

and up we went, and it got colder. We could not see anything outside of the aircraft and it continued to get colder still. Frost began to form on the inside of the aircraft.

A B-17 has many areas that allow moisture and cold to enter and it was not long before the inside of the aircraft was completely covered with frost.¹⁹ None of us had heavy flying clothes and we were not prepared for what we were experiencing. The Pilot called back for a status check. I told him that we were very uncomfortable and described the conditions in our area of the aircraft.²⁰

Eventually, it became obvious that we could not get over the bad weather so the decision was made to go *under* it. Thank goodness for that decision! As we began to descend, conditions within the aircraft improved and we finally returned safely to Clovis. I might add that in addition to having been very cold in the aircraft on that trip, it was also a very rough ride.

On another occasion, one of our long flights in a B-17 took us over Norfolk, Virginia. For some reason we landed at the Norfolk Naval Base.²¹ During our approach to the base I was unaware of the fact that we were preparing to land and the Pilot failed to notify me to reel in the trailing wire antenna.²² I have often

¹⁹ In early model B-17's the windows at the waist gun positions in the rear section of the aircraft were not enclosed; thus allowing the extreme cold to penetrate at high altitudes. On later models of the aircraft, the waist gun windows were enclosed. (ED).

²⁰ On a B-17, the Radio Operator's station was near the center of the aircraft on the right hand side looking forward. (ED).

²¹ The Norfolk Naval Base is the largest naval base in the world. Incorporated within its boundaries is the Norfolk Naval Air Station, where Mr. Maples and his crew landed. (ED).

²² The trailing wire antennae was another feature of the early model B-17's. The

wondered what the ball of metal on the end of that antenna struck as we flew over Granby Street.²³

I did not stay at Clovis very long. As I have said before, I always seemed to be in the wrong place and now they wanted me at Walker Army Air Force Base, located between Hays²⁴ and Russell,²⁵ Kansas. My most memorable thoughts of Clovis were good. The weather there was beautiful and I started drawing flight pay.

At Walker Army Air Force Base things started to come together. We were assigned to flight crews. We trained together, flew together, attended briefings and began to operate like a team ... like a *crew*. Each of us began to appreciate what the other crew members were trained to do. We took pride in our crew and functioned like professionals. Our crew won first place in an aircraft recognition contest and our photograph appeared on the front page of the base newspaper as a result.²⁶ We felt good about that.

One day our crew chief and I were standing and talking in front of the hanger in which our aircraft was undergoing some routine maintenance. We watched as the

metal ball at the end of the antennae helped to stabilize it during flight. The antennae was played out, or brought in, by the Radio Operator, in order to obtain the most precise radio frequency on his equipment. (ED).

²³ During WW If, Granby Street was one of the most popular sections of the City of Norfolk. Movie theaters, bars, eateries and a host of other businesses attracted many of the thousands of military men and women stationed nearby. (ED).

²⁴ A city in central Kansas. (ED).

²⁵ A city in central Kansas. (ED).

²⁶ See a copy of this photograph in Appendix A. (ED).

large hanger doors opened and soon a tractor backed up to our aircraft, hooked up to the nose gear and began to tow it out of the hanger toward a designated spot in the parking area. We were not prepared for what happened next as the aircraft slowly exited the hanger. The driver of the tractor was supposed to follow a painted yellow line which would insure that the tail of the aircraft would pass safely through a large slot above the hanger doors.²⁷ Well, he made a mistake and turned too soon, which resulted in the tail missing the slot and allowing it to smash into the upper portion of the hanger above the doors causing considerable damage. As the crew chief and I watched as this whole scene unfolded, he suddenly looked at me and said, "let's get the hell out of here!" I took his advice and we quickly disappeared as we did not wish to become caught up in a bunch of inquiries, investigations into possible sabotage etc., that were sure to follow the incident. I felt sorry for the driver of that tractor.

All of my flying was in B-29's now; take off, landings, gunnery practice, communications, etc. We were really beginning to get fine tuned. There was one thing that needed attention. The Flight Engineers²⁸ were having trouble starting the engines without them backfiring. This irritated Colonel Reeves, our squadron leader, so one day he called the entire squadron out for a demonstration on how to start the engines with no backfiring. A lot of folks were "ho-hum" and skeptical, but they became very humble when Colonel Reeves started all four engines on a B-29 without a single backfire. Obviously, some more fine tuning was in order. Every

²⁷ The tail of a B-29 soars to 29.7 feet into the air. See Appendix I for further technical data on the B-29. (ED).

²⁸ On a B-29, the Flight Engineer starts the aircraft's engines; not the Pilots. The duty of the Flight Engineer is to monitor all of the functions associated with the B-29's engine performance while in flight. (ED).

thing proceeded according to schedule at Walker. One day we found ourselves loading our aircraft for departure to Mather Field, located in California.

On a B-29, the Radio Operator occupied the only NCO²⁹ position in the forward section of the aircraft. The rest of the positions were held by officers.³⁰ I am not sure, but I think this fact caused some animosity with one of the Gunners. On this day, things came to a head during the loading of the aircraft when the Gunner started ordering me around more than usual. This particular Gunner whose position was in the rear of the aircraft out-ranked me and apparently thought he was in his rights to do so. This uncomfortable situation changed when I invited the Gunner to climb down out of the aircraft in order that the issue could be settled, man to man. He refused to oblige me and things returned to normal.³¹

I enjoyed my stay at Walker. If you have ever seen the television episodes of "Gunsmoke,"³² you have a good idea of just what the western towns of Kansas looked like. They offered practically nothing for the military personnel stationed

²⁹ Non Commissioned Officer. (ED).

³⁰ The Airplane Commander, Pilot and Navigator were all commissioned officers. The Flight Engineer may have been an enlisted man or, perhaps, may have been rated as an F.O., or "Flight Officer." In the rear section of the aircraft, the Radar Operator was some times a commissioned officer as well, although non commissioned officers also filled this role. (ED).

