1 Mar 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"1 March 45. In preparation for a major strike, a Wing Training mission was flown this morning; FO-54. This Group dispatched 2 combat squadrons of 9 planes each. Each aircraft will drop 2 x 500# GP bombs on Rota from 11,000 ft. Major Parsons [500th Group Ops Officer] participated."

This mission was primarily for the new replacement crews which had arrived recently, including the Althoff crew of the 881st and the Haas crew of the 882nd, but some veteran crews such as the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, participated. The purpose was to provide practice in navigation, formation flying and bombing. Details of this mission were not found in official records, but based on comments in individual diaries, the planes took off around 0720 and first flew individually to Truk Atoll, about 800 miles southeast of Saipan. There the B-29’s assembled into formation, then returned to the Marianas in formation and bombed Rota Island.

By all accounts, everything went well. Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew turned 22 today and his birthday present was to get to fly for 6 hours and 40 minutes on this practice mission. The crew flew Z-35, "Pacific Queen", and had no problems. They practiced squadron, group and wing formations before finally dropping their bombs on the unused runway on still Japanese-occupied Rota.

The formation got back to Saipan at about 1400. After cleaning up and getting some chow, there wasn't much time for the crews to rest because there was an 1800 briefing for a real mission tomorrow. At that briefing they learned that their target was going to be the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory, Target 357, in Musashino northwest of Tokyo. The 73rd Wing and the 500th Group had been to this target several times before and it was a tough one.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 March
   Capt. Joseph J. McConnell, Squadron Surgeon, was put on temporary duty to the 148th General Hospital to assist in the medical and surgical care of casualties from Iwo Jima." [The invasion of Iwo Jima began on 19 Feb. Casualties were very heavy among the Marines (and Navy support personnel). This operation was understandably of great interest to the B-29 crews in the Marianas. - JEB]

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 March: About half of the crews were flying a practice mission so the quiz on target study given the day before was reviewed. Started spreading dirt and filling holes around the [S-2] office [area]. Painted the front display wall. Briefing at 1830."

The Clinkscales crew of the 883rd flew a search mission today in Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", for a missing B-29 crew from another Group. They were in the air for almost 14 hours but apparently did not find them. Right gunner Dick Wing from San Jose, California, wrote in his diary later that the downed crew was found and picked up by a destroyer.

2 Mar 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 March
1st Lt. James M. Pearson's crew left for rest camp on Oahu. Sgt. Richard M. Landsman left for 90 day recreational D.S. [detached service] in the United States." [The Pearson crew was the one that brought a badly shot up Z-11 back from Tokyo on the night of 19 Feb and crash landed into a 497th plane off the runway. - JEB]

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 March: Mission cancelled. No ground school today. Completed oiling of the floors and changed the displays. Combat officers beat the Staff officers 5 to 4 in twelve innings."

The mission to Musashino had been postponed due to bad weather. Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew recorded in his diary that it rained hard during the night. The postponement gave the crews a double benefit. First, they got to sleep late instead of getting up at 0430. Second, they got to eat the excellent breakfast normally prepared on mission days – fresh eggs with real butter. To Weber, they "tasted mighty good."

With some time to catch up on things, the Haas and Gillert crews of the 882nd Squadron went up to base finance to collect their per diem, apparently their travel pay from Herington, Kansas, to Saipan. Weber got $34.25 for the per diem and $101 for his regular pay, plus $150 which was sent home. Weber noted that as a 2/Lt on foreign service and with flight pay he now earned $268.50 a month. The extra money was welcome.

This afternoon the Haas (882nd), Althoff (881st) and Fitzgerald (881st) crews learned that they and other crews would be participating in another training mission to Rota tomorrow. Apparently the bad weather between Saipan and Japan was expected to continue for another day.

Don Weber had still received no mail from home and it was beginning to bother him.

3 Mar 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"3 March Group training mission consisting of 21 A/C paid a visit to Rota this morning. A couple of bombs were dropped and the ships were back in the hardstands by 1200."

Both the Althoff crew of the 881st Squadron and the Haas crew of the 882nd participated in this training mission, as well as the veteran Fitzgerald crew of the 881st. Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew got up about 0600, donned his flight suit and went to breakfast. Briefing for the mission was at 0700, take-off about 0830. Bomb load was a small number of incendiaries to be deposited on the already heavily pockmarked runway on Rota Island between Saipan and Guam. But first the group practiced assembly and formation flying by meeting at Anatahan Island north of Saipan and then flying together to a point west of Rota, then turning east and hitting the island. The whole exercise lasted only a little over two hours.

Weber was happy because after AC Otto Haas took the plane up to 12,000 feet and leveled off, he let Weber fly her the rest of the way, in #4 position of #3 element of the lead squadron. It was always good to fly the plane.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"3 March: Office partition painted. Officer Call at 1315 hours. General O'Donnel [sic] addressed the officers and endeavored to explain the rotation plan, censorship, promotion policy. Practice mission flown. Briefing at 2330 hours for Mission 28."

2/Lt Don Weber of the 882nd was among the officers in O'Donnell's audience. It was his first opportunity to see the commanding general.

S/Sgt Jack Heffner of the 881st Squadron had become an orphan of sorts. He had originally been radar operator on the McNamer crew, and that was fine, until McNamer was reassigned to Wing and the crew broken
up on 9 Feb. That meant Heffner had to find a new home. He thought he’d found one with the Ray Taylor crew flying as left gunner, which he was willing to do in order to get his quota of missions in, but the command would not reclassify him because trained radar operators were too valuable. So Heffner tried a new home as radar operator on the Pearson crew and flew a couple of missions with them, including the nearly fatal one of 19 Feb. But it looked like that was not going to become a permanent arrangement either. Yesterday the Pearson crew left for Hawaii for a well deserved rest leave... but Heffner was not on the orders. That's strange because it was as a direct result of the 19 Feb incident that the crew had been given the rest leave. But Heffner had somehow been overlooked. Well, as I'm sure Jack Heffner would agree, life isn't fair. Anyway, here he was again all by himself. Then today Heffner was put on DS (Detached Service) to Wing as a radar instructor. That's the way it goes in the Army. The 500th had obviously been tasked to supply a body with the requisite qualifications and Heffner was available.

At 1630 today the crews got the news that the mission to Musashino that had been postponed twice already was on for tonight. Actually, it would be a daylight mission for tomorrow but take-off would be tonight, so as to put the bombers over the target early in the day. Consequently, the mission briefing would be at the unusual time of 2330, which meant the crews would have to get up at about 2230. This would the first combat mission as a crew for the Althoff crew of the 881st, the Haas crew of the 882nd, and other new replacement crews. They had time to catch a little sleep if they could, but first the gunners had to go up to the line and check their guns.

4 Mar 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing flew another high-altitude, precision strike against Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant in Musashino near Tokyo. However, there would be a tactical change this time in the hope of fooling the enemy. The B-29's would take off at night, so as to arrive over the target much earlier than before. Because of the night take-off, there would be no attempt to form up by squadrons or groups. Each plane was to fly individually to the Wing Assembly Point about 100 miles off the coast of Japan. By that time it would be daylight and the planes would assemble there into formations and proceed to Japan. If an aircraft was unable to find its own squadron or group formation, it was to join any formation. Planes unable to locate any friendly planes were to proceed to Japan individually and bomb the last resort target, the coastal city of Hamamatsu.

The 500th Bomb Group contributed 24 planes to this mission, plus two planes to act as Super Dumbos (comms and rescue aircraft) for the entire Wing. The 24 attack planes were nominally divided into two combat squadrons. Leading the Group and the second squadron was to be Col John B. Montgomery, XXI Bomber Command Chief of Staff, flying with Maj Robert Fitzgerald and crew in Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque". Leading the first squadron would be Lt Col William McDowell, flying with Capt Vance Black and crew in Z-48.

The participating planes and crews were:

First squadron
Z-48, Black/McDowell
Z-47, "Adam's Eve", Adams
Z-54, Gregg
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Holmes
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Cheney
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-26, Limpp
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Sasser

Second squadron
Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque", Fitzgerald
The 500th took off third in the Wing order, between 0141 and 0153. That is, except for three planes from the first squadron which were delayed due to problems. Two of these were minor and quickly fixed, and those planes took off immediately after the second squadron, at 0154. Z-53, however, had a more serious problem. While making her take-off run, one of the life rafts popped out of its compartment in the fuselage above the wing. The crew had to abort the take-off and taxi back to have another life raft installed. This took some time, but Z-53 finally got off, at 0234.

Bomb load for this mission was 13 x 500 lb General Purpose bombs for most planes. Two planes carried 14 of these bombs and four planes carried only 10.

The planning for this mission included many small but important details. The 500th staff incorporated many of these into a page of “Pilot Hints” for use of the crews.

//Begin page//

500th Bomb Gp FO #61
SAIPAN Mission 28
4 March 45

PILOT HINTS

1. Taxi to runway indicated by Aldis lamp located at West end of runway "B".

2. Take-off with formation lights on. Flight leaders only will turn on recognition lights before take-off. Landing lights for take-off is [sic] optional, although recommended. Take off at one minute intervals.

3. Assemble in flights while on course to Wing assembly, if possible. (CAS to target 195)

4. Don't test fire until light.

5. Turn off all lights at day-break.

6. Start climb at approximately 30 degrees 45 minutes N.

7. Assemble at 27,000 feet. Group leader will have nose wheel down and will be the only plane transmitting - - - - - Z Z Z on 585 K.C. while at Wing assembly point. Leader will be circling to left 1/4 needle turn. Altimeter setting for assembly will be 29.92.
8. First Group will circle Wing assembly point for 45 minutes
   Second Group will circle Wing assembly point for 30 minutes
   Third Group will circle Wing assembly point for 20 min.
   Fourth Group will circle Wing assembly point for 15 minutes

9. If assembly is not effected at Wing assembly point proceed to control point (land fall) and attempt an assembly there. If less than three ships are together do not go to primary target.

10. Never leave any other aircraft once joined regardless of squadron or group.

11. Fly it tight and well forward. Bomb on leader only. If flying with the 498 remember they are carrying 2000 pound bombs.

12. Homing: 497th 524 A
       498th 534 X
       499th 565 V
       500th 585 Z

13. Watch VHF use. Silence except in emergency on way to Target.

//End page//

Before reaching the Wing Assembly Point one plane, Z-2, turned back due to a swallowed valve in #4 engine. The remaining 23 planes reached the assembly point and attempted to form up as planned.

First squadron leader Lt Col McDowell in Z-48 managed to collect five other planes from his squadron, Z-47, Z-54, Z-50, Z-51 and Z-45. They were joined by Z-34 from the second squadron and two planes from other Groups, A-2 from the 497th and T-31 from the 498th, to make a nine-plane formation.

Second squadron leader Col Montgomery in Z-8 gathered four other planes from his squadron, Z-9, Z-11, Z-12 and Z-30, plus K-34 from the 505th Group of the 313th Wing out of Tinian, for a total of six planes. 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew in Z-8, was impressed by their passenger, Col Montgomery, for whom this was the first mission. Copeland thought he was a “a swell guy... one of the nicest I've ever met.”

Nine more 500th planes linked up with other formations. Z-29 joined a five-plane formation led by V-8 of the 499th Group and also containing V-50, K-20 (505th Group), E-19 (504th Group) and T-2 (498th Group). Z-3 and Z-52 were part of a nine-plane mostly 498th formation led by T-26. Z-22 tagged along with a 14-plane formation led by L-2 (6th Group). Z-26 was with a 12-plane squadron led by A-46 of the 497th. Z-33, Z-35 and Z-4 joined a mostly 497th squadron of 11 planes led by A-10. And Z-53, the plane that took off late due to the popped life raft, ended up leading a four-plane element in an 11-plane squadron led by A-6.

The mixed formations headed off for the IP, the city of Kofu, where they turned onto the planned course of 86 degrees. Meanwhile, the last two 500th planes, Z-21 and Z-32, having been unable to find any friendly planes, bombed Hamamatsu individually as directed.

As the formations approached the primary target, a familiar scenario replayed itself. The primary was completely covered with clouds. Accurate bombing of the relatively small factory grounds would be impossible, so all planes diverted to the secondary target, the urban area of Tokyo. The city was also cloud-covered, but as a large area target, it could be bombed effectively by radar. Target 357 had been saved by weather again.

As the various formations passed over Tokyo, they dropped their loads between 0941 and 1005 from altitudes
ranging from 26,000 to 28,000 feet. Due to the thick undercast, no bombing results could be observed or any strike photos taken.

All 500th planes bombed successfully except for three. Z-34 was able to drop only half of her bombs. It was later found that the shackle on the lower forward rack had been loaded backwards. Two planes failed to drop any bombs at all, Z-53 due to a bomb door malfunction and Z-35 due to a short in the bomb circuit. Z-53 was able to salvo her bombs later, but Z-35 could not and the rookie Haas crew had to lug all ten bombs all the way back to Saipan.

Due either to the bad weather or the surprise of the early bombing, there was no fighter opposition. The only damage suffered by the 500th on this mission was two planes slightly damaged by flak. Z-9 was holed in the elevator, the left wing tip and the back of the rear bomb bay. Z-11 was hit in the right wing, including a hole in the fuel tank access panel outboard of #4 engine.

All planes returned safely to base, landing between 1435 and 1740. The extra weight of the 10 bombs they couldn't get out of the bomb bay slowed down the Haas crew in Z-35 and made them one of the last planes to land, after a long 15 hours in the air. But copilot Don Weber wasn't complaining. This was his first mission and he expressed thanks to God for making it an easy one and permitting him to come home safely. Also taking a long time to make it home, 15 hours and 40 minutes according to right gunner Joseph Altott, was the new Althoff crew of the 881st in Z-4. Altott added, "We sweated out our fuel on the return trip and landed with barely enough at 1630 hours."

5 Mar 45

The Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron had been exhausted after their long mission of yesterday, but copilot Don Weber was dedicated enough to get up early this morning at 0715 to eat breakfast and get his laundry ready to send out.

There was a Squadron critique of yesterday's mission at 1030 and a Group critique later at 1330, both attended by most if not all crews. After that the still tired Weber was hoping to take a nap but learned at 1500 that his crew had been assigned to test fly a plane, which they took up for 50 minutes. As was customary on Saipan, some sailors came along for the ride.

Later, an exhausted Weber wrote in his diary that he had now flown on four out of five days for a total of 26 hours. He also noted with disappointment that he had still received no mail.

