOMBARDMENT (VERY HEAVY)

Call Number: GP-500-HI

IRIS Number: 00095240

Roll: 1853

First Frame: 329

Last Frame: 878

Old Roll: B0670

**NASM Archives Division
United States Air Force
Pre-1954 Official Still Photograph Collection**

USAF Negative Number: 59027 AC

NASM Videodisk Number: 3A - 40361

World WarH

On February 23,1945, a group of men on the shore of Saipan Island, Marianas Group, watched a Boeing B-29 Superfortress, ["Draggin Lady," serial number 42-24694-BW], heading towards them. It was obviously in trouble and losing altitude fast. The pilots were attempting to make a runway near the shore. They came close -- heartbreakingly close — when two sputtering engines quit and the aircraft nosed over into the sea.

The men on the beach went into action. Some waded and swam to the wreck, while others gave the alarm summoning ambulances and crash crews. Soon, there were dozens of men swarming around the aircraft. Crewmen, some of them injured, were freed from the Superfortress and carried ashore in life rafts. However, in spite of the frantic efforts on behalf of the men to chop open the submerged nose of the aircraft with fire axes, three men were trapped inside the aircraft and died. Their bodies were recovered, and later the wrecked aircraft was hauled to the shore that it had failed to reach.

Both of these famous aviators also received the Medal of Honor with the Distinguished Flying Cross. The aviatrix Amelia Earhart also received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Hers was the only such award, as an Executive Order of March 1, 1927, ruled that the D.F.C. should not be conferred on civilians. During wartime, members of the armed forces of friendly foreign nations serving with the United States are eligible for the D.F.C. It is also given to those who display heroism as instructors at flying schools.

The medal, which is identical for all branches of the service, is a bronze cross pattee. On the obverse is a four-bladed propeller, one blade in each arm of the cross; in the re-entrant angles of the cross are rays which form a square. The reverse of the medal is left blank for the recipient's name and deed. The cross is suspended by a rectangular-shaped bar, in the center of which is a plain shield, from a ribbon having a red center stripe, flanked on either side by a narrow white stripe, a wide blue, a white, and, at the edges, a blue stripe.

Subsequent awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross are indicated by the oak-leaf clusters for Army and Air Force personnel and by additional award stars for all other services.

The replacement aircraft, ["Booze Hound,"] also flew in the Korean War and carried the name[s] "September Song" and "Charlie's Wagon."

I hope I have cleared up a few details for you; if not, feel free to write again. Thank you for the large copies of the [photographs] of ["Draggin Lady" and "Booze Hound."] I will insert [them] in my squadron books. We are always looking for good pictures of B-29 aircraft that flew with the 500th [Bombardment] Group.

If you have [an extra copy] of your father's mission records, I would appreciate [you sending it to me].

Sincerely,

Hurth M. Tompkins: 500th Historian

freedom. To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die. We have loved the stars too well to be fearful of the night SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDL MORS IANUA VITAE. REQUIEM AETERNAM DONA EIS, DOMINE.

**By Duane Blair Maples
Copyright, 1999**



A sight never to be seen again. A long line of B-29's taxiing out for take off from Saipan on a mission to Japan. Note the man in the photograph at lower left. He was most likely one of the Chaplains; blessing the crews and aircraft as they taxied past him. (ED).



A smiling, Staff Sergeant Charles R. Maples, home safe and sound in South Norfolk, Virginia ... to the girl he left behind ... and would shortly marry, Anna Alexander Maples. "No more worries for a while!"

The End



A smiling, Staff Sergeant Charles R. Maples, home safe and sound in South Norfolk, Virginia ... to the girl he left behind ... and would shortly marry, Anna Alexander Maples. "No more worries for a while!"

The End



The World War II Memoirs of B-29 Radio Operator

Charles R. Maples

Edited by Duane Blair Maples



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Editor's Acknowledgments

There are a few individuals whom I wish to thank for having contributed materials included in this memoir. Mr. Russell £. Bookman of Chase City, Virginia provided, at my request a number of years ago, an account of the crash of "Draggin Lady." Mr. Bookman was a substitute Tail Gunner flying on the aircraft on the day it was lost. His very interesting story can be found in Appendix A (Draggin Lady Crash Information Part HI).