³¹ Ironically, Mr. Maples and this particular Gunner remained in touch with one another for many years after the war, and regularly exchanged Christmas cards. Strange bonds between individuals are created by war. The Gunner is deceased. I have been in touch with his family. (ED).

³² If you grew up in the 1960's, you may remember the popular, long-running western television show starring James Arness, as Matt Dillon. Amanda Blake was "Miss Kitty," Milburn Stone was "Doc," Ken Curtis was "Festus," and "Chester," in the early episodes, was Dennis Weaver. (ED).

near them. Therefore, nearly all of our time was spent on the base. One other note. Walker Army Air Force Base was located in the heartland of the country's wheat-growing belt. The surrounding area was something to see from ten to fifteen thousand feet high. The few roads were just about perfectly straight all the way to the horizon and when the wind blew across the fields the wheat would look like the ocean waves. It was very easy to become disoriented in the air as a result of this phenomenon. We prepared to leave Walker and headed for our next destination which was Mather Field. The flight to California was my first to that state since joining the military. Accompanied by my crew I did not feel all alone any more. It seems to me that our crew may have stopped in Kearney,³³ Nebraska along the way but I am not able to elaborate on this.

Our point of departure from the United States en route to our overseas duty station was Mather Field. We were all briefed on what procedures to follow and then we left at night, headed for Hawaii. In our briefing we had been told what beacons and voice contacts³⁴ we were to make when we cleared the United States. Emphasis was made on the importance of making these contacts.

Special importance was placed upon our receiving the last beacon some miles off shore. If we failed to pick up this beacon we were to terminate our flight and turn back. Well, we failed to pick up the last beacon and returned to California. Contact was made with Air Traffic Control and we were directed to land at a specified air field. All went well.

³³ A city in South Nebraska. (ED).

³⁴ The voice contacts and radio beacons Mr. Maples is referring to were on ships at sea that transmitted instructions designed to aid the aircraft in navigation as it attempted, in this case, to fly to Hawaii. (ED).

We spent the night and prepared to take off the next morning. We were surprised to see the crowd that turned out to see us take off. We asked: "Why?" The answer: No large aircraft like ours had ever taken off from this air field before. What were they expecting to see? Well, the runway ran East to West We would be taking off to the East. There was a mountain range in the distance. We would have to turn before we got to it or we would have to have enough altitude to go over it. Either choice was kind of risky. Besides the mountain problem, the runway was very short for a large, four engine aircraft, so you can see why such a large crowd had gathered. I guess we disappointed them as we made our take off without incident.

On to Hawaii. I think we landed at Hickam Field. There was nothing exciting here. Some of the buildings showed evidence of patchwork as a result of machine gun damage from Japanese air attacks.³⁵ Also, there were a few piles of debris consisting of burned out trucks and other war material.

After a suitable rest and refueling we were on our way to Kwajalein.³⁶ What a piece of real estate *that* is. It is perfectly flat, has few trees and had a runway that went from one side of the island to the other. Still, we enjoyed the rest stop. Our next stop was Saipan,³⁷ a member of the Mariana Islands.³⁸ This is a much larger

³⁵ Hickam Field, along with a number of our aircraft based there, was heavily damaged during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7,1941. (ED).

³⁶ An atoll in the central part of the Ralik Chain, West Marshall Islands. (ED).

³⁷ Located in the Northern Mariana Islands. (ED).

³⁸ The Mariana Islands include Saipan, Tinian & Guam. The Marianas lie 1,350 miles South of Honshu Island, Japan. (ED).

island with a wide, short runway, and much more militarily developed. A great deal of the development was Army tents.³⁹

This would be our home for some months to come. Except for the markings of war, Saipan was a beautiful island. It is essentially the top of a mountain with ninety nine per cent of it under water. The ocean in this area is probably around thirty thousand feet deep. In fact, the Mariana Trench lies within just a couple of hundred miles of Saipan and is said to be the deepest recorded part of the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁰ Most of Saipan is from fifty to one hundred and fifty feet above the sea. It has one extinct volcano, Mount Tapotchau, which rises to approximately fifteen hundred and fifty feet.⁴¹ There was still a lot of foliage left and the shore line was very rocky and picturesque. The flight crews were housed, eventually, in Quonset Huts⁴² down near the water. We could look across the water and clearly see the island of Tinian three miles away.

There was no time to waste. We soon found ourselves flying on a practice mission. The target was Truk, a small island that while still held by the Japanese,

³⁹ Before the air crews enjoyed the relative comfort of the Quonset Huts, they first had to live in a vast "tent city," where living conditions were less than ideal; especially when it rained! Fortunately, the air crews quickly moved from the tents to Quonset Huts. (ED).

⁴⁰ The deepest place on Earth is the Vitiaz Deep (36,000 feet) in the Mariana Trench near the Southeast Asian Archipelagos. (ED).

⁴¹ Mount Tapotchau is located on central Saipan, and rises to a height of 1,552 feet. (ED).

⁴² A long, wide, steel fabricated building, that resembled an upside down U. Usually, one or two air crews, eleven to twenty-two men, would be housed in each Quonset Hut. Of course, the number of men in each Quonset Hut would vary from time to time. (ED).

had no military value.⁴³ This mission was good for practice but we did not receive a mission credit for it. Our 500th Bomb Group was one of the first groups to become operational, and six days after arriving on Saipan, November 18, 1944, we were off on a mission to Japan. The date was November 24, 1944, and the target was the Nakajima Aircraft Factory located in Tokyo. Thus began for us what was to become a fierce confrontation with a very formidable foe.

The thirty five combat missions that I was credited with, and participated on, have been well documented in other writings,⁴⁴ therefore, only the more memorable incidents or missions that are clearest in my mind will follow. Our assigned bombing altitude on the early missions was about thirty thousand feet.⁴⁵ In reaching this altitude, a terrible strain was placed on the aircraft and a good number of them were forced to drop out, or abort the mission, short of the primary target.

Our crew had two such instances in which we had to abort and we received no mission credits as a result. Whenever we *did* get over the target, however, all hell broke loose. The Japanese Pilots were very aggressive and often would do any thing necessary in order to bring down a B-29. The flak could often be thick and accurate. Our aircraft and crews were stretched to their limits on the long missions to Japan.