Some of the veteran crews were getting very unhappy with the lack of progress on several issues impacting their lives. 2/Lt Harold Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew, confided to his diary today, "Our rest leave is still pending. Hays [AC 1/Lt Hale Hays] has had no word of his promotion, no decorations have been approved, we still do not know how many missions will get us that trip home, and I for one am getting extremely disgusted with the whole set up."

There was a practice air raid alert on Saipan tonight, which to young Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew "sounded like old times again except that there was no Ack ack." There had been no Japanese air attacks for over two months.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"5 March.  
WSM 256. Lt Hays, in Z Square 23 ["Ramblin Roscoe"], took off 0600 K employing flight plan "A". Returned to base at 2000 K.  
WSM 257. Lt Setterich employing flight plan "C" took off at 1200 K in Z Square 43. Returned 0200 K.  
WSM 258. Lt Booze employing flight plan "G" took off 2100 K in Z Square #6 ["Booze Hound"]. Returned at 1100 K."
The weather strike mission routes had been standardized and designated by letters. A was a route to Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands. C was to the Tokyo area. G was to the Hiroshima area on southern Honshu.

73rd Bomb Wing WSM reports and personal diaries provide us with more details on these missions:

WSM-256 was simply a weather mission with no bombs or cameras carried. 2/t Harold Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew of the 882nd Squadron, wrote in his diary that most of Okinawa was covered by clouds. There was no opposition. Towner added, “The weather interrogation, according to message picked up by Koert [radio operator Sgt Henry Koert – JEB], was to be held at Guam, so we set our course to that island instead of Saipan. It was the first visit to Guam for most of us, but it could have been any Army airfield.” Towner's entry implies that the crew was not told prior to take-off to fly to Guam, which seems strange.

WSM-257 did include a bombing assignment, 17 x M18 incendiaries to be dropped on the Tokyo urban area, which was accomplished by the Setterich crew of the 883rd at 2002 by radar from 24,500 feet. There was no fighter opposition and only inaccurate AA. No damage was incurred. Also, radar scope photos were taken of portions of Tokyo and the area around Mt. Fuji. On the return Setterich flew to Guam, probably to deliver the radar scope photos and weather data, landing there at 0224 6 Mar and returning to Saipan by 0530.

WSM-258 was the initial combat mission for Lt. George Booze and crew of the 881st Squadron, and also for “Booze Hound”, 44-69766, the replacement Z-6. (You may recall that the original Z-6, “Draggin’ Lady”, 42-24694, was lost on 23 Feb 45 when she crashed into the water off Saipan during an engine test flight. The pilot and copilot, 1/Lt Robert Engle and 2/Lt Glenn Pavey, were killed in that accident.) No bombs were carried on this mission. Twenty radar scope photos were taken, presumably of the area around Hiroshima. The WSM report gives the return time as 1445 on 6 Mar, with no indication of a landing on Guam.

6 Mar 45

The 500th Bomb Group flew three Weather Strike Missions on this date:

WSM-259 was flown by the Bricker crew of the 881st Squadron in Z-1. Take-off was at 0547. No bombs were carried on this mission. Weather data was collected and 11 radar scope photos were taken of the island of Kyushu. There was no opposition. Z-1 landed at Guam at 2125 to deliver the data and photos and returned to Saipan at 0010 7 Mar.

WSM-260 was flown by the Tackett crew of the 882nd in Z-24. Take-off was at 0600. This was purely a weather mission employing Flight Plan C, which took them to the Tokyo area. The mission was accomplished without incident, Z-24 returning to Saipan at 2205.

WSM-261 was flown by the Standen crew of the 883rd in Z-54. Take-off was at 2129. Bomb load was 10 x 500-lb GP bombs, with the designated target as the Saeki Naval Base on the eastern coast of Kyushu. However, the crew was unable to reach Saeki due to “strong headwinds” and ended up bombing Sukumo Naval base, about 75 miles to the east on the southern coast of Shikoku, as a target of opportunity. [The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal incorrectly records that Standen bombed Saeki. - JEB] Bombs were dropped by radar at 0557 7 Mar from 26,600 feet. Results were unobserved due to darkness. Two fighters were picked up on radar at 25 miles distance but they did not attempt to attack. Otherwise, there was no opposition. Six radar scope photos were taken along the east coast of Kyushu and the west coast of Shikoku. Standen landed at Guam to deliver his information, then returned to Saipan by 1220.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

*6 March: Lt Setterich returned from WSM C257 at 0530 hours. Two hours of target study given by Lt Thompson. Lt Standen took off at 2100 hours on WSM G261 for Kure [error - Saeki]. Cpl O’Brien was CQ.
The Haas crew of the 882nd had ground school this morning, then at 1300 had a class on the new pneumatic bomb bay doors. Ho-hum. But things got better when mail arrived.

Copilot Don Weber finally got his first mail from home, and there was a lot of it, a combination of cards and letters from various friends and relatives, including nine from his mother alone. Weber was a cheerful man again. “Surely seems good to hear from home again.” He quickly wrote and mailed a letter home telling his family their letters had finally caught up to him.

CFC gunner Willie Greene also got a bunch of mail. Later Greene, who had some musical talent, played bass in what he called a “G.I. show” and made a hit.

Over in the 881st, the Althoff crew had the day off. They spent much of it playing baseball.

7 Mar 45

The Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron had expected to be awakened at 0330 today for an early training mission, but it was called off and replaced by ground school, so they got to sleep a little longer. Early riser copilot Don Weber still got up in time for breakfast. Today’s class starting at 0800 was target study, but it was cut short at about 0920 when the crew was informed that they had to hurry to an 0930 briefing for a training mission to take place later in the day.

Take-off was about 1230. The emphasis for this mission would be radar bombing, which the Haas crew badly needed, because they hadn’t done any. Unfortunately, they wouldn’t get any again today, because the plane they were assigned developed some sort of problem after take-off and they had to return to the field. The rest of the planes went ahead. According to Joseph Altott, right gunner on the Althoff crew, which participated in this mission, they made four practice bomb runs on Saipan, then flew a short distance north to drop some incendiary bombs on the small uninhabited island of Farallon de Medinilla. Total flight time was only two hours and 45 minutes.

While the training mission was going on, copilot Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st was working on a more personal mission – building a home-made mousetrap. He finished it about 1500. Then he wrote a couple of letters.

On this day S/Sgt Manuel Bettencourt, the original radar man on the Gerwick crew, returned from a long TD (73 days) with the 3rd Photo Recon Squadron. As far as we know, Bettencourt left no record of his feelings at this time, but we can be certain they would not have been good ones. The Gerwick crew had been lost over Nagoya on 23 Jan with no survivors – none from the men on the plane that day, that is. There were in fact four survivors of the original crew, but only because they did not go on that mission. One of these of course was Bettencourt himself, who had been on TD. Two others were AC Capt James Gerwick and bombardier 2/Lt Alfred Olsen, who had both been evacuated to Tripler Hospital in Hawaii due to illness, Olsen on 10 Dec and Gerwick on 23 Feb, the latter after a lengthy stay in the station hospital on Saipan. The fourth survivor (for a while) was the copilot 1/Lt Jack Kutchera, who had been bumped from the 23 Jan mission by Squadron Operations Officer Maj Frank Roberts, but Kutchera was lost later, on 19 Feb, while flying as copilot with the Rouse crew. So now Bettencourt was the sole survivor left on Saipan. News got around somehow on the Islands, so Bettencourt must have heard about the tragedy that befell his old crew, but nothing can prepare you for the shock of reality when you walk into your old quonset and see the bunks of your former buddies now occupied by the men of replacement crews. Manuel Bettencourt probably had trouble getting to sleep that night.

At 1800 hours there was an Officers Call, at which Group CO Col Dougherty spoke about the new Officers Club scheduled to open soon.
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"7 March: Lt Standen returned safely from WSM G261. He did not bomb the briefed target on account of strong headwinds. There was no flak nor fighters. Two hours of target study given. Lt Holmes, with Major Gay, took off at 1700 hours on WSM G264, target Kure. Our squadron won from the 881st nine 7 to 4."

On this day the 500th Bomb Group was tasked to fly three Weather Strike Missions. All three are cloaked in confusion, and one would end in tragedy. Here's what the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal records about the first two:

"7 March

WSM 262  Lt Farrell flying Z Square 34 accomplished flight plan “A” without incident. Off at 2015; land: 1155


[The times given are all Z or Greenwich time, and the landing time for Gray is wrong, should be 1427Z. Local times would be 0615 and 2155 for Farrell, and 0635 and 0027 8 Mar for Gray. - JEB]

The trouble with these succinct summaries is that the routes are contradicted by information in reports in the 73rd Bomb Wing files. Those reports do list Farrell's and Gray's flight plans as A and E, respectively, but the weather data coordinates included in the reports indicate that the routes were switched. In other words, Gray flew Flight Plan A and Farrell flew Flight Plan E. Flight Plan A was a route to the Ryukyu Islands, including Okinawa and Amami-O-Shima, and return. Flight Plan E was a route to the area of Shizuoka and Mount Fuji in central Honshu and return.

The fact that Gray in Z-35 flew Flight Plan A is confirmed by the combat diary of CFC gunner John Norton, who recorded this as a “weather mission to Okanawa [sic] Jima.” Norton also notes landing at Guam to turn in their weather data before returning to Saipan. This would apparently also confirm Farrell in Z-34 flying Flight Plan E. But maybe not exactly. 2/Lt Edgar Betts was the original copilot on the Hays crew of the 882nd Squadron, but since that crew had been made a lead crew, Betts was often bumped from his seat in favor of a command pilot, often Squadron CO Maj Joseph Brannock. So Betts had to pick up missions where he could and had become, in his own words, “the roving co-pilot of the squadron.” Still feeling a part of the Hays crew and living in the same quonset, Betts often made entries in bombardier Hal Towner's diary. He made one today: “At last, I made an easy mission. This was a daylight weather strike over Tokyo at 25,000 feet but we had a solid undercast so no trouble was encountered. We flew across the mainland of Japan and back out by Nagoya.” If Betts has the date right, then he must have flown with the Farrell crew in Z-34. (There is no crew list for this mission, but Betts is known to have flown as copilot with Farrell on several other occasions.) Unfortunately, his description of the route does not correspond well with other information in the 73rd Bomb Wing report. In particular, if Betts is right about coming “back out by Nagoya”, then Z-34 substantially deviated from the assigned route. (That would actually not be out of character for 1/Lt James Farrell, who was an excellent pilot but was known to flout orders from time to time. But that's another story.) The bottom line is we just don't know.

Whoever flew what route, both WSM-262 and WSM-263 were pure weather missions – no bombs carried... unless the reports are wrong on that too. Then there is WSM-264, which is quite a different story.

WSM-264 was flown by the Holmes crew of the 883rd Squadron in Z-46, and there is much confusion about it too. According to the sparse records available, this was supposed to be a standard WSM employing Flight Plan G, which would take the crew roughly northwest to within 150 miles of Okinawa before turning north to Kure in southern Honshu, and after overflying Kure a final turn to the southeast for a straight run home. The bomb load was 10 x 500-lb GP's and the designated bombing target was listed as Makki, which I have been unable to locate on any map.

Now Flight Plan G would not bring the plane anywhere near Tokyo, which is over 400 miles east and a little north of Kure. But three survivors of the Holmes crew – copilot 2/Lt Gilbert Easton, flight engineer 2/Lt Robert Sebring and navigator 2/Lt Robert Pope – all insist in a detailed account of this flight that they went to Okinawa, Kure and Tokyo. Not only that, the order they give is Okinawa, then Tokyo, then doubling back to Kure. Such a circuitous route would add something like 800 additional miles to the flight. It seems hard to believe that a change like that
would be made, but it's even harder to believe that these three participants would all misremember such a significant event in their lives.

So was Tokyo added at the last minute and not included in any official records? It's possible. The first big incendiary raid on Tokyo was scheduled for two nights hence, on 9-10 March. Sebring believed that the weather readings they were taking were related to the upcoming Tokyo mission, but that may be an ex post facto assumption on his part. It's also possible that the command decided at the last minute that they needed some more radar scope photos of the Tokyo area, although none of the survivors mentions taking photos. A potentially related event was the presence on this mission of Maj John Gay, the 883rd Squadron Operations Officer. Did Gay come along just to get in some flight and combat time, or was he on a special mission not entrusted to paper?

What the Easton-Sebring-Pope account tells us is that Z-46 took off at about 1700 on 7 Mar. The first leg of the flight, to the vicinity of Okinawa, went as planned. According to Sebring, they were taking weather readings at all points of this trip. But then problems started which eventually led to the plane running short of fuel. One of these was altitude. Normally, on the route out the bombers flew at a low altitude in order to burn off fuel and weight and didn't start climbing to bombing altitude until nearing Japan. But Sebring says that they had already reached 20,000 feet by the time they made the northward turn near Okinawa, and that they continued flying at high altitude until after Kure. It takes extra fuel to carry a load of bombs at altitude, and Z-46 was carrying 5,000 pounds of them.

But the biggest problem, according to Sebring, was flying to Tokyo before Kure. This added many miles and ate up a lot of fuel, especially since they ran into very strong headwinds on this roughly east to west leg. Pope, the navigator, recorded a ground speed of only 60 mph during this time. Sebring writes, “The Tokyo to Kure leg was flying into the headwind of the jet stream and seemed interminably long to me. If the mission planners had been aware of the implications of this, they could have planned the mission to be flown from Saipan to Okinawa, then Kure, then Tokyo, then back to Saipan, and we would have made it easily.”

So why, if Sebring and others realized that too much fuel was being used, did AC 1/Lt Theodore “Ted” Holmes remain at high altitude and not alter the route? The key appears to be Maj Gay. Sebring writes again, “On that leg going across Japan, I was very concerned about the gas supply and knew that it was going to be a very close thing. I mentioned this to Ted and Major Gay, but with the Major on board there was no way we were going to deviate from the briefed procedure.” Gay must have been a very stern character. Or maybe he had stern orders.

In any event, Z-46 eventually reached Kure, where, according to copilot Easton, “we were briefly caught in a searchlight and experienced some inaccurate anti-aircraft fire.” Their bombs were presumably dropped here, although no one mentions it. On the mission Easton, although officially the copilot, was acting as weather observer, since Maj Gay had co-opted the right seat. Easton had expected that, and as a lowly 2/Lt resignedly accepted his fate of collecting the weather data, encoding it and passing it to the radio operator for transmission back to base.