Mr. Richard O. Dodds of Fair Oaks, California, kindly extended permission for his World War II combat diary to be included in this work. (See Appendix C). As the Pilot of Mr. Maples' B-29's, "Draggin Lady" and "Booze Hound," Mr. Dodds' diary provides a mission-by-mission account of the combat action seen by his crew.

Ms. Dixie Dysart, Archivist, Inquiries Branch, Air Force Historical Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, provided first rate historical data on "Draggin Lady," the 500th Bombardment Group and the 881st Bombardment Squadron in reply to a letter I sent to her several years ago. (See Appendix F).

*** Mr. Donald Engen,
Director of The National Air And Space Museum in
Washington, D.C., sent me an interesting letter in which he detailed how I should proceed in locating a photographic image of "Draggin Lady" in the U.S. Air Force Pre-1954 Still Photographic Collection. (See Appendix F). The information he**

provided will be useful to readers who may wish to obtain a photograph of a particular B-29 or other type of aircraft of interest to them.

The 73rd Bomb Wing Association, via Mr. Richard A. Field of San Antonio, Texas provided copies of "Early/Original Aircraft of the 500th Bombardment Group," (Appendix A), and "Air Raids Against Saipan," (Appendix C).

^-/ Mr. John H. Johnsen of Sedona, Arizona wrote an interesting letter to me a number of years ago in which he was kind enough to explain how Mr. Maples' second B-29, "Booze Hound," received its name. (See Appendix B).

Mr. Raymond Rendina of La Mesa, California wrote his "Draggin Lady" - The Story of The Naming of a B-29 Superfortress," a number of years ago at my request. He also provided copies of various crew rosters for "Draggin Lady" and "Booze Hound," respectively, which were most helpful in identifying the various men who crewed both aircraft. (See Appendices A and B).

Finally, I must thank my father, Charles R. Maples, for not only writing the following story of his involvement in World War II, but also for having provided me with a wealth of original photographs, documents and other materials from his Army Air Force service for inclusion in the Appendices to this book.

Editor's Introduction

My association with this project began with the placing of a telephone call to my father on a summer evening in 1996. During the course of our conversation, I indicated to him that it would mean a great deal to me if he would undertake the task of writing about his experiences as a Radio Operator on a Boeing B-29 Superfortress while flying combat missions with the Twentieth Air Force against the Empire of Japan during World War II.

He was agreeable to my request and immediately began documenting those events that he could best remember, beginning with his induction into the United States Army Air Forces in 1943, and ending with his return to the United States from the Island of Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands Group following the completion of his thirty five mission combat tour in 1945. Using pencil, paper and a wire-bound notebook, he produced, in a period of approximately three months, the memoirs that follow. The original hand-written rough draft was almost seventy pages in length.

It was my pleasure to serve as editor, consultant, historical researcher and typist for my father on this project. Countless revisions to the original document were made over the course of the next two and one half years with regard to form and content. The appendices at the conclusion of my father's memoirs were designed to include historical materials, photographs and other documents relating to his war service that would serve to/accentuate his own written words. The book you have in your hands is one that my father and I eventually became satisfied with.

The minor role that I played in helping to bring the book together is one that will always bring me much satisfaction. I am very grateful to my father because he had the courage to re-live a part of his life that certainly was rarely pleasant in order that his memoirs could be written. It is not easy for any of us to face the fears and ghosts of our past. There were times during the course of this project when I felt guilty and angry{at myselffor having asked my father to conjure up once again the many terrible things he witnessed during the air war with Japan. Still, for the sake of our family, as well as for history, I felt his story should be told.