⁴³ Truk is a member of the Central Caroline Islands group. (ED).

⁴⁴ See The World War II Combat Diary of Lt. Richard O. Dodds, Pilot, in Appendix A. (ED).

⁴⁵ During the early high altitude missions, bombing results were poor; primarily as a result of the extremely high winds over Japan; winds that we now know are part of the "jet stream." The B-29 crews discovered the existence of the "jet stream." The later, low level altitude missions, would bring excellent bombing results. (ED).

It took seven or eight hours just to get to the target, flying entirely over water with no place to land in an emergency or because of bad weather. Then, when we came close to Japan, the aircraft formations began their climb to high altitude in preparation for the bomb run. Often, our aircraft suffered significant damage as a result of the climb to the high bombing altitudes, such as engine failures, blown superchargers in the engines, fuel transfer system failures, etc., which caused some of the crews to abort. Another problem was evident when you would see an aircraft drop its auxiliary fuel tanks along with its bombs. If the Flight Engineer on such an aircraft had not used all of the fuel from the auxiliary tanks first, then that aircraft was in trouble.

The strain on the aircraft from the missions was evident most of the time. The affected part just quit. In that case, if the crews were lucky, they made it back safely. The strain on the crews, however, was not always so evident. After just a very few missions, with nearly each one of them encountering problems, our Aircraft Commander became ill and was taken off of flight status. He was moved to the base hospital and sometime later we learned that he had been sent to Hawaii. We did not see him again⁴⁶ and very shortly thereafter we had a new Aircraft Commander.⁴⁷ We also lost our CFC⁴⁸ Gunner. After about fifteen or twenty

⁴⁶ Mr. Maples' Aircraft Commander had flown a large number of strenuous missions before entering the B-29 program. He overcame his illness and has lived a long and productive life as of this writing. He and my parents have been in frequent contact over the years. (ED).

⁴⁷ Lieutenant, later Captain, Patrick Calhoun. (ED).

⁴⁸ Central Fire Control. This Gunner*s position was in the rear section of the B-29, in which, also, were located the right and left "blister" Gunners. The CFC Gunner could operate all of the guns on a B-29 by remote control except those in the tail section.
(ED).

missions he had all he could take and refused to fly any more. I do not know what eventually happened to him. The strain of combat flying was clearly beginning to take its toll among the members of our crew.

Early in my involvement, our crew was selected to fly over to Tinian to discuss with the new, incoming crews, our experiences and what it was like to fly these long missions. I, of course, was assigned to talk to a group of Radio Operators. Mostly, all they wanted to know were things like how many fighters we had seen, how much flak we had encountered, had we ever been hit, etc. We did manage to talk a little about procedures but they were clearly a nervous bunch. As Tinian is only a few miles from Saipan, I do not believe we even retracted our landing gear between departure and arrival.

On one of our early missions we were assigned to bomb Iwo Jima,⁴⁹ which was some where around six hundred miles from Saipan and still in Japanese hands. We were to bomb in a prescribed formation designed to cause the most effective destruction. All Aircraft Commanders were instructed to watch the lead aircraft and open their bomb bay doors and drop their bombs when the lead aircraft did so. As the mission proceeded, our Radar Operator⁵⁰ became concerned that the lead aircraft was waiting too long to open its bomb bay doors. He told our Aircraft Commander that he believed we would miss the island with our bombs if we waited

⁴⁹ The center island of the 3 in the Volcano Islands, 660 nautical miles south of Tokyo. (ED).

⁵⁰ Robert D. Cookson. The Radar Operator who replaced Cookson on Mr. Maples* crew was Staff Sergeant Harry Gerson. I located Mr. Gerson in the 1980's when he was living in Philadelphia, PA. My mother, father & I visited with him & his wife afterwards. He passed away some years ago. (ED).

for the lead aircraft to drop its bombs. We went ahead and dropped our bombs with good results. Some of the other planes' bombs, however, went into the ocean.

Wouldn't you know it, as a result of Cookson's action and performance, he was taken off of our crew and assigned to a lead aircraft's crew. As fate would have it, he did not survive the war as his aircraft was lost on a later mission. I guess we all accepted what we had to do and in our own way we tried to make the most of it. We, of course, did not fly every day. We could not take that kind of strain and neither could the aircraft. Some of my free time was taken up visiting different areas of the island.

On one such day I thumbed a ride around the end of the island to the opposite side of the run ways. This would have been a very long hike on foot. The area that I found myself in was held by our Marines. A lot of damage and destruction from the invasion of the island some months before was evident. I saw many discarded trucks, tanks and other heavy weapons and equipment. While I was walking around taking all of this in, I heard some one call my name.

I knew I was mistaken so I paid no attention. A few seconds later a huge Army truck pulled right up to me and the driver said, "hello, Charles Maples." There was no mistake this time. I was very excited as the driver of the truck was "Cokey" Newberry, a long time acquaintance from the same little town I was from, South Norfolk, Virginia. He was in the Marines, and told me that there were six or seven more South Norfolk military men on Saipan that he knew of. There were some in his outfit and others in the Army, etc.

He knew where most of them were, too. We made arrangements to meet again and hopefully to have all of the guys he could contact to join us. Later, several of us

got together and we had a real good time swapping war stories and talking about the town we had left behind. "Cokey" gave me a Japanese bayonet and a clip of Japanese machine gun ammunition. It was a good day. Sadly, however, these items were stolen before I got back to my quarters.

I had stopped at our recreation center on the way back to my Quonset Hut to play a couple of games of table tennis. When I was ready to leave I looked for my bag and it was gone! I thought to myself, all of the miserable bastards in the world are not Japs. During my wanderings around the island I looked over Suicide Cliff, which received its name because of the substantial number of primarily Japanese civilians who flung themselves and, in some cases their children as well, from the cliffs at Morubi Bluff rather than fall into the hands of the US Armed Forces. Sadly, those who had taken their lives and the lives of others in this fashion had been told by the Japanese general commanding their armed forces on the island that they would suffer rape and torture if captured by the Americans. I also saw the principal city of Garapan.⁵¹ I understand that the city had a sugar cane processing plant during peace time. It was now "Off Limits," and the former inhabitants of the city, along with a large number of other homeless Saipan Islanders and Japanese civilians, were quartered in an area known as Camp Susupe, which was protected by our soldiers.