It was on the final leg home that it became clear they weren't going to make it. They passed Iwo Jima, but with fighting still going on on the island, the uncertain condition of the airfield, and the fact that it was still dark, they did not attempt an emergency landing there. Instead, they continued toward Saipan, trying to get as close as possible before ditching. Meanwhile, radio operator Sgt Ralph Lietz was in contact with the ground station on Saipan and sending out ditching messages and Mayday signals. The crew prepared for ditching by throwing out or securing all loose gear, removing the escape hatches at the flight engineer's and tail gunner's positions and in the rear unpressurized section, and gathering items they would need in the rafts, such as water jugs, extra food and flashlights. Easton asked his AC Holmes if he preferred that Easton be in the copilot's seat during the ditching, and Maj Gay offered to give up the seat, but Holmes decided it would be better for Easton to ditch with the men in the rear because he was familiar with the crew.

Luckily for the crew, one of Lietz's Maydays was picked up by the destroyer USS Hudson, DD 475, which was escorting a convoy back to Saipan from Iwo Jima. The Hudson responded and sent the B-29 the coordinates of the convoy. Holmes turned toward the indicated location. By the time the B-29 reached that point, which was
about 200 miles northwest of Saipan, it was daylight and they could see the ships below. Holmes ordered the crew to ditching stations and began easing the big bomber down. He feathered numbers 2 and 3 engines, even as the other two engines were already beginning to sputter from lack of fuel.

Holmes and Gay remained in their seats, as did flight engineer Sebring. Bombardier 2/Lt Alvis Sparks sat and braced himself next to Sebring. Navigator Pope and radioman Lietz both climbed into the tunnel and braced themselves, with Pope taking out his pistol and shooting out the astrodome to create a convenient escape hatch in the top of the plane. In the rear, tail gunner Sgt Patrick Collins returned to his backward-facing seat in the tail compartment. The remaining five men, copilot Easton, ring gunner S/Sgt Charles Mohn, right gunner Sgt Robert Fisher, left gunner Sgt Ellis Granger and radar man Sgt Norman Anderson huddled together in the rear unpressurized compartment, braced against the bulkhead to the radar compartment.

Holmes tried to hold the nose of the plane up while he throttled back as much as he dared, bringing the speed down to an estimated 120 mph just before impact. In the rear, Easton sensed the change in the plane's attitude. "I recall shouting to the crew 'Here we go!', and in a few seconds I heard a coarse rumble, which indicated the rear of the plane had touched the water. This is the last I remember until I woke under water."

After that first touch at 0724 there was a powerful impact that brought the plane to an abrupt halt. It also caused the B-29 to break in two just behind the wing, which resulted in the nose immediately dipping below the surface. Water began rushing into the forward compartment. Sebring felt Sparks, the bombardier, scramble across his lap and out the window. Sebring tried to follow but could not; his feet were caught in the flight engineer's foot well, probably because the fuselage had buckled. Frantically pulling and kicking, he managed to free his feet and pull himself out the window. By this time he was about 20 feet under water, so he inflated his Mae West and floated to the surface, bumping into the #3 propeller on the way up.

The first thing Sebring saw upon surfacing was Sparks, who was floating vertically but was unconscious, or possibly already dead, with his head intermittently awash. Sebring grabbed the bombardier and held his head above water while swimming to a nearby life raft. Sebring hung onto the raft but did not have the strength to pull either himself or Sparks into it.

Pope remembers climbing out of the astrodome, but "the next thing I recall is being in the water and holding on to Ralph [Lietz], who was in turn holding on to the static discharger on the right wingtip. Ralph said to me that he had broken a bone and asked if I could let go. No problem, I thought – I'll grab the aileron. I did not realize that the plane's wing was acting like a huge sail, and when I let go of Ralph, the plane drifted rapidly away from me. So I was alone in that huge ocean."

The broken-off tail section of the B-29 sank quickly. When Easton came to under water, he could see light above, so he pulled both ripcords of his Mae West, which popped him to the surface. He had swallowed a lot of salt water and immediately started trying to cough it up, only to be slapped in the face by a wave. "The next thing I recall, Collins, the tail gunner, had my head draped over his feet on his one-man life raft and was calling for assistance. I was periodically passing out during this time. At some point, I re-awoke and found myself looking straight into Al Sparks' face. His eyes were open as he floated past being supported by Sebring on the edge of a life raft."

Captain Richard Pratt of the Hudson was a fine skipper who ran a smart ship. He saw the B-29 descending and had the Hudson heading toward the plane's projected impact point before she even hit the water. The ship's boats were lowered as soon as they reached the wreckage. The tin can sailors quickly picked up Sebring, Sparks, Easton, Collins, Lietz and ring gunner Mohn. They also found Pope, floating alone but all right. And they found the body of Maj Gay. Gay and Sparks were both officially pronounced dead on board the Hudson. Not found were the bodies of AC Ted Holmes, gunners Fisher and Granger, and radar operator Anderson, all of whom apparently had been trapped in the plane. Despite the loss of six men, it's very likely that the tragedy would have been worse but for the prompt action by Captain Pratt and the crew of the Hudson.

Most of the survivors were injured, some seriously. Easton's leg was bleeding badly, and Sebring's right ankle was mangled. Easton reported receiving a blood transfusion on the destroyer, "which immediately brought me back to life. I spent the remainder of the trip back to Saipan, about 24 hours, in the captain's cabin making a
thorough mess of it.” Pope and Collins had no physical injuries but were treated for shock. A little strangely, one of the ship’s officers asked about the possibility of using the ship’s crane to pick up the still floating forward part of the airplane and transporting it back to Saipan, but when Pope told them how much it weighed they gave up on that idea and sank the wreckage with gunfire to remove it as a navigation hazard.

The crew of the Hudson were extremely solicitous, extending every possible courtesy to their unexpected guests. Pope, temporarily housed in an officer’s cabin, remembers being offered coffee and even stronger refreshment, but “[h]aving swallowed a quantity of seawater, I felt lousy and declined everything until someone offered me ice cream. Then the world became livable again!”

Easton, Sebring, Mohn and Lietz would all be sent back to the States for long-term treatment. Easton had knee and back injuries, but he would return to active duty by August. Sebring’s right ankle was badly broken. It would never fully heal and he would be medically discharged in March 1946. The eventual disposition of Mohn and Lietz is unknown. What is known is that only Pope and Collins would return to duty on Saipan. Scratch another veteran crew.

8 Mar 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“8 March: Lt Holmes ditched at approximately 17 00 N - 144 00 E at 0734 hours. Three hours of target study given. Won a ball game from Group Staff officers 3 to 2. The destroyer HUDSON picked up the survivors of Lt Holmes crew.” [These war diary entries must have been taken from a running daily log, hence the intermixing of the banal with the vital. See the 7 March entry for a full account of the Holmes ditching. - JEB]

This was a quiet day for most of the air crews on Saipan. There was ground school for some crews, including the Haas crew of the 882nd. Target study began at 0800, then at 1100 1/Lt Walton Morrison, an intelligence officer at Group HQ, gave a presentation on the history of Japan, which copilot Don Weber found “rather interesting.” With the afternoon free, most of the Haas crew, including Weber, played softball with the Limpp crew, another recent addition to the 882nd. Limpp and crew won. After the ball game, at about 1500, Weber, bombardier Frank Sharp and ring gunner Willie Greene went over to Blue Beach #2 and went swimming for a while. Weber got several more letters from home today.

9 Mar 45

On the night of 9-10 March 1945 the XXI Bomber Command carried out the first mass low-level incendiary attack against Japan.

Rumors had been swirling around the Command for some time about the crazy ideas their new commander, Maj Gen Curtis LeMay, seemed to have in his mind. So it was with a sense of foreboding that the crews filed into the briefing rooms at the unusual time of 1000 on 9 March to get the scoop about their next mission. But even though they expected unpleasant news, they were still stunned by the totality of it all. The target was Tokyo, probably the best protected city in the country. They would bomb not only at low altitude, but very low altitude, as low as 5,000 feet for some units. There would be no formations -- every plane was on its own. And to top it off, no ammo would be carried! Most men left the briefing rooms that day convinced of two things: one, LeMay was indeed a maniac; and two, many of them would not live to see the next day.

But this plan was not the product of a deranged mind or the imperious whim of an egomaniac. LeMay was a methodical thinker who considered every possibility... and even the supposed impossibilities. Everything had been carefully thought out over the past several weeks. Japanese AA had been determined to be least effective between 5,000 and 10,000 feet. It was known that the Japanese had few night fighters, and the ones they had were not very good. And in the darkness over Japan, any plane you might see -- and fire on -- was more likely to be another B-29 than a Jap plane, so going out unarmed was actually for the crews' own protection.
Furthermore, every pound saved in weight of ammo, and by extension the then superfluous gunners -- was another pound of bombs that could be carried.

But even if all this had been clinically explained to the crews, it probably wouldn't have made them feel any better. Abstract knowledge will not quell that bad feeling in your gut. But no matter how they felt about it, they would do their duty.

The no ammo directive was perhaps most irking. Sure, your chances of meeting a Jap night fighter might be only one in fifty or a hundred, but if that one chance occurred you at least wanted to be able to shoot back. So some crews made up their minds to "reinterpret" LeMay's orders. As Bill Royster, a tail gunner in the 499th Group, put it, "[We knew] all about LeMay's SUGGESTION that we fly without full crews and empty guns, but he wasn't going to go. We decided that it was optional." Royster's crew would take loaded guns along, and so would many others. Examination of numerous memoirs and reminiscence shows that reactions ran the gamut. Some crews followed the orders and took no ammo, some loaded only the tail guns, and others loaded all their guns. Even LeMay's own after-action Report of Operations sent to Gen Arnold in Washington contains a statement that reveals, perhaps inadvertently, that the orders re ammo were disobeyed: "No gunnery was employed against the enemy on this mission with the exception of approximately 500 rounds fired at some searchlights."

This mission was the first one for the 500th Bomb Group in which the planes, most of them anyway, took off without full crews. To use my father's crew (#224, formerly Savage's, now LaMarche's) of the 882nd Squadron as an example, it was decided to take only two gunners, who probably served as scanners at the side blisters. The other two gunners, including my father, stayed behind this time but switched with the first two gunners for the next mission, then alternated back and forth for the next two incendiary missions after that. Surviving records indicate that many other crews followed the same procedure.

Flying with the LaMarche crew in Z-27 tonight as Lead Bombardier was a new member, Capt Zanon B. Malanchuk, from Meriden, Connecticut. It had been a long journey, both literally and figuratively, for Malanchuk to get here. He was born in 1919 into an immigrant family in Connecticut proud of both their Ukrainian heritage and their adopted country. All four Malanchuk children served in WW2, Zanon and younger brother Eugene with the AAF, older brother Myron with the Merchant Marine, and older sister Vera overseas with the Red Cross. Zanon entered the Army early, in 1940, enlisting in the Engineer Corps. He later transferred to the AAF but like many other young aspiring aviators washed out of pilot training and had to settle for another job, in his case bombardier, where he found his calling. By all accounts he was an excellent bombardier, tops in his class at Midland, Texas, in June 1942. However, as far as Malanchuk was concerned, that turned out to be a bad thing, because also like most young aviators he wanted to see combat. But the AAF was expanding rapidly and needed good instructors, and the first to be tabbed were the top class graduates. To his bitter disappointment, so it was with Malanchuk, who was stuck as an instructor for the next 2-1/2 years. He told his family later that if he had known that was going to happen, he would have missed some targets on purpose during training. The only good thing during this period was meeting, falling in love with and marrying an Oklahoma girl at Midland in 1942. A year later, he had a son.

Finally, in early 1945, while stationed at Selman Field near Monroe, Louisiana, Malanchuk saw a chance for a jail break, so to speak. A decision had been made to establish a Lead Crew School at the 73rd Bomb Wing on Saipan and some senior instructors from stateside were needed to help set it up. Malanchuk was one of those chosen -- or more likely he volunteered -- for this assignment, and he was soon on his way to the Marianas as part of a group of 11 instructors, mostly Captains like him, from various stateside training bases. They reported to XXI Bomber Command HQ by mid-January and were then sent on to the 73rd Wing, for the specific purpose of helping train lead crews.

Malanchuk's original TDY period of 46 days was set to expire on 8 Mar, but it's clear that he had no intention of returning to the States while the war was still on. While on Saipan he obviously made some connections and by 21 Feb he had been unofficially assigned to the LaMarche (formerly Savage) crew, a lead crew of the 882nd Squadron of the 500th Bomb Group. We know this only because 2/Lt Harold Towner of the Hays crew, a fellow bombardier and good friend of 2/Lt Thomas Hemingway, the original bombardier on the Savage-LaMarche crew, noted in his diary how upset Hemingway was at being transferred to another crew. Towner thought it was a raw
deal too. But orders were orders and Malanchuk became the crew's new bombardier. Tonight was not officially Malanchuk's first combat mission – analysis of records indicates that he flew a successful weather strike mission on 6 Feb with Col Robert Morgan of the 497th Bomb Group – but it was certainly his first major strike. Not only that, but he was leading the Group on the first big fire mission against Tokyo, and literally under the eye of Group Commander Lt Col John Dougherty, sitting in the copilot seat right behind him. In subsequent orders dated 8, 10 and 13 March 1945 Malanchuk's status would be officially changed from TDY to permanent assignment to the 882nd. He had finally gotten the combat duty he so eagerly sought.

For most members of the new Haas crew of the 882nd this would be their third mission, and only the second as a crew. They attended the 1030 briefing with the rest of the crews and had the same reactions and misgivings. Ring gunner Willie Greene and tail gunner Paul Grove would be the two gunners left behind this time. The rest of the crew went down to a good supper at about 1630, then it was onto a truck and up to their plane, Z-28, "Old Ironsides", for their preflight check and early evening take-off.

The Althoff crew of the 881st would also be going on this mission. Although they had been told that only two gunners were needed, the crew decided that all would go because, as right gunner Joseph Altott put it, "no gunner wanted to be left behind and miss seeing Tokyo burn." This would be the crew's first mission in Z-19, 42-63435, which was actually the resurrected Z-3, "Snafu-perfort", 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson's original plane, and still bearing his artwork. 63435 had been taken out of commission for extensive repairs in late December 1944. Now she had been fixed, was back in action, and would become the Althoff crew's regular plane. But there was a nomenclature problem of sorts. The command did not like the name "Snafu-perfort", apparently thinking it too irreverent. But rather than give up the name entirely, some clever soul on the crew simply removed three letters and turned it into "Sna pe fort". Problem solved.