For many years, my father never spoke of his experiences during World War II. Eventually, however, he and I were able to have many long conversations about his exploits as we both grew older; myself advancing into middle age and my father into his seventies. As I listened, spell-bound, to his stories, it quickly became clear to me that the air war against Japan had differed in many significant aspects compared to the air war in Europe. To begin, let us consider geography as a primary difference between the two air wars. Following the capture of the Northern Mariana Islands during the summer of 1944 by United States Naval and Marine forces, it became possible to bring our Army Air Forces within striking distance of the Japanese home islands. Still, the distance between the Marianas and Japan was a formidable one... fifteen hundred miles.

There was only one aircraft within the United States* arsenal that was capable of striking Japan over such great distances; the new, Boeing B-29 "Superfortress." With a range of over four thousand miles, and capable of carrying bomb loads of twenty thousand pounds, or more, the B-29's and the men who crewed her would, over the course of the period between November, 1944 through mid-August, 1945,

bring about the near destruction of a significant number of Japan's cities while operating from their island bases in the Marianas.

Charles R. Maples and his 500th Bombardment Group (Very Heavy) began arriving on Saipan in early November, 1944 and prepared for the long missions to come. As on Guam and Tinian, the United States Navy's "Seabees" had been busy building the long runways the B-29's would require after Saipan was taken from the Japanese in June. The 500th Bombardment Group's first mission to Japan was on November 24th, 1944. The city of Tokyo was the target. Charles R. Maples' baptism by fire had begun.

Although the bombing results on this mission were poor, the B-29 crews had left no doubt they would be back. During the early weeks of the B-29 build-up on Saipan, the Japanese Air Force made its presence felt by means of a number of air raids on the island; especially during November and December of 1944, and early January, 1945, which destroyed a number of B-29's on the ground and killed and wounded a number of our servicemen. The enemy air raids placed an additional strain on the B-29 crews who were exhausted after having flown missions that could last as long as sixteen or seventeen hours. Japanese air attacks on Saipan had ceased by the time United States forces captured Iwo Jima, from which the enemy aircraft were operating, in mid-March, 1945.

As the missions to Japan continued, the B-29 crews continued to see just how different their air war was compared to the one that was still grinding on in Europe against Germany. As previously mentioned, the missions from the Marianas were incredibly long in duration and flown over vast reaches of the Pacific Ocean. Engine failures were a constant problem and Flight Engineers and ground personnel alike had to master the temperamental Wright R-3350-57 Cyclone turbocharged radial

piston engines VAs the bomb loads increased, these engines struggled to carry the heavily laden B-29*s to their assigned bombing altitudes of twenty five to thirty thousand feet Precious fuel was expended in large amounts in order to reach such altitudes.

A number of B-29 crews were lost at sea simply because they had run out of fuel while returning from a mission. Remember, there was no air-to-air refueling during World War II! Until Iwo Jima was secured by our Naval and Marine forces in March, 1945, a B-29 low on fuel coming back from Japan en route to Saipan had no where to land. It either had enough fuel to make it back or it had to ditch. It was that simple. Thanks to the brave Marines who gave their lives to secure Iwo Jima, many B-29's suffering from fuel shortages on their way back from Japan were saved. Further, if a B-29 had wounded on board, it was a long way back to Saipan and medical help. Once again, an emergency landing on Iwo Jima, along with first-aid given by fellow crew members, could very well mean the difference between life and death.

Navigation was another real concern for the B-29 crews. It was absolutely essential that the Navigator and Radio Operator on each aircraft were highly skilled at their respective jobs. The failure to obtain accurate compass or radio bearings would likely result in an aircraft missing a possible safe landing on Saipan and, instead, flying until it ran out of fuel... somewhere in the vast reaches of the Pacific Ocean, where it would probably never be found.

Once over their assigned target areas, in addition to the flak from the Japanese ground defenses, the B-29's often faced suicidal fighter attacks from the enemy pilots. On more than one occasion, Japanese pilots were successful in ramming a B-29, and in some cases destroying the B-29 and themselves. Although there were

documented cases of German pilots intentionally ramming allied aircraft, the Japanese pilots carried out suicide attacks against the B-29's on a greater scale than did the German pilots in the European air war. On one of his missions, my father saw the B-29 flying right next to his destroyed in a mid-air "Kamikaze" attack.

