

"Draggin' Lady"

The Story Of The Naming Of A B-29 Superfortress

BY

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Like many other World War II bombers, the B-29 that my crew shared with another crew had a name and art work painted on the sides of her nose. Her name, "Draggin' Lady," was chosen as a result of the circumstances under which she brought our crew home to Saipan from a mission to Nagoya, Japan in January, 1945. Although I cannot remember the exact date, I do know that the following events took place on either the January 3rd or January 14th mission to Nagoya. This is how I remember the mission that is burned into my memory:

As we neared the I.P., an oil line broke in the number two engine and oil started flowing out and onto the top surface of the left wing where it began to build up and freeze. As we were in a tight formation and had to keep up with the rest of our planes, the pilot elected not to attempt to feather the prop. By the time we had completed the bomb run the prop had become a "runaway," and the flight engineer could not feather it.

We started to lose altitude and air speed as the wing was getting heavier and heavier from the weight of the freezing oil. The sky was full of Japanese fighters and they soon started to come after our smoking aircraft. At this point several B-29s boxed us in and began to escort us out to sea. The fighters finally left us and we continued homeward. After having established contact with a Dumbo¹ we prepared for a possible ditching.

As darkness approached I could see sparks coming out of the propeller shaft on the damaged engine and from my seat it was an eerie sight. As we continued to descend the oil started to run off of, and the sparks started small fires on, the wing. Pretty soon the entire surface of the wing burst into flames and at about the same time the propeller shaft froze and the

1. A B-29 used to search for downed crews. Supplied with life rafts and emergency supplies, the Dumbo could drop these items to crews that had been forced to ditch and radio their position to other Dumbos and/or to Saipan.

prop twisted off, flying up and away from our aircraft. I watched as the spinning, burning prop disappeared into the darkness. Eventually the fires on the wing went out and the pilot, by way of the intercom, instructed all crew members to assume their respective ditching positions as he and the flight engineer could not stop losing altitude and air speed. The pilot then instructed the crew to start throwing out everything not attached to the ship.

We threw out our flak suits, parachutes and things I cannot even remember now. The pilot had been in radio contact with one after another of the Dumbos and we finally leveled off several thousand feet above the Pacific. The radio operator tossed out some automatic signaling equipment and we all waited in our ditching positions for the pilot's signal that would indicate we were about to ditch.

We rode out this nightmare for hours, with the pilot and flight engineer transferring fuel to and from the various tanks in order to stay airborne. Somehow we made it back to Saipan which we found completely blacked out. Unknown to us at the time, a P-61 Black Widow night fighter had been on our tail trying to establish radio contact as we had approached the island. He did not fire on us because we had our wing tip lights on.

All of a sudden the whole runway lit up. As we came in for the landing each engine died out one by one as our wheels touched down. As we rolled down the runway all of our engines were gone, and the pilot and co-pilot were pulling on the mechanical brakes in order to stop the aircraft. After the aircraft came to a halt we climbed out, kissed the ground and were taken to de-briefing.

Once there we were allowed to erase Z Square Six² from the M.I.A. Board. Later, a lot of discussion took place with regard to coming up with a name

2. Our aircraft's tail markings were painted on in a perpendicular fashion with the letter "Z" on top, followed underneath by a hollow square and then the numeral 6; all of which indicated that she was a 500th Bomb Group ship. The other three bomb groups in the 73rd Bomb Wing were the 497th (A-Square), 498th (T-Square) and 499th (V-Square).

for the aircraft. Someone suggested the name "Draggin' Lady" as we all felt that we had dragged both the aircraft and ourselves home. The two airplane commanders, representing the primary and alternate crews, must have agreed on this name. The name "Draggin' Lady" was painted next to a scantily clad, reclining female figure on both sides of the nose soon thereafter.

In appearance, the lady on our aircraft resembled Miss Lace, a character in Milton Caniff's widely read cartoon strip, Male Call. Tragically, shortly after the name and nose art were painted on, "Draggin' Lady," serial number 42-24694, was lost after she crashed off Saipan as a result of engine failure that occurred during a test flight in February, 1945.