The 500th scheduled a record 42 aircraft for this mission, of which 41 were airborne. The scratched plane was Z-7, with the Sullivan crew. Since there would be no formations, there were no designated squadron or group leaders, but three planes, Z-27 (LaMarche), Z-13 (Luman) and Z-42 (Moreland), were designated as lead aircraft. These three planes, loaded with 184 x M47A2 incendiary clusters (only 182 in the case of Z-13) with instantaneous nose fuses, would go in first to mark the target area for the remaining planes, each of which carried 40 x E28 incendiary clusters fused to open at 2,000 feet. Group CO, Lt Col John Dougherty, flew in the lead plane, Z-27, with Capt Austin W. LaMarche and crew. Other command and staff coming along for the ride were Operations Officer Maj Freeman Parsons in Z-2, Lewis crew; Group Bombardier Capt Richard Hale in Z-14, Mather crew; and 881st Squadron Operations Officer Capt Horace "Hod" Hatch with his old crew and plane, the Conn crew in Z-9.

The participating planes and crews were as follows:

Z-27, LaMarche/Dougherty
Z-13, Luman
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Moreland
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-14, Mather/Hale
Z-12, Curtis
Z-11, Calhoun
Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque", Fitzgerald
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Booze
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil
Z-4, "Black Magic", Taylor
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis/Parsons
Z-1, Bricker
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Clinkscales
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
The 500th Bomb Group Day By Day – Part 3 - Victory

Take-off was from 1818 to 1853. The 500th Group was second in the Wing take-off order and was assigned altitudes of 3000-3500 feet to fly en route to the target. Before reaching the IP, which was a small peninsula southeast of Tokyo, the 500th planes were to climb to bombing altitudes staggered between 7000 and 7800 feet.

Five aircraft aborted before reaching Japan. The #1 prop on Z-43, Setterich crew, stuck at 2900 RPM immediately after take-off. Z-31, Arbon crew, was only a short distance out when her #1 prop ran away and could not be feathered. Z-26, Sewell crew, and Z-45, McClanahan crew, were likewise not far out when they ran into problems. The former had a back-firing #2 engine and excessive cylinder head temperature, while the latter could not fully close the front bomb bay doors and the #3 nacelle wheel well door. Finally, Z-54, Standen crew, was about two hours out when she lost her #2 engine. All five of these planes made it safely back to base.

According to copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew in Z-28 of the 882nd, they hit some weather on the way to Japan. Weber especially noted seeing some St. Elmo's fire which "caused one bright explosion which fairly rocked the ship." The darkness and the bad weather necessitated much instrument flying, with AC Haas and Weber sharing the flying duties equally.

Most of the aircraft which had not aborted reached Japan as planned in the vicinity of the city of Katsuura, but a few had navigation and radar problems. Z-29, Z-10 and Z-9 (Shorey, Thompson and Conn crews) had inoperative radars and were confused by some fires started by earlier errant bombings on Choshi Point, so they mistakenly dropped their bombs there. Another plane with a malfunctioning radar and poor navigation, Z-3, Harlan Jackson crew, bombed Tateyama Hojo, well northeast of Tokyo, as a target of opportunity. Finally, Z-21, Hanft crew, also with radar not working, became very lost and ended up bombing Sendai, nearly 200 miles northeast of Tokyo. All of these alternative drops were judged questionable in the 73rd Wing mission summary, but there is no evidence of any adverse action being taken against the crews.

This left a total of 31 planes that hit the IP. The course to the target from there was 308 degrees, but there was really no need to look at the compass, as the glow from fires already started could be seen from many miles away. Tokyo was already a burning beacon.

Radar operator S/Sgt Jack Heffner of the 881st Squadron, after returning from a week's temporary duty as a radar instructor at Wing, had managed to secure a seat on a plane for this mission with the Lewis (former Brown) crew in Z-2. 2/Lt William Lewis had been Heffner's original copilot on the old McNamer crew. Lewis had
recently taken over the original Brown crew when Capt Jay Brown was transferred to Wing, so he was quite willing to take Heffner along as radar operator for tonight's mission. On their way in to the target, the Lewis crew had seen the fires started by errant drops on Choshi Point but were not misled.

While crossing Tokyo Bay, Z-13 was hit by flak at 7000 feet. Flak was much heavier over Tokyo, where Z-13 was struck again, along with eight more bombers -- Z-4, Z-14, Z-30, Z-41, Z-42, Z-50, Z-52 and Z-55. Fortunately, most of the damage was light and none was fatal. The Japanese used searchlights in an attempt to illuminate the B-29's for their anti-aircraft guns and night fighters, but the searchlights seemed erratic and were only able to catch a few planes in their beams, and generally for only a short time. As for night fighters, only nine attacks were reported, and none caused any damage.

Bomb drops were made individually from 0134 to 0251 and from between 6900 and 7800 feet. Ten aircraft suffered partial rack malfunctions and were unable to release all their bombs, but the vast majority, over 500 M47 and over 1,000 E28 incendiaries, fell down to add to the inferno below.

According to copilot Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, “The radar run was perfect and we dropped in an open spot visually.” They were at only 7,800 feet but Copeland could see dark columns of smoke towering above them. They avoided the smoke, the AA, and one night fighter which tried to make a run on them and got out safely. What disappointed Copeland most about the mission was that so many planes had wasted their bombs on Choshi Point.

The Althoff crew of the 881st in Z-19 arrived over Tokyo at about 0150. Several large fires were already burning so the crew overflew the center of the city and dropped their incendiaries in the eastern section where there were no fires. They encountered only light flak and no fighters. 10 March happened to be left gunner Harry Drnec's 30th birthday. He got to celebrate it over Tokyo.

Heffner in Z-2 reported that when they reached the city they saw “countless fires of all sizes burning all over town.” As soon as the bombs were away, AC Lewis increased speed to 285 mph and exited the area as quickly as possible.

All returning crews reported a huge conflagration over Tokyo. Many also reported something they had not experienced before -- severe turbulence due to thermal updrafts, which made it very difficult to maintain altitude and hold steady on the bomb run. Some planes were carried up several thousand feet. One of the planes which ran into a thermal was Z-53, Clinkscales crew, 883rd. As they approached the target, they were suddenly lifted up to about 10,000 feet. Flight engineer Jim Wride recalled, “Everything below us was fiery red and smoke immediately filled every corner of our plane.” Then just as suddenly they dropped back down to about 5,000 feet. Some aircraft did not survive the stresses exerted on the airframe by such a roller-coaster ride, but Z-53 was a tough old bird. She would make it back to Saipan safely.

Unwitting to the B-29 crews high above, the fires they had started were threatening more than just Japanese on the ground. A number of B-29 airmen shot down on previous missions were being held under brutal conditions in solitary cages at Kempeitai (Japanese Secret Police) headquarters adjacent to the moat surrounding the Imperial Palace grounds. As the smoke and fires approached this area, the Japanese jailers abandoned the facility and left the prisoners locked in their cages. The Americans thought they were surely going to die that night. Had they survived parachuting from burning planes and Japanese beatings and starvation only to be killed by their own men? One of those prisoners, Hap Halloran, a navigator in the 499th Bomb Group whose plane had been brought down on 27 Jan, called it “a night of terror.” But miraculously only a small part of the building burned and the men survived... to be subjected to further brutality.

Exit for the bombers was to the right after bombs away, to the coast north of Choshi Point and then home. Cpl John Norton, right gunner on the Gray crew of the 882nd, reported an unsuccessful attack by a night fighter 75 miles out from the target. The Althoff crew in Z-19 could still see the glow in the sky from burning Tokyo from 80-100 miles away. All 500th planes returned safely to Saipan, landing between 0839 and 1137 on 10 March. The fears of heavy losses had been unfounded, and Gen Curtis LeMay had been vindicated.

At the post-mission interrogation that all crews had to undergo, men's spirits were usually lifted by a shot of
liquor. Don Weber’s spirits were lifted by the sight of an American Red Cross girl handing out donuts.

Post-strike photos showed the heart of Tokyo burned out, nearly 16 square miles. An estimated 83,000 Japanese died in the fires, more than would die in the atomic blast at Hiroshima. For the XXI Bomber Command this was the most successful attack to date, and LeMay already had plans to duplicate the results in other cities.

10 Mar 45

It was a quiet day on Saipan today. Most of the air crews spent the day recovering from last night’s exhausting and draining mission to Tokyo. There wasn’t much else going on, except that the 500th was tasked with flying one Weather Strike Mission, which was assigned to the Sullivan crew of the 881st Squadron.

1/Lt Richard Sullivan and crew took off on WSM-269 in Z-7, “Hell's Belle”, at 2111 this evening. The purpose of this mission was to observe the status of the fires set in Tokyo by the raid early this morning and to drop 14 x T4E4 fragmentation cluster bombs into the vicinity of the flames to hinder Japanese fire-fighting efforts. Sullivan reported that fires were visible from as far as 120 miles away, and that an estimated 14 to 25 square miles of the city were either still in flames or smoldering. The bombs were dropped into the fires at 0505 11 Mar from 31,000 feet. There was no fighter opposition and only light and inaccurate flak. Sullivan noted that Japanese searchlights first searched at low altitudes before starting to search higher. The crew safely returned to Guam to submit their report at 1050 11 Mar, and were back on Saipan by 1250.

11 Mar 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"11 March

The mess waste line to the sea was completed and put in operation today -- a great sanitary improvement.

In order to facilitate the great need for manpower on the line to sustain the 'Blitz' all details were returned to the line and enlisted men from the Orderly Room, Supply, Operations, Intelligence, and the Mess took over additional duties as Guards and K.P.'s."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"11 March: Briefing for Mission 30 held at 0915 hours. The target will be the urban area of Nagoya. Major John E. Gay, O-354198, and Lieutenant Alvis L. Sparks, O-0698378, were buried today at 1300 hours in Army Cemetery No. 1 on Saipan. All crews with the exception of Lts Rich, Adamson, Ryan and Capt Feathers took off. Capt Black, Lts Cheney and Clinkscales aborted."

Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron was at the 0915 briefing and recorded that it was comparatively brief, lasting only about an hour. This was important to Weber because today was Sunday and he was able to attend chapel services at 1030. Weber thought that Chaplain Davis “delivered another fine sermon.” Also attending religious services today were Willie Greene, also of the Haas crew, and copilot Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st.

It is unknown to which Group this Chaplain Davis was assigned, probably the 497th or 498th. Each Group of the 73rd Bomb Wing had a Chaplain assigned, from various denominations, and each man in the Wing was free to attend whichever service he wished. The 500th’s Chaplain was Capt George Hickey, by all accounts a fine man and an outstanding Chaplain, but Hickey was a Catholic and Weber was a Protestant, so the young pilot went to hear the Protestant minister Davis.

However, regardless of their denomination, the chaplains were receptive to their needs of the men. The 499th Group’s Chaplain William D. Bray, a Methodist, was dedicated and well-liked, so much so that Col Samuel Harris
of the 499th arranged for a chapel to be built for him “via midnight requisition on lumber owned by the Navy and the Island Commander and via whiskey to the CB’s.... It has a steeple and a cross on top so in all it qualifies as a real Chapel.” The broad-minded Bray added a Star of David to the steeple and allowed Jewish airmen, who did not have a chaplain or place of worship of their own, to use the chapel for their services. Bray even helped obtain some Jewish prayer books and sacramental wine for them.

After religious services Weber went to dinner, then back to his hut, where he wrote a letter home and unsuccessfully tried to get a little sleep before tonight’s evening take-off. Finally giving up, he put on his flight suit and headed up to the line with the rest of the crew to Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, the plane they would fly tonight. The full crew would be going this time, except apparently for left gunner Bob Wilson, who was not on the crew list.

The reason they were taking three gunners this time was that there had been a small change with regard to gunnery. Perhaps recognizing that they could not prevent the crews from taking along loaded guns, the command relented and authorized a “small” amount of ammunition for the tail guns, which would be manned this time. So there would be a tail gunner and two gunners acting as left and right scanners.

The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st was not scheduled for this mission, but copilot Bob Copeland went up to the runway anyway to watch all the planes take off this evening. “It was like nothing I’d ever seen before, and there were 160 that took off altogether.”

On the night of 11-12 March 1945 the XXI Bomber Command carried out the second mass low-level incendiary raid in what would become known as the March "fire blitz". Target this time was Nagoya. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 42 aircraft for this mission, and all made it airborne.

The participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-48, Black  
Z-27, LaMarche  
Z-12, Curtis  
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden  
Z-49, "Three Feathers", Cheney  
Z-54, Standen  
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby  
Z-45, "Mustn’t Touch", McClanahan  
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt  
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Moreland  
Z-41, "The Baroness", Barron  
Z-55, "Janice E.", Gregg  
Z-47, "Adam's Eve", Adams  
Z-43, Setterich  
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Clinkscales  
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey  
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce  
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson  
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Sasser  
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons  
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett  
Z-31, "Homing De-Vice", Arbon  
Z-26, Sewell  
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hughes  
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Limpp  
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Reeves  
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Haas  
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Booze
Z-7, "Hell's Bell", Dearborn
Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque", Taylor
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Thompson
Z-11, Calhoun
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-13, Luman
Z-14, Mather
Z-1, Bricker

The basic plan was the same. Planes would fly to the target and bomb individually. But some details were different. The three lead aircraft for the 500th, one from each squadron, Z-48, Z-27 and Z-12, took off at 1840, before the planes of the preceding 499th Group. This was presumably to give the lead planes plenty of time to mark the target area. The rest of the 500th planes took off after the 499th, between 1851 and 1907, except for two (unidentified) which had bomb loading or maintenance problems and took off much later, at 1950 and 1951.

Bomb load for the three lead planes was 184 x M47A2 incendiaries with instantaneous nose fuses. These would mark the target area for the following 500th planes, each of which carried 40 x E28 incendiary clusters fused to open at 2000 feet. (The attempt to get the three lead aircraft over the target early would not work out. Z-48 aborted, and while Z-12 and Z-27 did make it to the target, they ended up fourth and sixth respectively in the Group bombing order. Somehow, Z-30, Z-52 and Z-54 got in ahead of both of them, and Z-6 beat out Z-27. Somebody was not following their speed and cruise control instructions, or perhaps less than perfect navigation added miles to some planes' routes.)

Four planes aborted, all early in the flight. Z-53 turned back 20 miles north of Saipan due to a stuck prop on #3 engine and #1 engine cutting out. Z-48 (one of the lead planes) turned back 40 miles north of Marpi Point when her #3 engine ran away and would not feather. When she jettisoned her M47A2 incendiaries, they exploded "very near (the) bomb bay." Z-49's #4 prop stuck at 2800 RPM and she landed back at Isley after circling the island. And Z-11 turned around 60 miles north of Saipan when her bomb bay doors became unlatched and could not be relatched. She also had her #3 prop stuck at 2200 RPM.