Another danger the B-29 crews faced was the very real possibility of being tortured should they be shot down and captured by the Japanese. Some of the most brutal cases of documented torture to come out of World War II involve ones in which captured B-29 crew members suffered terribly in the hands of their captors. There were, of course, instances when the Germans tortured captured flyers, but the Japanese have been better known, historically, for their brutal treatment of prisoners of war.

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As the tempo of the missions to Japan increased during the Spring and Summer of 1945, the number of B-29's in the air over the targets also greatly increased. On many missions, there were three to over five hundred B-29's in the air in order to hit just *one* target. As a result, there was a constant danger of mid-air collisions; particularly on the low level night incendiary raids when aircraft were bombing individually over the target at different altitudes. Intense smoke from fires burning on the ground and the glare from search lights probing the night sky over a target also greatly increased the possibility of mid-air collisions as the B-29's often had to take evasive action in order to avoid these hazards. With hundreds of B-29's returning to their bases in the Marianas at the same time, many being low on fuel, just getting the aircraft safely back on the ground became a challenge in and of itself. Those aircraft with wounded aboard were given priority in landing, while other aircraft, dangerously low on fuel, had to sweat out their turn to land, by a little

wonder that so many crew members could be seen happily kissing the ground on their hands and knees after safely completing a combat mission!

x^/As previously mentioned, the B-29 missions to Japan were extremely long, and this placed a great physical and mental strain on the air crews. While many of the crew members could get some sleep on the long flight back to the Marianas, the Radio Operators were required to stay awake at all times, both to and from the target, in order not to miss critical messages from commanders in both the air and on the ground. Some crew members broke under the strain of flying and refused to fly any further missions. One of the Gunners on my father's aircraft flatly refused to fly any further combat missions after he had all he could take. Crew members on other aircraft also refused to fly for various reasons during the B-29 campaign against Japan.

As the standard number of missions required to complete a combat tour was raised from thirty to thirty five missions under the leadership of General Curtis E. LeMay, some crews talked of outright mutiny and morale plunged to an all time low. Just try to imagine being caught up in a situation where you are required to *literally* face your worst nightmare thirty five times, and then overcome the life threatening dangers associated with it successfully!

It was in this exact scenario that Charles R. Maples found himself as a B-29 crew member. On mission after terrible mission, he and the other men on his aircraft flew into the war-torn skies over Japan and performed, often against incredible odds, the respective jobs assigned to them. For the airmen who survived, their lives would never be the same again in many ways. For those who did not return, the lives of their comrades, friends and families back home would be forever changed by their deaths.

^With the passing of the years following World War II, the memories of the veterans of the B-29 campaign against Japan are now beginning to dim. The B-29 veterans of the Western Pacific Campaign whom I have met are a fiercely proud group of men and they are keenly aware of the unique sacrifices they and their comrades willingly made in order to bring about the ultimate victory over Japan, thus ending World War II. These veterans are secure in their knowledge that it was the sustained attacks, night and day, in almost any imaginable weather conditions, by hundreds of B-29's of the Twentieth Air Force on any given mission, that forced Japan to surrender.

Today, as we approach the beginning of a new century, many people are only familiar with an aircraft known as the "Enola Gay," the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, when they are asked to recall how World War II finally ended. Perhaps a few others may be familiar, too, with "Bock's Car," the B-29 that dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. However, I seriously doubt that very few people can name even five or less of the hundreds of *other* B-29's that rained ruin on Japan from their bases in the Mariana Islands during the period November, 1944 - August, 1945.

As for me, the B-29 Superfortresses named "Draggin Lady" and "Booze Hound," respectively, will live on forever in my heart and mind. These were the B-29's on which my father served. They took him to a number of targets in Japan and always returned him safely to Saipan. The big, lumbering Superfortresses, with their beautiful and sometimes outrageous "nose art," have not taken off on their long missions to Japan for over a half century now, but the world in which we live has been manifestly changed forever by this aircraft and the men who took her into the sky so very long ago.