I could not do too much sight seeing because there were still Japanese soldiers hiding out in the hills. Our military personnel stuck close to the well protected areas. There was not that much to see any way as it seemed that every thing above ground was destroyed; the sugar cane factory, the native huts, every thing.

Located on the West coast of Saipan. (ED).

Living conditions were not bad for flight personnel. I guess that about twenty men, more or less, occupied each Quonset Hut. Our bunks were our home and some of us even had room to hang a picture. When it rained, and I mean it really rained, we managed to stay dry. Also, areas of the island were sprayed periodically for insect control. We almost never saw a fly or mosquito. The uniform of the day was whatever we wanted to put on. We seldom had to attend formations or "Pass in Review" ceremonies. Water was a precious commodity but I had no trouble bathing and shaving in a helmet of water. We quickly learned not to shave just before a mission as an oxygen mask on a clean shaven face was a mild form of torture! It is amazing, but with the close living conditions and the constant tension I never saw a fist fight or a serious argument. It seems that we all fell into our place and were content with that. In this respect we were *not* our own enemy.

During our early days on Saipan we experienced air raids several days and nights a week.⁵² Japanese bombers from Iwo Jima would drop their bombs along the flight line and strafe our Quonset Huts. This was both nerve wracking and costly as they were very good at hitting our parked B-29's. It was a real show to watch the anti-aircraft batteries go into action. They were good at bringing down Japanese aircraft Also, the island's loud speakers could be tied into the control tower which was in communication with our P-61 Black Widow fighters.⁵³ At night, this was just like a movie as the radar defense crew on the island would direct a P-61 to an

⁵² See Air Raids Against Saipan, in Appendix D (ED).

⁵³ The P-61, "Black Widow," was used in both day and night fighter roles; in both of which it performed superbly. Heavily armed and having very powerful radar equipment, it was often painted black & was most sinister looking. It flew in both the European and Pacific Theaters of Operation. See Appendix E for two photographs of "Black Widows." (ED).

area where they had a target on their scope. Shortly there after, there would be a bright explosion in the sky and then in a calm voice we could hear the Pilot of the Black Widow say, "scratch one bogey." This scenario would be played out over and over again until the US forces captured Iwo Jima.

As time went on, things began to change somewhat for the better. Most of the guys found ways to relieve their tension. On pay day and for two or three days there after, there were the inevitable card games. Some times they would go on non stop, day and night, mostly until some one won all of the money at stake. Also, there were crap games which ran hour after hour, some times way into the night.

Some way to relieve tension! Others, including myself, spent hours playing solitaire. One day, every body jumped when one of the guys started firing his 45 caliber pistol into his duffel bag. Several guys nearby grabbed him and disarmed him. When things settled down the poor guy said he saw a mouse run behind his duffel bag and he had been out to get him. No mouse was found. This episode clearly demonstrated both the strain the man was under and the danger of being near someone when they explode.

It helped every one's morale when the construction battalions erected a large water tank about eight feet off of the ground, with pull chains connected to shower heads. About six or eight guys could then take showers at one time. Oh, what a shower will do for you when you are hot and sweaty or when you have had a bad day! The food continued to improve and this was a big plus. I will never forget the sign that hung at the entrance of the chow line which stated, "Take what you want and want what you take." I am still influenced today by that philosophy.

One other thing I recall that helped to keep our morale up was the fact that each flight crew made up a softball team. We had a pretty good ball field with a back stop and a good, level playing field. One day our team was playing against Major Fitzgerald's⁵⁴ team. Major Fitzgerald was pitching and yours truly was batting. I will have to tell you like it was. He threw a pretty fast pitch and I connected with it. The ball went clear out of the outfield, over a Quonset Hut and kept going as I trotted slowly around the bases. It made me feel pretty good that day. It must have made an impression on some other folks, too. About forty five years later, at a 73rd Bomb Wing reunion, I saw my Co-Pilot⁵⁵ for the first time since I left Saipan. When we shook hands he said, "well, here is the home run king." I liked it that he remembered a seemingly small, insignificant thing.

As more crews and aircraft arrived the pace began to pick up. It was not long before we had two run ways in operation. In the briefing for our first mission, it was stated that the single run way was eight thousand feet long and was being lengthened every day. It was a good thing because on the take off for that mission we used up all of the black top portion of the run way and ran onto the packed coral. When the Pilot pulled back on the controls to lift off, the tail skid dug into the coral causing big chunks to fly off in every direction. I was sitting in the Navigator's astrodome⁵⁶ during the take off and had a bird's eye view of the loosened coral flying behind us.

⁵⁴ Major Fitzgerald and his crew, including Robert D. Cookson, the original Radar Operator on Mr. Maples' crew, were lost on a mission in March, 1945. (ED).

⁵⁵ Lieutenant Richard O. Dodds. (ED).

⁵⁶ Located behind the upper forward gun turret. From this position, Mr. Maples was an eye-witness to much aerial action. This position was used primarily by the Navigator to take his "star shots" in order to plot the aircraft's position at any given time. (ED).

We were at our maximum load and should have had ten thousand feet of hard surfaced run way. When I look back now I wonder how we ever got airborne. Eventually, we had two nice, wide long run ways from which to operate. Operating from a single run way was a real gamble. The aircraft would take off at one minute intervals. On the way to Japan the Pilots could adjust their speed and altitude so as to rendezvous just off the coast; then the aircraft would form into groups and proceed to the target.