On the route out, the remaining 38 planes flew at about 1000 feet, with navigation lights on, until reaching Nishino Jima, about 500 miles south of Japan, at which point they were turned off. The climb to briefed bombing altitudes of 6000 to 6800 feet (individual planes were assigned varying altitudes within this range) began about 200 miles out from Japan. At about this time Z-26 lost her #2 engine but airplane commander Maj Robert Sewell elected to continue to Japan on three engines and bomb the city of Hamamatsu as a last resort target.

The remaining 37 planes made landfall as planned in the vicinity of the city of Nakiri, flew on to the IP, the city of Uji-Yamada, and then to the target city, Nagoya.

Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew in Z-35 recorded that they climbed to 10,000 feet for their bomb run. If so, this was a violation of the briefing instructions and could be dangerous. Each Wing and Group was assigned a different altitude range to minimize the danger of collisions, and also to avoid bombs being dropped onto B-29's at lower altitudes.

Some flak was encountered over Ise Bay and Nagoya harbor but it was inaccurate and did no damage. Anti-aircraft fire was heavier over Nagoya itself and two B-29's reported being hit there but ground crews could find no damage later. Some phosphorous bombs were dropped from Japanese planes above, and some flares were also observed. Forty to fifty searchlights were active and caught a few planes in their beams. AC Jim Farrell, flying Z-34 of the 882nd Squadron, got a scare when he called for 2400 rpm on the props at the IP and his fill-in
Farrell hadn’t had a regular copilot since Sam Porter had been transferred out (and later killed) in January – reached down and accidentally flicked on the landing lights! (The Prop Controls and Landing Lights switches were on the same pedestal.) Farrell quickly reached down and turned them off. He expected the searchlights to start homing in on them but they were lucky. They had apparently not been noticed.

Only seven fighter attacks were reported but one was effective. Two twin-engine Irvings made a coordinated attack on Z-14 from eight o’clock high and four o’clock low respectively and knocked out her #4 engine, but the B-29 kept flying on three engines.

Thirty-three aircraft made full drops over Nagoya between 0243 (Z-30) and 0400 (Z-55) at altitudes ranging from 5800 to 8500 feet. Three planes, Z-2, Z-14 and Z-43, suffered partial rack or release malfunctions and did not get off all their bombs. Then there was the strange case of Z-7.

According to the records, Z-7 was flown on this mission by a mostly 883rd crew, led by 2/Lt Ernest Dearborn, formerly copilot on Capt Eugene Mahoney’s crew (#362), but with Maj Freeman Parsons, Group Operations Officer, flying in the left seat as AC. Records also indicate Z-7 may have been a last-minute addition -- she had flown a weather strike mission the night before. Whatever the case, the bombardier had some problems on this mission. Z-7’s bombs failed to release on the first run, so she came around -- always a dangerous maneuver -- to try again. Same result. They tried a third time and still couldn't get them to drop! According to the Mission Summary, later investigation “revealed that this was caused by a personal error of the bombardier.” What did he do, hit the wrong switch? In any case, the bombs were later jettisoned into the sea manually, except for two which were brought back to base.

Right gunner Joseph Altott of the Althoff crew in Z-19 reported flying thru heavy flak and dropping their bombs at 0327. To him the destruction below appeared greater than in Tokyo. “This was a sight I will never forget: We flew in at 6500-6800 ft and had a very good view of Nagoya. We could see the whole district being swept with flames in all sections....”

All told, the 500th Bomb Group dropped 368 M47A2 and 1,337 E28 incendiaries on the primary target, and the other Groups probably about the same. The fires appeared intense and widespread but damage was not as severe as initially thought, as the Japanese firefighters managed to bring most of the fires under control before they merged. Their relative efficiency would earn them a repeat strike later.

But for now the crews were only concerned with getting home. Exit was made by means of nearly a 180 degree turn to the right, to cross the coast slightly west of Hamamatsu. Then came the long flight home. This would be complicated by very bad weather at Saipan, rain showers and a zero ceiling. Only 25 of the 38 returning planes managed to get in at Isley, landing between 0857 and 1138 on the morning of 12 March. One of those was Z-19 with the Althoff crew. Right gunner Joseph Altott praised his AC 2/Lt Robert Althoff for making “a beautiful landing right through the soup.”

Four planes -- Z-23, Z-14, Z-22 and Z-26 -- diverted to Tinian, and nine others -- Z-1, Z-8, Z-50, Z-45, Z-33, Z-7, Z-21, Z-47 and Z-52 -- had to fly all the way down to Guam. These planes would return to Saipan later that day after the weather cleared, but in the meantime all set down safely somewhere. There were again no losses on this mission. It was beginning to look like old man LeMay wasn’t so crazy after all.

One little noted aspect of this mission is the fact that 500th Group was able to put up 42 aircraft only 32 hours after the last plane had landed from the big Tokyo fire raid. This is impressive testimony to the hard work and skill of the ground crews.

12 Mar 45

The day after a big night mission was again quiet. The rain and clouds that had complicated the morning landings continued all day. Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, thought that the rain should really make his garden start growing. The S-2 Section posted pictures today of Tokyo after the big
fire raid of 9-10 March and according to Copeland, “the results were devestating [sic].”

### 13 Mar 45

This morning the men of the 500th were informed there would be a briefing this afternoon for another night incendiary mission, this time to Osaka. Early riser Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron, got up for breakfast, then went back to his hut to write a letter home and then take a nap. He napped again in the afternoon in order to be as fresh as possible for tonight's mission. Weber admitted that these long night missions were wearing on everyone. “These missions have been taking a little of the old pep and vinegar out of us fellows....”

Most crews spent a good part of the day checking and cleaning their planes. As on the last mission, ammunition was to be carried for the tail guns only. (But it wouldn't be surprising if some crews also took ammo for other guns.) The men had an early supper at 1600 and then walked over to the S-2 area for the briefing.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"13 March: Briefing for Mission 31 held at 1630 hours. The target is the urban area of Osaka. All crews except Lts Setterich, Gregg, Schmidt, Major Adams, Capts Irby, Braden and Mahoney's, took off. Capt McClanahan aborted. Lts Field and Seale, with their crews, reported in."

In addition to the usual information dispensed at a briefing, the men learned that the results of the last mission to Nagoya were not as good as had been initially reported.

On the night of 13-14 March 1945 the XXI Bomber Command carried out its third mass low-level fire raid in a row, with over 300 bombers striking Osaka, the second largest city in Japan. Only 30 hours after the last of 42 planes had landed from the raid on Nagoya, the 500th Bomb Group put up 36 planes of 39 scheduled. The records do not identify the three scratched planes or crews.

The 36 participating planes and crews were as follows. Based on format used in previous mission documents, the listing is probably in order of bombing the primary target, except for the last four planes, which either aborted or bombed last resort targets.

Z-33, “Slick Dick”, Hanft
Z-28, “Old Ironsides”, Sasser
Z-3, “Ann Dee”, Law
Z-56, “Wabash Cannonball”, Adamson
Z-8, “Mission to Albuquerque”, Fitzgerald
Z-1, Bricker
Z-54, Standen
Z-41, “The Baroness”, Barron
Z-19, “Sna Pe Fort”, Althoff
Z-49, “Three Feathers”, Feathers
Z-53, “The Ancient Mariner”, Clinkscales
Z-27, LaMarche
Z-7, “Hell's Bell”, Sullivan
Z-13, Luman
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray
Z-22, “Georgia Ann”, Haas
Z-51, “Tail Wind”, King
Z-30, “Sting Shift”, Reeves
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Oswald
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Gillert
The basic plan was still the same, all planes to fly to the target and bomb individually. There would also be three lead aircraft to mark the target as before, this time taking off at 1750 to 1751, almost an hour prior to the remainder of the planes. However, the records do not identify which were the three lead aircraft. The other 33 aircraft took off from 1849 to 1907, except for Z-56, which was delayed for unknown reasons and didn’t get off till 1921.

Bomb load was not uniform for this mission. (Were they running short of certain types of incendiaries, or were they trying something new?) Most planes carried E36 incendiaries, but some carried E28’s, and there were a few M46 photo flash bombs mixed in. Each plane again carried ammo for only the tail guns.

Once in the air, each plane flew off toward Japan at 2000 feet. About 15 miles north of Saipan the #2 engine on Z-45, McClanahan crew, started shooting flames around the cowl flaps and she turned back. About 400 miles out from Japan Z-12, Curtis crew, lost her #4 engine; she turned around and dropped her bombs on Chichi Jima on the way back.

The remaining 34 planes began their climb to bombing altitude. Due to a complete overcast, all navigation was done by radar. Z-11, with only an intermittently functioning radar, got lost and hit the coast well to the right (east) of the briefed course, then turned the wrong way, toward Nagoya. Once the error was realized, she turned around, but the airplane commander decided to bomb Kushimoto Airfield as a target of last resort instead of trying to reach Osaka. The other 33 planes made landfall near the prescribed point, but Z-29’s #1 engine picked this time to catch fire. The crew feathered it and continued to the IP, which was a peninsula on the SW corner of Awaji Island, but the airplane commander decided against going over the primary on three engines and bombed the city of Shirama as a last resort target. This left 32 planes to reach and bomb Osaka.

On their way in, several 500th planes reported other, unidentified B-29’s dropping their bombs at landfall and turning back. A few scattered fires were also observed along the route, obviously caused by bombers jettisoning or dropping their incendiaries early.

The 500th planes dropped their bombs between 0155 and 0325 from altitudes ranging from 5800 to 8200 feet. A total of 1,051 x E36 and 193 x E28 incendiaries fell on the city, along with 4 x M46 photo flash bombs. Many planes reported severe turbulence over the target from rising thermals, but all made it through safely. Breakaway was to the left.

Flak was light to moderate and mostly inaccurate. The records state that only Z-1 and Z-41 were hit, and damage was light. But in a letter home, Sgt Leonard J. McNeill, from Orlando, Florida, tail gunner on the Law crew in Z-3, told his father-in-law that they “brought back a good-sized flak hole in our ship”, though fortunately no one was hurt. The omission of this damage from the official Battle Damage Report probably indicates that it was slight enough to be repaired quickly. The Sullivan crew in Z-7 had a very close call, but not from enemy
action. A bomb dropped by another B-29 somewhere above them hit the “leading edge of left wing between #1 and #2 engines.” If that bomb had struck a little farther back, it may have broken the wing off, or if a little to the left or right it would have taken out an engine, with probably catastrophic results.

Only one night fighter was seen, again by tail gunner McNeill on the Law crew. This fighter followed along behind for several minutes, apparently trying to home in by radar. McNeill wisely held his fire for fear of revealing the bomber’s exact position. Eventually, they lost him.

Once again, all planes returned safely to Saipan, landing between 0757 and 1028 on the morning of 14 March.

Later damage assessment showed over eight square miles of the industrial and commercial areas of the city burned out. Another big success.

14 Mar 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"14 March: All crews returned safely from Mission 31. Results good. Meeting of Citation Board held. A citation for Crew Chiefs was drafted. Lt Schultz reported to the Squadron. The Staff lost a ball game to the 881st, 6 to 4.

15 Mar 45

15 March: Lt Schultz and his crew were billeted in the S-2 Office. Additional quarters are being constructed for them. Capt Black was appointed Operations Officer."

With more replacement crews coming in, billeting space was obviously getting to be a problem. As of 31 March 1945, the 500th Bomb Group reported 147 lost or missing air crew members. This is the equivalent of more than 13 crews. The 500th had started out with 60 original crews, and as best I can determine (there are no figures readily available) had received 13 replacement crews by 18 March 1945. This should have evened out, but maybe extra staff were taking up some of the bunks, or maybe Lt Schultz wanted to keep his crew together and not scatter them around to where the vacant bunks were.

16 Mar 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 March: Briefing for Mission 32 held at 1600 hours. The target is the urban area of Kobe. Take-off is at approximately 2030 hours. All regular crews except Capts Moreland's, Braden's, Mahoney's, Irby's and Lt Barron's took off."

On the night of 16-17 March 1945 the XXI Bomber Command conducted its fourth mass low-level incendiary attack in a row. The target this night was Kobe. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 42 aircraft, of which 40 were airborne. The two planes which failed to take off, for reasons unknown, were Z-21 (Pierce?) and Z-42 (Moreland?).

The participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-3 (H. Jackson), "Ann Dee"
Z-4 (Oswald), "Black Magic"
Z-5 (Kappil), "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-6 (Law), "Booze Hound"
Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Belle"
Z-8 (Fitzgerald), "Mission to Albuquerque"
Z-19 (Althoff), "Sna Pe Fort"
Z-9 (Mather), "Nina Ross"
Z-10 (Thompson), "Punchin' Judy"
Z-11 (Taylor)
Z-2 (Lewis), "20th Century Limited"
Z-13 (Luman)
Z-12 (Curtis)
Z-1 (Bricker)
Z-29 (Shorey), "Gravel Gertie"
Z-22 (D. Jackson), "Georgia Ann"
Z-28 (Hughes), "Old Ironsides"
Z-32 (W. Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-27 (LaMarche)
Z-24 (Tackett), "Pride of the Yankees"
Z-31 (Arbon), "Homing De-Vice"
Z-26 (Sewell)
Z-33 (Hanft), "Slick Dick"
Z-23 (Limpp), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-30 (Gilbert), "Sting Shift"
Z-34 (Farrell), "Frisco Nannie"
Z-35 (Gray), "Pacific Queen"
Z-50 (McClanahan), "Fancy Detail"
Z-54 (Standen)
Z-49 (Feathers), "Three Feathers"
Z-52 (Cheney), "20th Century Sweetheart"
Z-56 (Gregg), "Wabash Cannonball"
Z-51 (Schmidt), "Tail Wind"
Z-45 (Adamson), "Mustn't Touch"
Z-48 (Black)
Z-41 (King), "The Baroness"
Z-55 (Ryan), "Janice E."
Z-47 (Adams), "Adam's Eve"
Z-43 (Setterich)
Z-53 (Clinkscales), "The Ancient Mariner"

1/Lt Herschel Connor from Canton, Illinois, was the original flight engineer, and a very good one, on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron. Major "Fitz" and his well-trained crew had gained a reputation for escorting damaged planes home, in no small part due to Connor, who was able to stretch out his fuel to keep the plane in the air for much longer than normal. During their latest feat on 19 Feb, when they stayed with the badly damaged Z-11 and the Pearson crew all the way home, the plane and crew had remained in the air for a whopping 17 hours and 45 minutes. Connor's talents had not gone unnoticed. He had been put in for promotion and had recently been transferred to Wing to teach his skills to others. Connor didn't want to leave the crew but Fitzgerald, while hating to lose him, convinced Connor that he should go.