The beautiful skies between Japan and the Northern Mariana Islands are quiet today ... as they should be. No longer are they filled with hundreds of B-29's droning to and from their targets. No longer are they witness to B-29's on fire; falling, twisting and twirling toward the earth far below them. No longer are they darkened by the dark bursts of exploding flak and shredded with machine gun fire searching for human flesh to tear apart. No longer do men seek to destroy one another in those skies filled with their flying machines of war. The shrieks of the dead and dying in those skies have faded into silence long ago, and in the cities of Japan, citizens no longer flee in terror under a sky once filled with B-29's; their bomb bays pouring tens of thousands of incendiary and high demolition bombs upon them.

Those skies are quiet today because they are grave yard skies. No, we cannot see them, but they are *there*; hundreds upon hundreds of graves, floating in place; stark, silent sentinels, that will always be there. They mark the many places where so many men lost their lives either instantly, or at the point where they began their fall into eternity. They will always be there as mute reminders of the reality and the insanity of war. They will always be there to remind us of the great achievements of ordinary men who performed extraordinary deeds; of ordinary men who became heroes, each and every one.

Perhaps it is well that we can not actually see the massive-graves in those skies, rife with all of the horror, sorrow and destruction. On the other hand, perhaps it might be well that we *could* see *just* in order that we *should never forget* the important chapter in our nation's history that they so majestically and silently represent.

In the pages that follow, you will become acquainted with a young man from the small town that was once known as South Norfolk, Virginia; a young man who was a part of the great B-29 air campaign against Japan during World War II and who lived to tell his story. Charles R. Maples was one of the lucky ones who made it back to friends and loved ones following his ordeal by fire, and he has never forgotten that fact. I will always admire, respect and deeply appreciate the fact that my father was again willing to face his enemies from the past, because he was asked to do so, in order that the following story could be written.

It is my sincere wish that you, the reader, will both enjoy and appreciate the pages that follow, for often it is possible to learn much more about ourselves, and who *we* are, by studying the contributions, achievements and the lives of others.

**Duane Blair Maples
Virginia Beach, Virginia
December, 1998**

Author's Forward

As the author of these memoirs, I would like to emphasize the fact that they were written with my family in mind in order to give them some idea of my personal involvement in a war that involved millions of American soldiers and our allies; many of whom had much more hazardous and heart-wrenching experiences than I went through. I am not qualified to tell their stories.

My son, Duane Blair Maples, the Editor of these pages, has researched the involvement of the 73rd Bombardment Wing during World War II and has made a significant contribution in having provided the reader with historical records and other materials pertaining both to the B-29's on which I served, and my fellow crew members. Also, he has included other historical data that underscore the size and scope of B-29 operations against Japan and how my own 500th Bombardment Group played a vital role in those operations. My thanks goes to him for the materials he has provided in the Appendices to my book.

**Charles R. Maples Virginia
Beach, Virginia
September, 1998**

July 28,1996

Duane:

I remember that you asked for a few words describing my World War II involvement. You and your mother, my loving wife, have always been my best supporters. Your interest has always kept me proud of my past I hope these few words meet your expectations.

Love, Dad

"It is sad ... half of the people do not know, and the other half do not care."

Charles R. Maples

I remember growing up in the little town of South Norfolk,² Virginia, which was about five miles by seven miles in area with a population under ten thousand. Very few people had any money and only the well to do had automobiles. We walked to the grocery store, the drug store and, although not very often, to the movies, where the admission price for kids was ten cents. We all knew one another and grew older together.