The next part of the mission was to get home safely. After bombs away, all of our aircraft were leaving the target at about the same time, which meant that they would arrive at Saipan at about the same time. Some aircraft were damaged, some had injured aboard, all were low on fuel and all were looking for a way to land on that single run way. The result of one aircraft crashing on the one run way and therefore closing it down to all of the other returning aircraft would have been a catastrophe of the highest magnitude. It was bad enough just to attempt entering the traffic pattern of circling aircraft and maintain an interval for a safe landing. Having two run ways lessened a potentially disastrous situation considerably. On one occasion I remember, a Pilot, unable to get a safe interval from the aircraft ahead of him, was ordered by the control tower to go around and try his landing approach again. He reportedly told the tower that he did not have enough fuel for another landing attempt and was coming in any way. He landed on the taxi strip, crashed into a fuel tanker truck, turned it over and demolished his aircraft. No one could explain why there was no fire, no explosion and only minor injuries to the crew. We could have used three run ways but there was no where on Saipan to add a third one.

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One bright, sunny morning, there was a mission on and the aircraft were taking off. Our crew was not scheduled for this one. When we were not flying I never went up on the flight line but I could hear the engines moving the heavily loaded B-29*s down the run way. I was puttering around our Quonset Hut when the grapevine reported that they were looking for a Radio Operator and several Gunners. The reason for this, I learned, was that an aircraft had developed a problem as it was attempting to take off. The warning signal came on and the Pilot decided to abort the take-off. He slammed on the brakes and was able to turn off of the run way at the last taxi strip. The word was that in stopping the aircraft the tires and brakes heated up badly and the resulting odor and smoke from this filled the aircraft. A quick check of all systems did not indicate any problem so the Pilot decided to taxi around for another take-off attempt. It was at this point that several of the Gunners and the Radio Operator said they wanted off the aircraft. They reasoned that if the same thing were to happen again the tires and brakes would not be able to stop the aircraft. So, that is why they were looking for replacements for those crew members. Well, any way, that was the story circulating around the area at the time. I did not question the accuracy of the story and strategically disappeared for a few hours.

One thing that seemed to help every one's morale was the "nose art"⁵⁷ that was appearing on the aircraft. Also, a sense of pride was instilled in the crew when a name was added to the aircraft. Small, stenciled bombs were also painted on the aircraft to indicate the number of missions flown. Our crew got caught up in the

⁵⁷ See Appendix A for both a drawing of the "Lady" by Mr. Maples, and close up photographs of the nose art that was on "Draggin Lady." The nose art on the B-29s was removed in the Spring of 1945; supposedly because of complaints from the chaplains and nurses. Why? The art work could be very graphic with regard to certain subject matter. Also, see Appendix E for photographs of the art work on other World War II B-29's. (ED).

process and we had an artist⁵⁸ paint a beautiful, scantily clad likeness of "Miss Lace," from the comic strip "Male Call," by Milton Caniff,⁵⁹ on both sides of the nose of our B-29.⁶⁰

We were very pleased as the artist had done a good job. Our aircraft was named "Draggin Lady," as the result of a late return to Saipan from a mission after the other aircraft in our group had landed. The story is that some one spotted our aircraft coming in and made a comment some thing to the effect of, "well, here comes the Lady, Draggin in at last."⁶¹ The name seemed appropriate and we had it neatly printed underneath the reclining figure of the Lady. We flew a few missions on "Draggin Lady," and it was not long before she was grounded in order to undergo an engine change. Now, when a new engine was installed it had to undergo a breaking-in period. This was accomplished by flying the aircraft around for about four hours with the other three engines doing most of the work and the new engine running at reduced power.

⁵⁸ Many of the "artists" who painted the "nose art" on WW II aircraft were quite good. Some of them had been employed as sign painters or as illustrators for newspapers and other types of publications before the war. (ED).

⁵⁹ A comic strip writer who was a particular favorite of soldiers in World War II, as his characters helped build morale with their comical portrayals and military-based themes. (ED).

⁶⁰ It was somewhat unusual for "nose art" to be painted on both sides of an aircraft as the artist doing the work may have very well charged more for creating the same art work twice. Mr. Maples does not remember the name of the artist who painted the art work on his B-29. (ED).

⁶¹ A number of years ago, I edited a story written by Raymond Rendina, the Tail Gunner on "Draggin Lady's" alternate crew; in which he told the circumstances under which the aircraft's name came into being. A copy of the story can be found in Appendix A. (ED).

This exercise was called "slow-timing" the new engine. Nobody enjoyed this, there fore, we did not mind when an alternate crew was delegated to take "Draggin Lady" up for the slow-timing routine. We heard that the flip of a coin, or some other scientific method, was used to determine whether our crew or the alternate crew was to fly the aircraft on that day, February 23,1945.⁶²

Usually there were some military personnel hanging around the flight area hoping to catch a ride on a B-29. Such was the case on this day and several non-flyers were issued a parachute in order that they might "hop" a ride on our aircraft for the slow-timing flight Our aircraft then took off and immediately developed a problem with one of its engines. The Pilots began to circle back to the island and requested permission to land. As the aircraft, still over the water, approached the run way, a second engine developed a problem and the aircraft crashed just off shore in about six feet of water.⁶³

Several people on board were killed.⁶⁴ As fate would have it, our crew was saved for another time. I understand that this incident with our aircraft put an end to the

⁶² I have seen the date of the crash in more than one publication as having been on 2/27/45. However, a copy of the AAF Inventory Loss Card, a copy of which can be found in Appendix A, clearly indicates 2/23/45 as being correct. (ED).

⁶³ It is believed that several propeller governors failed in quick succession which resulted in such sudden loss of power that the Pilots were unable to control the aircraft. See Appendix A for a photograph of the aircraft in the water after the crash, along with other data pertaining to the tragedy. "Draggin Lady" had flown 12 combat missions as of the time of the crash. (ED).