Connor was flying today but with another crew. After he picked up his equipment he briefly stopped by Z-8's hardstand to see Maj Fitz and his old crew. "[T]hey were just ready to crank up engines. I told him that I was flying and would be there to pick him up if he stubbed his toe. He wanted to know who I was flying with and the ship number. His last words were 'O.K., grandma.' Every crew member was in good spirits."

The basic Wing plan remained the same, all planes to fly to the target and bomb individually. Take-off for all planes was from 2054 to 2113. There were no assigned lead planes on this mission.

Bomb load was not uniform. Planes carried a mix of incendiaries -- M17A1's, M76's, E36's and E28's -- with a few M26 (T4E4) fragmentation clusters thrown in. Once again, ammunition was carried for the tail guns only.
On the route out, the 40 planes headed for Japan at altitudes between 4000 and 4500 feet. There was only one abort. About 200 miles out from Japan, Z-33, Hanft crew, turned back due to a problem with her #3 engine, either a swallowed valve or a blown cylinder head.

The remaining 39 planes made landfall as planned, except for Z-49, Feathers crew, which wandered far off course due to faulty navigation. When the error was discovered, the plane had insufficient fuel to make the primary, so she bombed the city of Shingu as a target of opportunity.

This left 38 planes to bomb Kobe. The IP, a peninsula just north of Wakayama, was easily picked up by most planes on radar, and they went in on the bomb run at altitudes between 6000 and 7500 feet. Bombs were dropped between 0407 and 0515. Five planes -- Z-1 (4), Z-2 (1), Z-4 (4), Z-45 (1) and Z-54 (8) -- experienced partial shackle or rack malfunctions and failed to drop the indicated number of bombs. All told, 1343 incendiary bombs and 13 fragmentation clusters from the 500th rained down on Kobe. About 20 percent of the city was burned out.

The official report says that flak was light to moderate and mostly ineffective, but Dick Wing, right gunner on the Clinkscales crew in Z-53, felt it was “intense”. Near the IP, Z-50, McClanahan crew, was hit up front in the lower forward turret and nose wheel well door. Over the primary, Z-30, Gillert crew, was struck in the right inboard nacelle door. The damage was not serious for either plane.

From 10 to 15 Japanese fighters were seen on this mission, and eight attacks were reported. Few searchlights were observed, but they were hardly needed, as the B-29’s were well outlined against the fires below when passing over Kobe, making good targets for fighters lurking above. There were some reports by returning crews of explosions in the air and bombers possibly going down, but due to the darkness and confusion nothing definite could be determined. No claims of enemy aircraft were made on this mission.

Breakaway after the bomb run was to the left, and the route home was over Awaji Island and down the bay to the sea. Most planes returned safely to base, landing between 1042 and 1256 on 17 March. Two planes were late. It was soon learned that Z-41, King crew, had run short of fuel and had landed at Iwo Jima to refuel. She would show up later. But as the minutes and hours ticked off and no word came, it slowly became clear that Z-8 and the Fitzgerald crew would never come home.

The loss of the Fitzgerald crew and Z-8 was keenly felt by the 881st Squadron and the 500th Group. Major Fitz and his men had shepherded so many damaged B-29’s home after missions that their plane, “Mission to Albuquerque”, had been unofficially given a second name -- "St. Bernard".

Not until after the war was over could the story of Z-8's loss be pieced together. She had been rammed over Kobe by a Tony flown by Capt Junichi Ogata. The B-29 broke in two and crashed into Saido Mountain about two miles north of the city near a POW camp. Most of the crew went down with the plane, but two men, navigator Robert Nelson and radio operator Algy Augunas, succeeded in bailing out and were taken prisoner. They were held for four months by the Kempei Tai, then on 18 July 1945 were given a perfunctory trial and sentenced to immediate death. After bungled attempts at beheading, the two men were shot. After the war, eight Japanese officials involved in this incident were tried and sentenced to varying lengths of confinement from 3 years to life.

One of Capt Ogata’s boots was found inside the wreckage of the B-29. Circling crows later led searchers to his body not far away. The bodies of the B-29 crew were hastily buried by the Japanese, but prisoners from the nearby camp, led by a Franciscan missionary, Friar Marcian Pellet, managed to recover and bury them and mark the graves.

The members of the Fitzgerald crew (#115) were:

AC          Maj Robert J, Fitzgerald
P           2/Lt Robert E. Copeland
B 1/Lt Erwin A. Brousek
N 2/Lt Robert W. Nelson
FE 2/Lt James C. Bond
Radio S/Sgt Algy S. Augunas
Ring G Sgt John T. Barry
RG Sgt David W. Holley
LG Sgt John L. Cutler
Radar S/Sgt Robert D. Cookson
TG Sgt Ruben A Wray

Technical Notes:

With any mission, there were many smaller details that had to be anticipated and planned for. For the 16 March mission the 500th Bomb Group staff incorporated many of these into a page titled "Pilot Hints & Instructions", which was presumably distributed to the airplane commanders. Many items seem routine; others invite comments or questions.

Item 4 gave the altitudes to be adhered to en route, also the calibrated air speed (CAS). Navigation lights were to be left on until start of climb. If a front or bad weather was encountered, all planes were to space out to avoid collisions. Another measure to avoid collisions was embodied in Item 8, which ordered aborting planes to return to base at a different altitude than on the outbound leg.

Item 9 stressed the importance of dropping bombs at the assigned altitude. There were other B-29's out there, and you didn't want to drop on them.

Item 12 lays out the rules for landing at Iwo Jima. Landing there is discouraged except in an emergency. Some fighting was still going on on Iwo this time, but more importantly, facilities there were very primitive and fuel was in short supply.

17 Mar 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"17 March: All crews returned safely from the Kobe mission. Capt Braden's crew was briefed for WSM A291. The Officers Club was officially opened."

Willie Greene of the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron was part of the band that played at the O Club opening.

18 Mar 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"18 March WSM-291-A Capt. Braden took off 17 2041Z [18 March 0641 Local] in Z Square 50 ["Fancy Detail"]. Flight plan 'A' was accomplished and aircraft returned to base 18 1341Z [18 March 2341 Local]. WSM-292-J Capt. LaMarche in Z Square 27 took off 17 2054Z [18 March 0654 Local] to bomb East Tokyo. A radar run was made on the target from 29,500 feet, dropping 14 x 500 [pound] GP's [General Purpose, i.e., high explosive]. Fires were observed in warehouse; some hits on west approach to bridge. A/C returned to base at 18 1110Z [18 March 2110 Local]. [2/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd RCM Officer, was on this mission in Z-27. When he got back to base, Garrigus learned that he had been promoted to 1/Lt this same day. - JEB] WSM-293-H Lt. Calhoun flying Z Square 6 ["Booze Hound"], took off 18 0301Z [18 March 1301 Local] to bomb target 197 [Nagoya Arsenal]. A radar run was employed from 27000 feet, dropping Incendiary Bombs. Bombs landed in area of target 198 [Aichi Aircraft Works]. One large fire and several smaller ones were observed. A/C
On the night of 18-19 March 1945 the XXI Bomber Command revisited Nagoya for the fifth and last of its big March “fire blitz” raids. Nagoya had been hit on the night of 11-12 March but had escaped the level of damage inflicted on the other cities, so a second attack was deemed to be necessary.

The 500th Bomb Group put up 32 aircraft for this mission. Participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-49 (Feathers), “Three Feathers”
Z-52 (Irby), “20th Century Sweetheart”
Z-56 (Gregg), “Wabash Cannonball”
Z-51 (Schmidt), “Tail Wind”
Z-42 (Moreland), “Supine Sue”
Z-48 (McClanahan)
Z-41 (Barron), “The Baroness”
Z-55 (Ryan), “Janice E.”
Z-43 (Setterich)
Z-29 (Shorey), “Gravel Gertie”
Z-21 (Pierce), “Devils’ Delight”
Z-32 (Parsons), “Fever from the South”
Z-24 (Sasser), “Pride of the Yankees”
Z-31 (Arbon), “Homing De-Vice”
Z-26 (Sewell)
Z-23 (Gilbert), “Ramblin Roscoe”
Z-30 (Reeves), “Sting Shift”
Z-35 (Gray), “Pacific Queen”
Z-34 (Farrell), “Frisco Nannie”
Z-3 (H. Jackson), “Ann Dee”
Z-4 (Oswald), “Black Magic”
Z-5 (Mather), “There’ll Always Be A Christmas”
Z-7 (Sullivan), “Hell’s Bell”
Z-19 (Law), “Sna Pe Fort”
Z-9 (Conn), “Nina Ross”
Z-11 (Booze)
Z-2 (Lewis), “20th Century Limited”
Z-13 (Luman)
Z-12 (Curtis)
Z-1 (Bricker)

Take-off was from 2045 to 2056 for 31 planes, following the 499th Bomb Group. One 500th plane, Z-26, Sewell crew, had some sort of a problem and had to taxi off the runway. Whatever it was, the problem was fixed, but then the plane had to wait until all other Wing planes had taken off. She finally got into the air at 2204.

Bomb loading was again not uniform on this mission. Most planes carried M47A2 or M76 incendiaries, but some carried E28, E36, E46, or M17A1 incendiaries, and there were a few M64 general purpose bombs scattered around for good measure. As for gunnery, ammo was carried this time not only for the tail guns but for the lower turrets as well, although the gunners were cautioned to use the lower turrets to fire on ground targets only.

Assigned altitude for the 500th en route to Japan was 5000 feet. Z-56, Gregg crew, and Z-30, Reeves crew, aborted not long after take-off, the former because of a stuck #3 prop governor, the later due to failure of the #4 prop pitch control. About six hours out, Z-51, Schmidt crew, turned back after she had to feather her #4 engine
due to a severe oil leak.

As they approached Japan, the remaining 29 planes climbed to their assigned bombing altitudes between 5000 and 5800 feet. Landfall was made as planned and the planes moved on to the IP, which was a point of land at the southern end of Nagoya Bay near the city of Uji Yamada. From there the bomb run was straight up the eastern edge of the bay, course 015 degrees. The Nagoya waterfront was used as an offset aiming point.

As the planes reached the target area, they had to fly through a large column of smoke from the fires already burning. Turbulence from rising thermals buffeted the aircraft as they tried to maintain course and altitude and caused some planes to bomb from slightly higher or lower altitudes. But all made it through and dropped successfully, except for three planes -- Z-5, Z-23 and Z-43 -- which experienced shackle failures and did not get all their bombs away. A total of 2,377 bombs from the 500th fell on Nagoya.

Anti-aircraft was light to moderate overall and generally inaccurate. Only three planes -- Z-52, Z-26 and Z-13 -- suffered minor flak damage. Many searchlights were observed but they appeared ineffective in aiding the AA batteries. Approximately 11 fighters were seen but only one attack was reported, on Z-7 from eight o’clock high, and it caused no damage. No claims were made by B-29 gunners. A few gunners fired their lower turrets on searchlights below but ceased when they realized this only seemed to focus attention on their plane.

Briefed breakaway from the target was to the right, then to the coast in the vicinity of Hamamatsu Bay. All planes followed these instructions except Z-5, Mather crew, which for unknown reasons turned to the left and exited along the western shore of Nagoya Bay.

Somewhere over Japan, Z-2, Lewis crew, lost an engine, probably to an oil leak, and had to fly home on three. About 300 miles out from Honshu she was joined momentarily by X-36 (9th Bomb Group, 313th Wing, out of Tinian). Z-2's feathered engine was obvious, and she unsuccessfully attempted to establish contact to request escort the rest of the way home, but the other B-29 flew on and left her. This angered Lewis and crew so much that they filed an official report on the incident, but it is unknown if any action was taken.

Z-19, Law crew, was delayed coming home when after departing the coast they observed flares off to their left. Thinking it might be another B-29 or crew in distress, they circled the area for 45 minutes searching for the source but had no luck. By this time, the plane was running low on fuel, so they landed at Iwo for refueling.

All planes returned safely to Saipan, landing between 1011 and 1218 on 19 March, except for Z-19. Her late arrival at 1406 was greeted with considerable joy, as her landing at Iwo Jima had not been reported to Saipan and she had been feared lost.

This mission burned out another nearly three miles of the center of Nagoya. But the job was not yet finished. The Group Bombardier's Report, unsigned but probably written by Capt Richard E. Hale, recommended a night bombing raid on Targets 193 or 194 (both Mitsubishi aircraft plants in Nagoya) “using 75% GP bombs and 25% incendiary to light up the target.” Hale was either clairvoyant or somebody upstairs was paying attention, because this is almost exactly what would be done six nights hence.

19 Mar 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"19 March.  WSM-294-A  Lt. King took off 18 2000Z [19 Mar 0600L] in Z Square 45 ["Mustn't Touch"]. Flight plan 'A' was accomplished and aircraft returned to base at 19 0400Z [19 Mar 1400L].
WSM-295-E.  Lt. Adamson, in Z Square 54, took off at 18 2000Z to bomb Mitsubishi A/C Factory. A radar run was made on the target from 24,600 feet, dropping 12 x 500 lb. GP's. Due to rack malfunction bombs landed in rice paddies. A/C returned to base at 19 0400Z.
WSM-296-G  Capt [Donald G.] Jackson in Z Square 22 ["Georgia Ann"], took off at 19 0800Z [19 Mar 1800L] to
bomb Tamashima A/C Plant. A radar run was made on the target from 26,000 feet, dropping 14 x 500 lb. GP's. Results unobserved. Return to base 19 2200Z [20 Mar 0800L]."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"19 March: ... Periodicals are being received much more regularly and in greater variety. Fences were put up in the Headquarters area. Lts Adamson and King flew their WSMs."

20 Mar 45

After the heavy mission load over the last few weeks, and especially during the fire raid blitz, everyone in the 73rd Bomb Wing was exhausted -- air crews, ground crews, even the staff. A rest was badly needed, and so the men were given a day off -- except for those who drew WSM duty. Rumor had it though that the primary reason for the break was simply that they'd run out of incendiaries.