During World War II, the local draft board became real interested in the young men; those of us nearing twenty one and those over twenty one. The government

¹**Mr. Maples is referring to the fact that many people today know little or nothing of the B-29 bombing campaign against Japan by the Twentieth Air Force during WWn, and many others could care less. (ED).**

² **Located in Southeastern Virginia on the Elizabeth River, just South of Hampton Roads. Helpful geographical information in this footnote and others in this book was gathered from Merriam Webster's Geographical Dictionary - Third Edition, Merriam Webster, Inc., Publishers, Springfield, Massachusetts, USA 1997. (ED).**

had signs every where which read, "Uncle Sam Wants You!" When I came home from work each day from the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, I would ask my mother, "did my walking papers come yet?" I was not surprised when one day she handed me an envelope marked, "Official Business." That was when my involvement in World War II began. After receiving my draft notice things began to move along in a predictable manner, and before long I and a lot of my friends boarded a train for Richmond, Virginia, and we received our first taste of the great joy of serving our country.

My introduction into the military was something to behold. First came the physical examinations. We were told to undress, remember where we put our clothes (in small, numbered lockers), and told that we would not see them again for the rest of that day. Then we lined up, naked, and proceeded to move from area to area, from doctor to doctor. They looked at every inch of our bodies, outside and inside, as far as they could reach. I learned a lot about my body and my health that day, foremost of which is the fact that all men *are not* created equal; not by a long shot! I came out pretty well except for my blood pressure which was elevated. After two separate tests and a fifteen minute rest period laying on a mattress, the third test was OK. So much for the physical part of my indoctrination.

Next came the mental examination. You had to know your name, having a high school education was a plus and knowing who was President of the United States was a winner. I passed all of these. Finally, the time came for my classification interview. This was a real test of wits. This five minute encounter would usually determine the branch of the military in which an individual would serve. A few questions, and the man would find himself best qualified for the Army, Navy, Marines, etc. The questioning was very scientific. I sat in front of an interviewer and

the process began. Question: "Are you employed?" Answer: "Yes." Question: "Where?" Answer: "Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia." Question: "How long?" Answer: "Two and one half years." Question: "What job do you perform with your company?" Answer: " I am a cable splicer's helper." The interviewer then reached for a book, from among many books, and began to flip through indexes and pages and finally said, "Ah, here we are." -^Then the questioning started again. To all of the questions I had suitable answers. He smiled, closed the book and said, "Signal Corps." I said, " I prefer the Army Air Forces."³ He said, "with your background, you are a good candidate for the Signal Corps, and right now they are looking for people with your experience." I said again, "my first choice is the Army Air Forces." He wrote that down and said some thing like, "good luck, but don't count on it"

After a very long day of continuous examinations, we finally were allowed to put our clothes on again and to have a little time before the swearing-in ceremony. The ceremony was short as we mainly listened to an officer reading a list of commitments to serve and defend the United States of America, the Flag, etc., and to signify such by taking one step forward. What a step! Looking back on this whole business, the only light side came when some one would step into the armory and announce, "all right, listen up and cover up, the nurse is coming through." Some guys did more than blush! Then it was home for one week to take care of personal business.

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³ ftipr to 1942^the Army Air Force was known as the US Army Air Corps. After 19\$^the name was changed to the Army Air Forces. It was not until 1947 that the US Air Force came into being as an individual branch of the US Armed Forces. (ED).

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On April 3, 1943, I found myself at Camp Lee, Virginia,⁴ along with a good number of my South Norfolk buddies. I was assigned to a barracks to wait and ponder the future. Very soon, one morning at about 0400,⁵ a Sergeant came in, turned on all of the lights and yelled out, "grab your socks," or something to that effect,⁶ "the following men are to be ready to ship out at 0430." I was one of them. Soon, I was on a train heading south through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and ... "where in the heck are we going?" To Miami,⁷ Florida, that is where! I did not know it at the time but I was headed for Basic Training at an Army Air Force facility. "Hooray," I got what I requested!

There was nothing exciting about Basic Training. I enjoyed Miami and being quartered in The Rowe Hotel. While there I had an encounter with a Sergeant named Starkey, a member of the permanent party cadre, and he conned me out of \$40.00. After he borrowed the money from me I shipped out before he paid it back. I also had to take an emergency leave back home to appear in court as a witness in a murder trial. This was all the result of something that happened before I was inducted.⁸ The Army did not furnish transportation for my emergency leave. It was

⁴ Now named Fort Lee. It is located near Petersburg, Virginia, which is just South of the State Capitol of Richmond. (ED).