⁶⁴ Both Pilots, Lt Robert E. Engle and Lt. Glenn D. Pavey, and an unknown Navy passenger along for the ride. The Flight Engineer, Dooley Rogers, suffered a serious back injury and was returned to the US. He is still attending 73rd Bomb Wing reunions as of this writing. (ED).

free rides by non-flying personnel. What with the strafing and bombing of our area by the enemy, equipment failure, aircraft crashing while attempting to land, aircraft ditching and a host of other problems, it was very evident that flying over the target was not *all* we had to be concerned about. Eventually, we received a replacement B-29 that had been named "Booze Hound."⁶⁵ Captain George Booze and his crew originally brought this aircraft to Saipan. "Booze Hound" also had the tail designation Z Square 6;⁶⁶ the same one that had been on Draggin Lady." The name and art work that were on "Booze Hound" must have been removed by the time we started flying it as I do not recall having seen any thing painted on the aircraft other than our 73rd Bombardment Wing's standard "ball and spear" insignia.⁶⁷ Our crew also flew some missions in B-29s belonging to other crews until we received "Booze Hound."

One morning, just before day break, we were getting ready to board our aircraft for another mission. Suddenly, the aircraft right next to us developed a malfunction in its lower rear gun turret and the guns began to fire continually. They fired until the gun barrels became so hot that they turned red and the shells began to explode in the turret. Luckily, the turret was slightly elevated so the shells went harmlessly into the hills. However, when the shells began to explode in the turret from the heat,

⁶⁵ See Appendix B for a photograph of, and other information pertaining to, "Booze Hound." (ED).

⁶⁶ The Z Square 6 painted on the tails of the aircraft noted, identified them as belonging to the 500th Bombardment Group. Z Square 6 would have been aircraft number six in the 881st Bombardment Squadron. (ED).

⁶⁷ After the art work was ordered to be removed some time in the Spring of 1945, the 73rd Wing adopted an insignia known as the "ball and spear." It depicted a long spear piercing a large ball with wings on it. The aircraft's name could then be printed within the boundaries of the "spear." (ED).

that was another story and our whole crew scattered and sought cover behind our landing gear and behind the truck that brought us up to the flight line. *Any where* seemed to be better than no where.

As stated before, our concerns seemed to have no end. I remember on one of our daylight missions we had a load of five hundred pound bombs. We flew in a group and dropped a pretty good pattern. AH went well after our drop until the Pilot called for a check of the bomb bays. The exchange over the aircraft's intercom went some thing like this: "Rear Gunners, is it OK to close bomb doors?" "Roger, rear bomb bay clear." "Radio Operator, is the forward bomb bay clear?" "Negative, negative, do not close forward bomb bay doors."

The hatch to the forward bomb bay was located right next to the Radio Operator's position, so I could just swivel around in my seat and look through the plexiglass window and see all of the bomb racks. On this occasion, the last bomb on the rear rack⁶⁸ on the Pilot's side of the aircraft had slid all of the way down the rack but did not release. It had jammed itself downward at about a fifteen degree angle. What to do? I do not remember if I volunteered or was appointed to help the Bombardier⁶⁹ clear the problem. Anyway, I opened the hatch and went out into the bomb bay. It was very cold and the noise from the wind was so loud that one could easily become disoriented. I held on for dear life and inched my way around to the

^w The B-29 has twin bomb bays; one located in front and the other behind the wings. The bombs are released alternately from each bomb bay in order to maintain the center of gravity. In this case, the bomb that jammed was in the front bomb bay on the left side of the aircraft (ED).

⁶⁹ The Bombardier on Mr. Maples' B-29 passed away a number of years ago. I located his son's law office years ago in CA & requested that he call me. He never has. (ED).

bomb rack. There was a narrow ledge about six inches wide on which I stood to do this.⁷⁰ The safety wire and propeller were still in place so the bomb was not armed. I held onto the rack and pushed and shoved on the bomb but it did not budge. Finally, I stepped up on the bomb and began jumping up and down and it let go. At about the moment the bomb fell free, the Bombardier had just reached the hatch preparing to enter the bomb bay. I guess it had been a long trip from his position. Any how, I gave him a thumbs up and he relayed the signal to close the bomb bay doors.

The noise out in the bomb bay was absolutely baffling. What a relief it was to me when that bomb let go. I felt so good that I just can not describe it here. A question that I have always asked myself has been, "what took the Bombardier so long to travel about twenty feet in order to have been of some possible assistance to me?" We probably could not have made it back to Saipan with the tremendous drag on the aircraft resulting from the open bomb bay doors. If we could have made it back, we most probably would not have received permission to land. I do not recall any mention of this incident during the interrogation session following the mission. It sure made me wonder that had it been the Bombardier who kicked the bomb out, he probably would have been awarded a DFC.⁷¹ But that is OK. I have rarely talked about this incident and my reward is that I can sit here and write about it and pass it on to my family.

⁷⁰ Unless you have actually been inside the bomb bay of a B-29, and I have, you cannot visualize the precarious position that Mr. Maples occupied as he proceeded to kick the bomb free. (ED).

⁷¹ Distinguished Flying Cross. One of our nation's highest awards for heroism in aerial flight. A number of individuals received the award in World War II for doing exactly what Mr. Maples did in the bomb bay of his B-29. See Appendix C for a description of the medal and a summary of its history. (ED).

My old nemesis, the Gunner in the rear section of our aircraft, continued to show his authority and let us all know that he out ranked us. On one occasion, shortly after landing from a fourteen or fifteen hour mission, he informed us that the following morning we, all enlisted crew members, would meet on the flight line to clean the aircraft's guns. This, of course, included me. I told him that I was not going to clean any guns. He did not like my attitude one bit and said, "we'll see about that." Shortly there after, I had the opportunity to speak with our Pilot.⁷² I brought up the subject of cleaning the guns. I made the following defense for my refusal to clean the guns: 1. The guns were not my equipment and I was not responsible for them. 2. I did not ask any one else on the crew to help me maintain my radio gear. 3. The Radio Operator was required to monitor assigned frequencies from take off to landing. This did not allow me to sleep on the way to and from the target 4. There was no one on board the aircraft to relieve me on long flights such as Pilot for the Co-Pilot, Co-Pilot for the Flight Engineer, Navigator for the Radar Operator, four Gunners on board; one could observe while the other three slept; and finally, there was the Bombardier who probably worked thirty to forty minutes on the entire mission. The Pilot agreed with me and said he would speak to the Gunner on this matter. As a result of my conversation with our Pilot, I was never required to clean the first gun. Case closed for good.