Cpl (soon to be Sgt) Leonard McNeill, tail gunner on the Law crew of the 881st Squadron, took advantage of this day of rest to sit down and write a long letter to his father-in-law, Jimmie Culbreth, back in Orlando, Florida. At 27, McNeill was several years older than the average B-29 crewman. He was also unusual in being married with two small children. These two factors, age and fatherhood, tend to give a man a broader perspective on life. McNeill clearly had a good enough relationship with Culbreth to share what he called “a devil of a lot on my mind.” The Law replacement crew had been on Saipan for only three weeks now but had already been tempered in the caldron of the March Fire Blitz, flying the last three missions, to Osaka, Kobe and Nagoya. McNeill described how he felt about this: “The job we are doing isn't easy not even for a brave man and I always felt I was a little chicken. Our reward for what we are doing is great or I think so anyway. I have set (sic) and looked back at Japan for a hundred miles off the coast and seen three of their lar[g]est and most important cities in flame. Can you imagine a fire in Tampa that you could see in Orlando? It wouldn't leave much of Tampa would it? I don't think there is much left of Nagoya or the others either. We came back with our chest stuck out and our head held high somewhat different than the way we go out but we are still shaking inside.”

This experience had obviously made a deep impression on McNeill and made him keenly aware of his own mortality. But he was afraid that his wife Melba, back home in Orlando with their children, did not have a sufficient appreciation of the dire possibilities... which is why he was writing to his father-in-law.

“My principle (sic) thought is about my family and I write to you as I always felt, as a friend, and not as a son-in-law. Everything is left so the kids can have about half a chance growing up but I doubt if Melba will be level headed enough to think of the things that will be comming (sic) to her and the kids. I have told her before I came over but I believe she took it too lightly and thinks it can't happen here to her. But maybe it can.” So he implored Jimmie, “Please don't let anything be overlooked.” That included notifying Leonard's folks, because any official notification concerning him would come only to Melba as next of kin.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"20 March 45 WSM-297-A. Lt. Hanft took off 19 1900Z [20 Mar 0500L] in Z Square 33 [“Slick Dick”]. Weather data was gathered in the Okinawa Jima Area. [This was in preparation for the invasion of Okinawa, which took place on 1 April 1945.] Ship returned to base at 20 0900Z [20 Mar 1900L].


WSM-299-F. Lt Haas in Z Square 36 [“Li'l Abner”], took off 20 0820 [20 Mar 1820L] to bomb target 194 [Mitsubishi Aircraft Works], Nagoya, Japan. A radar run was made from 27,300 feet, dropping 10 x 500 lb. M64 bombs. [M64 = GP] Results were unobserved. Return to base 21 0105Z [21 Mar 1105L].

73rd Wing declared holiday to allow personnel to rest after successful low altitude burn raids in the past several days."
According to CFC gunner Cpl Willie Greene of the Haas crew, this weather strike mission was “P.P.” (piss poor). They flew over Kobe and Osaka before dropping their bombs on Nagoya at 0200, but one bomb hung up in the bomb bay. On the return they landed at Guam to deliver their weather data, making a long mission longer. The exhausted crew didn’t make it back to Saipan until 1100 on the 21st. Greene also noted that Squadron Operations Officer Capt Joseph M. Savage, Jr., accompanied them on this mission.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"20 March: Today is the first holiday we have had since being on the Island. Ball games predominated the day. The EM team beat Group 4 to 3, but lost to the 881st in the afternoon, 1 to 0. The officers won from Group, 7 to 5 and from the 881st in the afternoon, 5 to 3. Col Dougherty gave a talk at the Group Theater just before the picture was shown. After the show, the first "Symphony Under the Stars" program was given. It was a well deserved rest. Lt Gregg flew the WSM and returned safely."

21 Mar 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"21 March: A routine day. There was a meeting of the Awards & Decoration Board; applications were forwarded. A rainy spell has set in. New crew assigned -- Lt Ben B. White, Crew 366."

22 Mar 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 March: Started moving the Operations Tent to make room for a new quonset. Beat the 882nd in softball, 14-1."

Today Capt Herschel Connor, formerly of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st but now assigned to Wing, dropped by the 500th area to see his old crew chief, M/Sgt George Lucas. Coincidentally today Lucas had gone with 881st Operations Officer Capt Norbert Oswald over to base operations to pick up a brand-new plane to replace Z-8 42-24849 lost with the Fitzgerald crew on 17 March. Oswald and Lucas taxied what would become the fourth Z-8, 44-69829, back to the 500th area. First claim on the new plane went to Capt Donald Thompson and crew.

23 Mar 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"23 March 1st Lt. James M. Pearson's crew returned from recreational D.S. [detached service] in Oahu." [You may recall that this crew had crash-landed their badly damaged plane, Z-11, off the runway at Isley when coming back from a mission to Tokyo on 19 Feb. They had been given a month's R&R in Hawaii.]

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"23 March: Lt Barnwall of the ATC [Air Transport Command] visited the Squadron seeking information on Lt Northcutt of Capt Charters’ crew. [The Charters crew had been lost on 9 Jan when their plane, Z-45, developed engine trouble en route to Tokyo and they had to ditch in bad weather.] He was given what we had. The Staff officers beat the combat crews' team, 10-1."
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 March: Capt M. P. Hudgins of MISX CinCPac held a meeting in the Squadron briefing room at 0900 hours. The Strike team briefing scheduled for 1030 was postponed. A new radio was received from Special Service for the War Information Center. Briefing for Mission 34, target 193 [Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Plant in Nagoya], was held at 1600 hours. Take off will be at approximately 1730. Major Adams, Capts Feathers, Moreland, McClanahan, Braden and Lts Schmidt, Standen, Cheney, Setterich, Ryan and Clinkscales took off. Lt Setterich aborted."

On the night of 24-25 March 1945 the XXI Bomber Command carried out a strike on the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Plant in Nagoya. This was an unusual night, low-level precision attack. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 30 aircraft for this mission and 30 were airborne. In addition, the Clinkscales crew flew Z-45 as a Super Dumbo (comms and rescue) plane on this mission.

The participating planes and crews, in order of scheduled take-off, were as follows:

Z-50 (Braden), "Fancy Detail"
Z-54 (Standen)
Z-49 (Feathers), "Three Feathers"
Z-51 (Schmidt), "Tail Wind"
Z-48 (McClanahan)
Z-42 (Moreland), "Supine Sue"
Z-41 (Cheney), "The Baroness"
Z-47 (Adams), "Adam's Eve"
Z-55 (Ryan), "Janice E."
Z-22 (D. Jackson), "Georgia Ann"
Z-28 (Haas), "Old Ironsides"
Z-32 (Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-27 (Robinson)
Z-24 (Tackett), "Pride of the Yankees"
Z-26 (Sealy)
Z-31 (Arbon), "Homing De-Vice"
Z-33 (Hanft), "Slick Dick"
Z-23 (Limpp), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-30 (Reeves), "Sting Shift"
Z-34 (Farrell), "Frisco Nannie"
Z-3 (H. Jackson), "Ann Dee"
Z-4 (Oswald), "Black Magic"
Z-5 (Kappil), "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Bell"
Z-6 (Booze), "Booze Hound"
Z-8 (Thompson), "Duke of Albuquerque"
Z-9 (Conn), "Nina Ross"
Z-12 (Law)
Z-13 (Luman)
Z-1 (Bricker)

Three additional planes and crews – Z-43 (Setterich), Z-21 (Pierce) and Z-19 (Althoff) – were readied as spares in case of problems, but they were not needed.

Take-off was from 1739 to 1751, except for Z-28, Haas crew, which apparently had some sort of problem that had to be fixed and took off later at 1829.
Bomb load was mixed. Twenty-seven planes carried 29 x M64 general purpose bombs plus 2 x M76 incendiaries, and ten of those additionally carried one M46 photo flash bomb. The remaining three planes carried 37 x M17A1 incendiaries. The gunnery records indicate that only tail guns were loaded for this mission. It had probably been determined that loading the lower turrets for firing on ground targets, as had been done on the 18 March mission, was a bad idea. The muzzle flashes and tracers only called more attention to the planes.

As usual for night missions, all planes were to fly to the target and bomb individually. Assigned altitude en route was between 5000 and 5500 feet.

There were four aborts. Z-7, Sullivan crew, and Z-5, Kappil crew, turned back after only a few minutes, the former because of “a smoking engine which loaded up at all power settings”, the latter because she lost her #1 engine. Z-28, Haas crew, which had experienced the delay on take-off, couldn't shake the jinx and had to turn back 3-1/2 hours out when her #3 engine began backfiring and vibrating excessively. Z-27, Robinson crew, made it to within about an hour of Japan when her #2 engine began backfiring and had to be feathered, so they had to abort.

The remaining 26 planes all made landfall as scheduled and proceeded to the IP, which was a point just northeast of Matsuzaka. From there each plane set a course of 30 degrees, which led straight up Nagoya Bay. The 500th had been assigned bombing times of 0110 to 0155. Some planes had made better than expected time and had to circle or loiter off the coast to avoid arriving over the target too early. Still, two planes, Z-49, Feathers crew, and Z-32, Parsons crew, didn't loiter long enough and bombed the target a few minutes early.

The Offset Aiming Point was the mouth of the Hori River. Bombing altitudes were from 5800 to 6850. All planes had been directed to make a radar bombing approach, with visual corrections if the primary target, which in this case remember was not a sprawling city but a specific factory, was positively identified. To aid in identification of the primary, pathfinder planes from the 314th Bomb Wing had been assigned to drop parachute flares over the target area, but this proved counterproductive. Crews complained that glare from the flares combined with smoke and haze to make visual sighting difficult. Only a few planes were able to make visual contact; most bombed completely by radar.

There was no effective fighter opposition on this mission. Only three fighters were seen and no attacks were reported. The same could not be said about flak. Several crews reported that it was the worst they had encountered on a night mission, and much of it was heavy caliber. Some airplane commanders took evasive action, which may have interfered with their bomb runs. Numerous searchlights were also observed on this mission.

One plane and crew had a particularly rough time over the target. Z-26 was being flown on this mission by the Sealy crew, #235A. It was their first combat mission, and Group CO Lt Col John E. Dougherty had decided to ride along with them. (Dougherty seemed to fly quite a few missions. He did not lead from a desk.) On the bomb run at 6000 feet some antiaircraft guns caught their range and shot a few holes in the plane. Then just before bombs away the plane shook. A shell had torn a large hole in the left wing and ripped off half the aileron. It also knocked out the radar and may have damaged the bomb release mechanism in some way, because the bombs failed to drop. This was a terrifying experience for a rookie crew, but the plane was luckily still controllable, and perhaps with Lt Col Dougherty’s encouragement, they decided to try again. So they made a right turn and came around again over the city. There they were hit yet again by flak, in the tail surfaces and the radar compartment, and the radar operator was slightly wounded. Worse, the bombs failed to release for a second time. Tempting fate twice was enough, so they headed toward home, intending to try to drop their bombs again, this time on Hamamatsu as a last resort target. But the plane was not handling well due to the damage, so they changed targets to Toyohashi, which was on a more direct route, and this time they got their bombs away.

Five other aircraft suffered flak damage, though not as serious as Z-26's. Z-48, McClanahan crew, was hit on the bomb run, as was Z-33, Hanft crew. Z-4, Oswald crew, Z-23, Limpp crew, Z-31, Arbon crew, and Z-33 again were all struck over the city.
Twenty planes were able to drop their full loads over the target. Five others dropped only partial loads for various reasons. On Z-3, Harlan Jackson crew, a rack malfunction caused 7 bombs not to release. Z-6, Booze crew, had a shackle problem which left one bomb hung up. Z-22, Donald Jackson crew, suffered an A-2 release failure and failed to get 6 bombs away. On Z-33, Hanft crew, the rear bomb bay doors failed to open, leaving 15 bombs on board. On Z-54, Standen crew, only one door in the rear bomb bay opened, leaving 11 bombs to be salvaged later.

All told, 601 general purpose bombs, 152 incendiaries, and 8 photo flash bombs were dropped on the primary target. From the light provided by the incendiaries and photo flash bombs, at least three sticks of M64’s were seen to drop on the target. Bomb damage assessment showed about 4.5% of the total roof area destroyed. Damage was also done to some other factories in the area, and an estimated 183 acres of the urban area of Nagoya were destroyed.

Breakaway after bombs away was to the right and then to the coast slightly west of Hamamatsu. Aircraft flew home singly or in sight of other planes. All aircraft returned to base safely, landing between 0720 and 0858. Last to land was badly damaged Z-26, but she made it down okay.

**26 Mar 45**

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“26 March
27 enlisted men promoted to grades indicated on SO #26, Hq 500th Bomb Group, dated 26 March 1945, inclosed.”

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“26 March: Ground School was again scheduled, but classes in target study were cancelled. Briefing for Mission #35 scheduled for 1100 hours, but it was postponed to 1500 hours. The target will be Oita, 1308 [Oita Air Field].”

Mission #35 would be the beginning of several weeks of bombing of Japanese airfields on the southernmost home island of Kyushu in support of Operation Iceberg, the invasion of Okinawa, scheduled for 1 April. Generals Arnold and LeMay were not happy about this diversion from the strategic bombing campaign, but Admiral Nimitz and the Navy were insistent, and since the Navy delivered nearly all the supplies for the XXI Bomber Command in the Marianas, they got their way.

**27 Mar 45**

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent its planes against Japanese airfields on Kyushu in support of the upcoming invasion of Okinawa. These would be daylight precision attacks. The 499th and 500th Groups drew as target the airfield at Oita. The 500th was ordered to prepare three combat squadrons of ten aircraft each. Later, by verbal order, the Group was ordered to send one additional plane to fly with the 499th. Unfortunately, nothing is known about this plane.

The assigned planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

**First Squadron (881st)**

Z-4 (Oswald), “Black Magic”
Z-5 (Kappil), “There’ll Always Be A Christmas”
Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Bell"
Z-6 (Calhoun), "Booze Hound"
Z-8 (Thompson), "Duke of Albuquerque"
Z-9 (Althoff), "Nina Ross"
Z-11 (Mather)
Z-2 (Lewis), "20th Century Limited"
Z-13 (Luman)
Z-1 (Gieker)

Second Squadron (882nd)
Z-29 (Shorey), "Gravel Gertie"
Z-21 (Pierce), "Devils' Delight"
Z-32 (Hughes), "Fever from the South"
Z-27 (Robinson)
Z-24 (Haas), "Pride of the Yankees"
Z-31 (Arbon), "Homing De-Vice"
Z-23 (LaMarche), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-30 (Sasser), "Sting Shift"
Z-35 (Gray), "Pacific Queen"
Z-34 (Sewell), "Frisco Nannie"

Third Squadron (883rd)
Z-50 (Braden), "Fancy Detail"
Z-49 (King), "Three Feathers"
Z-52 (Irby), "20th Century Sweetheart"
Z-56 (Gregg), "Wabash Cannonball"
Z-48 (Adamson)
Z-42 (Moreland), "Supine Sue"
Z-41 (Barron), "The Baroness"
Z-55 (Ryan), "Janice E."
Z-43 (Setterich)
Z-53 (Clinkscales)

Three spare planes and crews -- Z-3(?) Z-12 (Booze) and Z-54 (Standen) -- were also assigned in case of mechanical problems, and they were needed, because Z-7, Z-27 and Z-53 had various problems and had to be scratched. But the three actual replacements were Z-12 (Booze), Z-45 (Clinkscales) and Z-54 (Standen). This suggests that Z-3 was the plane detached to fly with the 499th Group (see first paragraph). Unfortunately, there is no record available of this plane's activities on 27 March, so there is no way to check. The late addition of Z-45 as an unscheduled replacement also suggests that this plane was the one that took off late (see below).