⁵ 4:00 AM in civilian time. (ED).

⁶ Any man who has ever served in the Armed Forces will probably know exactly what the Sergeant called out here in his rather vulgar wake-up call. The expression was still being used when I was in uniform. (ED).

⁷ A city on the Southeastern coast of Florida. (ED).

⁸ Mr. Maples was called to testify in a civilian case in which a man was being tried for the stabbing death of another man resulting from a brief but violent argument. Mr. Maples witnessed the stabbing at a gasoline station in South Norfolk, Virginia. (ED).

up to me to get home the best way I could. All forms of transportation were overloaded and I missed a train because I could not get through the crowd when it pulled into the station. I made up my mind to do differently when the next train pulled in. It was not too long before another train arrived and the crowd began to push and shove toward the doors; in one of which stood a conductor. This time I was right there pushing along with every one else. I heard the conductor say there were only a few seats and therefore not every one could board the train. I eventually got his attention by waving my papers and hollering above the noise. The conductor pointed to me and said, "let that soldier through!" When I got close enough to hand him my papers, he saw that they were stamped, "Emergency Leave." He immediately called a porter and instructed him to find me a seat. I did not have any more problems after that The porter brought me aboard, led me into a really plush car which only had about six or eight people in it, seated me next to a window and said if I needed any thing to just let him know. I realized that my emergency leave papers were as good as a special pass and used them several times on my journey with good results.

I eventually finished Basic Training and then I was shipped off to Illinois in order to attend Radio School at Scott Field. Funny thing about the Service, you are always in the wrong place so they ship you off some where else. Oh well. Radio School was long and tiresome. Half of the day was taken up sending and receiving Morse code. The other half was spent on studying radio theory and learning to repair radio equipment Day after day, Morse Code was sent from a tape machine which seemed to get faster and faster. One day, the instructor came to my desk and asked if I would take a twenty five word per minute test. I agreed, took the test and

handed in my paper. The next day the same thing happened. I received no feedback but learned that I had passed the tests. The next thing that I knew, I was told that I had been selected to go to an Advanced Radio School. I had been in the wrong place once again so it was time to hit the road; this time to Truax Field in Madison,⁹ Wisconsin.

Upon arriving in Madison we were told very little. We were a small group, hand picked for special training. That was all we knew. We were treated very well and the food and living quarters were excellent. Every where we went we were required to go in pairs, to school, to town, at calisthenics, to the mess hall, etc., always in two's. "It was very cold in Madison. Often it was ten to fifteen degrees below zero so outside activity was very limited.

We were closely watched and therefore we did not hear many rumors. About all we knew was that we were being prepared for flight duty as both a Radio Operator and Medic. ¹ We attended many classes on advanced First Aid that were taught by a surgeon. These courses included the art of giving shots, administering blood plasma, splinting and dressing wounds, the use of morphine, taking blood pressure, etc.

⁹ A city in Southern Wisconsin. (ED).

¹⁰ This "buddy system," was for security purposes. Mr. Maples and his fellow trainees, although they did not know it at the time, had been hand-picked for the then secret, B-29 program. (ED).

¹¹ Many Radio Operators on flight crews in various types of aircraft during WW II were cross-trained in Advanced First Aid. On the long B-29 missions, more than one badly wounded crew member was kept alive by the Radio Operator. (ED).

Besides the medical training, we were expected to increase our radio code speed to 30 wpm.¹² This code business requires a bit of explanation. Code was sent in mixed groups of five characters each. For example: 3ZTUB, A6MTZ, LV90C, OCTAR, etc. As you can see, if one were to miss a single character there would be no way to go back and fill in the missed number or letter. To pass a test, I was required to copy thirty consecutive five character groups without an error^This I did successfully in addition to passing the advanced First Aid course. After our training in Madison had been completed we still did not know what it had all been about, but the day came when we were told to get ready to ship out; not all of us, but some of us. We were in the wrong place once again. Now they wanted us in Clovis,¹³ New Mexico. So be it.