With regard to our Pilot, whose name was Captain Patrick Calhoun, and with whom I enjoyed an easy but professional rapport, an interesting episode took place one time on the aircraft as we were returning to Saipan from one of our missions. Captain Calhoun called me on the intercom and requested that I come to his

Captain Patrick Calhoun. (ED).

position on the aircraft. I said to myself, "now what is all of this about?" Captain Calhoun was a fellow who could be full of surprises as our crew was to learn on a couple of occasions during our missions. Any way, when I got to his position he was getting out of his seat and indicated to me that I was to take his place. I said to myself again, "now what is all of this about?" I did not ask Captain Calhoun any questions, however, and settled into his position. Then I strapped myself into the safety harness and proceeded to fly our aircraft for the next twenty minutes; all under the watchful eye of our Co-Pilot, of course. I can truthfully tell my family that not only did I fly OJL a B-29,1 alsoilejy. a B-29!

Our adventures continued, and I recall that on another mission returning from Japan I picked up an SOS.⁷³ An aircraft was calling the base station on Saipan but was getting no answer. I asked and received permission from our Pilot to answer the distress call. We communicated back and forth and then I contacted the base station. I gave them the position of the aircraft in distress, its speed, altitude and approximate time of ditching, all of which had been given to me. When we landed a jeep was waiting for us. An officer told us that he wanted the Pilot, Navigator and Radio Operator of our aircraft immediately. Off we went to Headquarters. Once there I was questioned by a Colonel. He read my log, shook his head and said there was no way the aircraft that contacted me could have been at the location I last noted in my log. He said, "you must have made a mistake." I looked him square in the eyes and said, "there is no mistake; the information in my log regarding the

⁷³ The first recorded use of the international call for distress, SOS, was used by the Radio Operator on the Titanic, on the morning of April 15, 1912. SOS looks like this:

... ____ ... Over the radio, it would be sent by tapping three quick dots, followed by three paused dashes and three more quick dots. (ED).

aircraft in distress is exactly what was sent to me."⁷⁴ The Colonel could see that he could not get me to change my story and the de-briefing ended. I do not know what aircraft and crew it was as there were a number of aircraft that did not come back from that mission.

Our most memorable day light mission occurred on February 19,1945. This was a high altitude mission. The target was the Nakajima Aircraft Factory located in Tokyo.⁷⁵ On the way into the target, Japanese fighters swarmed all over us. Our formation had about forty fighter attacks. In our four aircraft element, one was shot down,⁷⁶ one was rammed,⁷⁷ and another was badly shot up by the attacking Japanese fighters.⁷⁸ I saw the Japanese fighter ram the B-29. He came head on through our formation trying to ram one of us. He went through the formation, pulled up and dove down on the B-29. There was a huge explosion resulting in total destruction of both aircraft.⁷⁹ The B-29 in our formation that had been badly hit

⁷⁴ Mr. Maples is very sure that he made no mistake with regard to the position of the aircraft in distress. The downed aircraft and crew were never found. (ED).

⁷⁵ Tokyo is located on the Northwest shore of Tokyo Bay, Southeast Honshu Island, Japan. Tokyo's target identification number was 357. A number of missions had to be flown against Tokyo before the Nakajima Aircraft Factory was successfully put out of action. (ED).

⁷⁶ Rouse's crew. (ED).

⁷⁷ Samuelson's crew, flying in Z Square 12. Samuelson's crew normally flew Z Square 19, named "Snafu¹ Perfort." (ED).

⁷⁸ Captain James Pearson's B-29.1 interviewed Mr. Pearson by telephone on 4/1/99. (ED).

⁷⁹ The only survivor of Samuelson's crew was the Radar Operator, Robert Evans. He was captured and spent the rest of the war in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp. (ED). I interviewed Mr. Evans by telephone on 4/1/99/ (ED).

started to fall behind the rest of our aircraft. The Japanese fighters immediately began to press their attacks on that aircraft. Our crew elected to go to the aid of the crippled B-29 and together, their crew and ours, we succeeded in saving the aircraft and we all made it safely out of the target area.⁸⁰ When we returned to Saipan and landed, we blew two tires on one side of the aircraft and "ground looped"⁸¹ near the edge of the run way. When the bomb bay doors opened, I dove out and hit the ground running. Our entire crew received the Distinguished Flying Cross for our part in helping to save an aircraft in distress.⁸²

The long missions continued and in the Spring of 1945, I found myself participating on what history would later record as having been one of the most significant missions flown by our B-29's in World War II, and would come to be known as the March 9th-10th Tokyo Fire Raid. On this mission over three hundred B-29's loaded with incendiaries struck the Japanese capital.⁸³ We were not in

⁸⁰ The B-29 that Mr. Maples' crew came to the aid of over Tokyo made it back to Saipan after being escorted back by Major Fitzgerald's crew. It crash landed and broke in half after careening down the runway. With some minor cuts and bruises, the entire crew survived their ordeal and later posed for a photograph in front of their wrecked aircraft. The name of this B-29 was "Holy Joe," Z Square 15, Captain James Pearson and crew. (ED).

⁸¹ A term used to describe how an aircraft will swing rapidly around out of control when landing with the tires blown on one side. (ED).

⁸² See Appendix C for a copy of Mr. Maples' Distinguished Flying Cross citation. His other awards include the Air Medal w/4 Oak Leaf Clusters, Asiatic/Pacific Theater Ribbon w/3 Bronze Stars, WW II Victory Medal, Good Conduct Medal & 2 Presidential Unit Citations. (ED).

⁸³ For graphic descriptions of the March 9th-10th Tokyo Fire Raid, along with excellent descriptions of the devastating firestorm created by the dropping of the incendiary bombs, see the following: "Before the Bomb: How America approached the end of the Pacific War," by John D. Chappell, 105-108; "Hiroshima's Shadow," Kai Bird & Lawrence Lifschultz, Editors, 55-57; "The Making of the Atomic

formation as each crew had been instructed to bomb as close as possible to the fires on the ground that had been set by our Pathfinder aircraft⁸⁴ which had preceded the main strike force. This was a night mission flown at low altitude, five to eight thousand feet, and it was a totally new experience for us.

We had been warned in briefing that the thermal effect resulting from the raging fires on the ground could cause real problems for us. We were told not to fly into the rising smoke. Well, as soon as we got out of the search lights, Captain Calhoun flew our aircraft right into the smoke! I never learned why he took that course of action. Perhaps he had no choice as there were other aircraft close by all around us. At any rate, our aircraft quickly filled up with smoke and some very strong odors. It was a combination of burning wood and burning human flesh. It was sickening to say the least. Our aircraft was rocked around as if it were a toy. We were lifted almost straight up several thousand feet. Captain Calhoun and our Co-Pilot⁸⁵ were having considerable trouble maintaining control. I do not know at what point our bombs were released. Other crews experienced similar problems.

Fourteen aircraft were lost on this raid. This was the last time we flew through any smoke. The damage inflicted upon Tokyo on this mission was enormous. Two

Bomb," by Richard Rhodes, 598-600; and "Flames Over Tokyo," by E. Bartlett Kerr, *passim*. (ED).

⁸⁴ The Pathfinder aircraft, varying in numbers from mission to mission, would mark the target area with a large burning "X" on the ground made with incendiary bombs. (ED).

⁸⁵ Lieutenant Richard O. Dodds. I located Mr. Dodds living in CA a number of years ago. He and his wife have attended a number of 73rd Bomb Wing reunions. After the war, he flew aerial tankers in the Air Force and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. (ED).

hundred and sixty thousand buildings were destroyed, eighty three thousand people were killed and over one million others were left with no place to call home.⁸⁶ This was our most memorable night mission.

AH of our missions were nerve wracking and usually the potential for disaster was never far away. Such was the situation we encountered on one of our low level incendiary raids. This type of mission was usually a maximum effort consisting of three hundred or more aircraft and conducted using strategies much different from the daylight raids. For instance, all of our guns were removed and the Gunners were left behind except for one who came along with us to act as an observer. We also carried a heavier load of bombs than was usual as a result of leaving our guns and Gunners back on Saipan.

When our formation neared Japan, I would crawl through the tunnel over the bomb bays and enter the Gunners' compartment located in the mid section of the aircraft and act as a second observer with the one Gunner that we had brought along. One of us would be on each side of the aircraft in one of the gun blisters.⁸⁷ Such was the situation in which I found myself on this particular mission. As we came over the target there was a great deal of activity. Search lights were looking for us, anti-aircraft fire was streaking through the sky, other B-29's were flying very close to us with little difference in assigned altitude, etc.

⁸⁶ **This one mission to Tokyo resulted in more Japanese civilian deaths than occurred in either of the atomic bomb explosions at Hiroshima or Nagasaki. (ED).**

⁸⁷ **The outward bulging windows on each side of the B-29 near which the left and right Gunners sat by their gun-sights, and fired their guns by remote control, were nick-named "blisters." (ED).**

At one point I became aware, as did Douglas Bullock,⁸⁸ the Gunner whom we had brought along on this mission, of a particular stream of tracers that were tracking our aircraft. The Japanese anti-aircraft battery on the ground had our altitude figured right on the button and their fire was getting ever closer. Bullock looked over at me and hollered, "Charlie, I think they have got us this time." I had to agree with him as it looked like with the next burst of shells we would be history. Then, for some unknown reason the tracers stopped tracking us and seemed to be firing steadily at the same location behind us. We could not account for this but a good guess was that another B-29 had suddenly become the target or a second plausible explanation was that a B-29 had dropped a batch of aluminum rope which would have confused the enemy anti-aircraft battery's radar. I will write more about the dropping of aluminum rope shortly.

Any way, we dropped our bombs on the target and headed for home, just like in the movies. Well, not *quite* like the movies. Every mission left its mark on me and I did a lot of maturing during my thirty five missions. One philosophy that grew on me and changed my whole outlook on life is that "some things in life are important and some things are not important Learn to know the difference and act accordingly."

Each mission presented us with an endless variety of problems. On another low level night mission we were caught in the enemy's search lights for a time. Where those lights were, so was the ground fire being directed. We were tracked for several minutes and shot at by what looked like 40 mm. fire. Sound familiar? One of my

⁸⁸ I located Mr. Bullock some years ago. He and my father have communicated by telephone several times. He is retired from the Boeing Aircraft Company; the company that produced the B-29. (ED).

side jobs on the aircraft was to release aluminum rope designed to confuse the enemy ground radar in just such a situation as we found ourselves on this mission. I dumped several batches through the chute right behind my chair. It seemed to do the trick and soon we were out of the search lights and the guns on the ground seemed to be firing at the aluminum clusters I had dropped.

On another night mission I perched myself in the Navigator's astrodome. I could see every thing that was going on from up there. What I saw at one point that night over the target nearly gave me a heart attack. I looked up right into the open bomb bays of a B-29 drifting slowly over us! He was caught in search lights and surely did not see us. I called our Pilot and gave him this information and he made a slight turn, there by taking us out of danger. That B-29 was only about one hundred feet above us!

It was always exciting. Every mission usually had its share of possibilities for disaster. For example, on one occasion after a low level night mission, we were well out to sea heading to Saipan, or at least we were well out to sea heading *some where*. I noticed that the Navigator⁸⁹ seemed agitated and busier than usual. He took, or at least tried to take, a fix on the stars in order to establish our position. The weather was not all that good and he was clearly concerned. He asked me if I could get him a bearing for Saipan. I said, "yes I can, but what is wrong, don't you know where we are?" He replied, "I just want to make sure of our position." I then contacted the base station on Saipan and asked them for the heading we should fly in order to reach home base. After receiving the heading from the base station I gave it to the Navigator, and in a couple of minutes I heard him tell the Pilot to change his course

⁸⁹ I located the Navigator, Frank Merrick, some years ago in the Detroit, Michigan area. He was a retired police officer. He is now deceased. (ED).