Clovis was the first military air base that I was assigned to. It had B-17^f's, B-24's, B-25's and a number of smaller aircraft.¹⁴ It also had a few B-29's.¹⁵ I did not even know that the B-29 existed prior to my arrival at Clovis. I eventually learned that it was the aircraft I was being prepared to fly on. But before we began flying there were some other events that took place.

¹² Words Per Minute. (ED).

¹³ A city in Eastern New Mexico. (ED).

¹⁴ The B-17 was a four engine bomber known as "The Flying Fortress." The B-24 was also a four engine bomber, nicknamed "The Liberator." The B-25 was a twin engine medium bomber known as "The Mitchell." (ED).

¹⁵ The Boeing B-29 was America's premiere World War II four engine bomber, nick-named the "Superfortress". See Appendix I for technical data on the B-29. (ED).

° Soon after our arrival we were assigned to our living quarters. It seemed that every time I moved to a new location I had to make new friends. None of the members of the group I left ended up at the same place that I did. At Clovis, I found myself bunked next to a Technical Sergeant named Eveleth. He appeared to be a number of years older than I was but we hit it off right away. He was a career soldier with hash marks¹⁶ halfway up his sleeve, good looking in his uniform, quiet but pleasant and obviously a man of considerable persuasion. I think he was a Gunner.

During the days following our arrival at Clovis we went through more physical and mental aptitude tests, various qualification skills, etc. I did all right on all of the tests except for one: color perception. Being as I am partially color blind, mainly red and green, the examiners picked it up right away. They gave me every opportunity to qualify while viewing colored yarn, color charts with numbers imbedded in them, small dots of colored light at the end of a long table, etc., but in the end I was disqualified for flying duty. I was disappointed, to say the least.

Back in the barracks, Eveleth noticed that I was in low spirits and asked me what was wrong. When I told him the results of my tests he jumped up and said, "come on, let's go over and talk to those people." Talk he did. He chewed them out good! Still, the administrators of the color perception tests resisted. Eveleth made the point that I was not trying to qualify as a Pilot or Bombardier but as a Radio Operator. In that position, he argued, what difference would it make if Maples lacked a high degree of color perception? He probably would not even be able to *see*

¹⁰Small, horizontal stripes worn on the uniform to indicate a specific number of months in combat Also, diagonal slash marks on the sleeve of the uniform would indicate a specific number of years on active duty military status. (ED).

outside of the aircraft from the radio position, he pointed out. In the end, thanks no doubt to Eveleth, my qualification record was changed to flight duty. After Clovis I never saw Eveleth again. I wished he had been a member of the B-29 crew I was later to serve with.
^

do not remember flying on a B-29 while at Clovis. Most of my flying was on B-17's and B-24's. We made some very long flights preparing us for what was to come. We were not assigned to a permanent crew at this time; however, most of my flying was with Captain Fields and Lieutenant Dodds.¹⁷ A couple of interesting things happened while we were training at Clovis.

On one occasion we made a non stop flight to Cuba with our return destination being Clovis.¹⁸ On the return leg of the flight some thing went wrong and we had to land in Florida. We spent the night there and prepared for our return to Clovis the next day. We had been advised of bad weather ahead along our route but the decision to take off was left to the pilot. He elected to go.

Captain Fields was a married man and the crew perceived that he did not want to spend any more time away than was necessary on this flight. Shortly after take off we hit the bad weather. The Pilots decided to try to get over the top of it. Up, up

¹⁷ Captain Richard A. Field, as Airplane Commander, and Lieutenant Richard O. Dodds as Pilot. Mr. Maples saw them both again for the first time since 1945 at a bomb group reunion in Louisville, Kentucky in the late 1980's. (ED).

¹⁸ Such long training flights were necessary in order to prepare the crews for the long combat missions to come in the B-29. These flights also taught the crew members how to function together as a team and to become skilled in navigation over long distances. (ED).