The Group Leader and second squadron leader on this mission was 882nd Squadron CO Lt Col Joseph F. Brannock, flying with Capt Austin LaMarche and crew in Z-23. First squadron leader was Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon, riding with Maj Robert Luman and crew in Z-13. Capt Charles Moreland in Z-42 led the third squadron. 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd Squadron RCM Officer, flew with the Haas crew in Z-24 to operate the radar jamming equipment.

Take-off was from 0353 to 040_ (missing digit), except for one of the spares (unidentified but very likely Z-45), which got off about ten minutes late, at 0414. Bomb load was 14 x 500 lb M64 general purpose bombs per plane. Shortly after take-off, Z-43, Setterich crew, blew a spark plug in the #1 engine and had to abort.

The remaining 29 aircraft flew individually at 1500 feet to the Group Assembly Point at Kita Io Jima, an island north of Iwo Jima. The squadrons were supposed to form up at this point but there was much confusion. The briefed procedure had been for the planes to circle to the right north of the island, and at different altitudes by squadron, but instead some planes circled around the island itself. After more than an hour of the leaders trying to assemble their squadrons, Lt Col Brandon led his still not completely formed squadron off on the designated
course, flying a dogleg to allow stragglers to catch up. The other two squadrons followed and took their assigned positions, the 882nd low to the right and the 883rd high to the left. This formation continued to Japan, at some point before landfall climbing to bombing altitude.

Due to an error by the navigator in the lead plane (Z-13), landfall was made 65-70 miles to the right of the scheduled course, in the vicinity of Yotsuura on the island of Shikoku. Near this point the formation ran into some layers of clouds and the 882nd lost sight of the other two squadrons. All squadrons turned southwest for Kyushu and the IP, which was Tsurumi Saki Point. The 881st and 883rd stayed together until breaking up after leaving the coastline of Shikoku. The 882nd lagged a few minutes behind. At some point, Z-32, Hughes crew, became separated from the 882nd formation and continued to the target alone.

All squadrons found and turned on the IP with no problem, axis of attack 313 degrees. At this point the 881st with ten planes was still ahead. Z-13 was still leading this squadron, with Z-8 in No. 2 position on the right wing and Z-12 in No. 3 position on the left. Z-4 was leading the right element, with Z-1 on her right and Z-5 on her left. Z-11 was leading the left element, with Z-9 on her right and Z-6 on her left. Z-2 completed the formation, filling in the diamond in either the left or right element.

The 883rd with nine planes (Z-43 having aborted) was right behind the 881st. Leading this squadron was still Z-42, with Z-41 on her right and Z-56 on her left. Leading the right element was Z-45, with Z-49 on her right and Z-50 on her left. The left element was led by Z-48, with Z-55 on her right and Z-52 on her left.

Three minutes behind the 883rd came the 882nd with nine planes (Z-32 having become separated). Z-23 was still leading this squadron, with Z-21 on her right and Z-29 on her left. Leading the right element was Z-35, with Z-54 (an 883rd plane flying with the 882nd, apparently as a replacement for the scratched Z-27) on her right and Z-30 on her left. Z-24 led the left element, with Z-31 on her right and Z-34 on her left.

And 18 minutes behind everybody else came plucky Z-32.

No fighter opposition was encountered. Flak varied from light to moderate along the route, with some coming from naval vessels near the Saeki Naval base. Fortunately, it was mostly inaccurate, but some of it found a home in Z-54, luckily creating only minor damage.

All planes bombed visually, dropping on the leader. The 881st bombed at 1237 from 15,420 feet; the 883rd at 1238 from 16,000 feet, the 882nd at 1241 from 16,350 feet, and Z-32 at 1259 from 17,480 feet. Over 400 x 500 lb bombs fell earthward.

Strike photographs showed that a general coverage of the target area was achieved, with the bombing producing large fires and thick black smoke. However, it was agreed that the pattern could have been better if the formations had been tighter.

On the return, the squadrons remained intact until landfall, at which point they broke up into elements or single aircraft for the long flight home. Z-41 and two other planes (unidentified) running low on fuel stopped at Iwo Jima to refuel. All planes returned safely to base, landing between 1905 and 1936, except for the three that landed at Iwo, which didn't get back to Saipan until 2103 to 2210.

28 Mar 45

Today Willie Greene, CFC gunner on the Haas crew, helped clean the guns on Z-24, which the crew had flown in yesterday's mission. Greene also learned that he had been promoted to Sgt on 26 Mar.

29 Mar 45
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"29 March: Work continues on the Operations quonset. The floor has been laid and the windows and sides are being installed. Staff officers won a ball game from Group, 5-1."

Newly promoted Sgt Willie Greene of the Haas crew of the 882nd spent part of his day cleaning guns on Z-28. Later he played cards, went to communion and then saw the movie "Meet Me In St. Louis".

This afternoon at about 1540 a new replacement crew, AC Capt Ernest Mock, assigned to the 881st Squadron, returned from a 2-1/2 hour training mission in Z-3 with the #2 engine feathered due to an oil leak. Mock landed the plane safely and everybody thought they were home free, but while taxiing toward their hardstand Mock misjudged the distance to a truck parked alongside the taxiway and hit it with the #4 propeller, bending back all four blades of the prop and probably ruining the engine, while also severely damaging the rear of the truck. This accident put Z-3 out of commission for about a week. Apparently no disciplinary action was taken against Mock. The official report blamed the truck driver for parking too close to the taxiway.

Today Capt Herschel Connor, formerly flight engineer on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, came down from Wing, where he was now assigned, to chat with his old crew chief, M/Sgt George Lucas, whom he called Luke. The two men were tops in their respective fields and liked and respected one another. The conversation inevitably turned to the loss of Z-8 and the Fitzgerald crew (less Connor, of course) on the night of 16-17 March over Kobe. Both men felt the loss deeply. Connor learned that left gunner Sgt John Cutler had been carrying Lucas's St Christopher medal that night. Lucas also said that he thought the crew would have made it back if Connor had still been the flight engineer, but both men knew that was just wishful thinking.

30 Mar 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 March

   Captain Horace E. Hatch's crew left by NATS [Naval Air Transport Service?] for recreational DS on Oahu. One of our planes raided Japan (weather strike) -- returned safely -- no damage."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 March: Recommendations for DFCs and Air Medals for planes participating in four of the five blitz burn raids were submitted. Briefing for Mission 36 was held at 1500 hours. Sgt Gibson returned to his duties in the Squadron S-2 Office."

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"30 March 45. WSM-E327. Lt. Lewis in Z Square 2 ["20th Century Limited"] took off 2005 [probably means 30 Mar 0605 Local] to bomb the Ogura Oil Company, Yokohama, Japan. A Visual run was made at 31,000 ft., dropping 12 x 500 lb. M64's with unobserved results. A/C landed base 1212 [probably 30 Mar 2212 Local]. It has not been noted thus far that WSM ships have been landing at Guam on the return leg of flight for weather interrogation. This would account for some of the long period of time between take-off and landing on Saipan. WSM-E328. Lt Althoff aborted in Z Square 19 ["Sna Pe Fort"] due to landing gear trouble. WSM-E329. Lt Law in Z Square 11 took off 300702Z [30 Mar 1702 Local] and completed flight plan "King". Ship returned to base at 31 0202Z [31 Mar 1202 Local]."

That's a curious statement re WSM's: "It has not been noted thus far that WSM ships have been landing at Guam on the return leg of flight for weather interrogation." I knew that the WSM planes usually landed at Guam before returning to Saipan, but I wasn't sure why. It shouldn't have been to deliver their weather data, because they transmitted that back by radio, encoded, in near real time. It appears from this statement that it was for
weather "interrogation", which was another term for debriefing. I guess that the crew were questioned in detail by the weather staff at XXI Bomber Command HQ on Guam about anything they may have observed on the flight. Or maybe there was some other, undisclosed, reason.

31 Mar 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command again sent its planes against airfields and related targets on Kyushu. The assigned target for the four Groups of the 73rd Bomb Wing was the Tachiari Machine Works on the edge of Tachiari Airfield. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 27 aircraft for this mission, of which 25 were airborne. (The identities of the two planes which failed to take off are not known.)

The participating planes and crews were as follows:

First squadron (882nd)
Z-27 (LaMarche)
Z-32 (Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-33 (Hanft), "Slick Dick"
Z-29 (Robinson), "Gravel Gertie"
Z-24 (Sealy), "Pride of the Yankees"
Z-23 (Limpp), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-34 (Farrell), "Frisco Nannie"
Z-22 (D. Jackson), "Georgia Ann"
Z-35 (Robertson), "Pacific Queen"
Z-30 (Reeves), "Sting Shift"

Second squadron (881st)
Z-13 (Luman)
Z-12 (Curtis)
Z-4 (Oswald), "Black Magic"
Z-19 (Althoff), "Sna Pe Fort"
Z-14 (Mather)
Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Bell"
Z-6 (Calhoun), "Booze Hound"
Z-5 (Kappil), "There'll Always Be A Christmas"

Third squadron (883rd)
Z-42 (Moreland), "Supine Sue"
Z-48 (McClanahan)
Z-55 (Ryan), "Janice E."
Z-41 (Setterich), "The Baroness"
Z-45 (King), "Mustn't Touch"
Z-50 (Adamson), "Fancy Detail"
Z-56 (Gregg), "Wabash Cannonball"

Leading the Group and the first squadron was Group CO Lt Col John E. Dougherty, flying with Capt Austin W. LaMarche and crew in Z-27. Leading the second squadron was 881st CO Lt Col Ralph A. Reeve, flying with Maj Robert D. Luman and crew in Z-13. Leading the third squadron was Maj Freeman A. Parsons, Group Operations Officer, riding with Capt Charles T. Moreland and crew in Z-42.

Take-off was from 0340 to 0408. Bomb load was 16 x 500 lb general purpose bombs.

Assembly of squadrons and flight to the target were made without incident, except that somewhere along the way Z-30, Reeves crew, aborted due to sparks and smoke coming from the #1 engine. This left nine planes in the first squadron, eight in the second and seven in the third, 24 planes total.
On the bomb run, Z-27 led the first squadron, with Z-32 on her right and Z-33 on her left. Z-29 led the second (right) element, with Z-24 on her right and Z-23 on her left. Z-34 led the third (left) element, with Z-22 on her right and Z-35 on her left.

Z-13 led the second squadron, with Z-12 on her right wing. Z-4 led the second element, with Z-19 on her right and Z-14 on her left. Z-7 led the third element, with Z-6 on her right and Z-5 on her left.

Z-42 led the third squadron, with Z-48 on her right and Z-55 on her left. Z-41 led the second element, with Z-45 on her right. And Z-50 led the third element, with Z-56 on her left.

Only light, inaccurate antiaircraft fire was encountered over the target, and one plane (unidentified) was slightly damaged by flak. Eight to 15 enemy fighters were observed over the target and ten attacks were reported, but none inflicted any damage. However, a straggler from the 498th Group, T-14, which somehow ended up flying alone behind the 500th's second (881st) squadron, was seen to be attacked several times by fighters. This plane, after bombs away, hastened to join the 881st by cutting inside the squadron's turnaway to the left and filling the diamond in the third element, behind Z-7, Z-6 and Z-5.

The first squadron dropped bombs visually at 1150 from 15500 feet, the second squadron at 1151 from 15000 feet and the third squadron at 1151:30 from 16000 feet. Two aircraft had problems with their bombs. On Z-7, the A-2 release system malfunctioned and left one bomb on board (to be jettisoned later). On Z-6, the B-10 shackle failed to release one bomb, which later had to be manually pried from the shackle with the bomb bay doors open, a dangerous undertaking. A total of 382 bombs dropped on the target, which was struck almost perfectly, all bombs hitting within 1500 feet of the aiming point.

All aircraft returned safely to Saipan, landing between 1824 and 2052. Z-19, Althoff crew, and possibly Z-50 (records are contradictory), Adamson crew, stopped at Iwo Jima to refuel and were the last to get home.

This mission was almost perfect from the standpoint of the 500th Bomb Group. Take-off, assembly, formations, flight to the target, bomb run, and flight home all went very well, and bombing was very accurate.

The Haas crew of the 882nd didn't go on this mission but saw a little fighting anyway as radio operator John Hoover and right gunner Harry Ruch got into a tussle. With touchy tempers this sort of thing happened from time to time, but the hard feelings generally didn't last. CFC gunner Sgt Willie Greene of this crew collected $164.38 in pay today.

On this day the 500th also launched three weather strike missions. From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:


WSM-331  Lt. Arbon in Z Square 31 ["Homing De-Vice"] off at 30 2005Z [31 Mar 0605L] to bomb [Target] #357 [Nakajima Aircraft Factory, Musashino], Tokyo, Japan. 10 x M64’s were dropped visually from 30,700 ft with unobserved results. A/C returned to base 31 1235Z [31 Mar 2235L].

WSM-332  Maj Sewell in Z Square 28 ["Old Ironsides"] left base 31 0737 [31 Mar 1737L] and accomplished flight plan "K". Ship returned to base 01 0222Z [1 Apr 1222L]."

1 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"1 April  WSM-333  Lt. Schmidt in Z Square 47 ["Adam's Eve"] took off at 310737Z [I believe this is an error.]"
Probably should be 311737 Z, which would translate to 1 Apr 0337L. Otherwise the plane would have been in the air 24 hours. (See return time below.) The center of the city of Tokyo was hit with 10 x M64's [General Purpose bombs] from 27,400 [feet] employing radar. Four bombs were seen to burst in the center of the city. One attacking Tojo fighter was shot down by the tail gunner [regular tail gunner on the Schmidt crew was Sgt Robert G. Mulligan]. A/C returned to base 010735Z [1 Apr 1735L].

WSM-334. Lt Seale, in Z-49 ["Three Feathers"], left the runway at 312120Z [1 Apr 0720L] to bomb the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Kobe, Japan. A visual run was made from 27,650 feet dropping 7 x 500 [lb] M-63's [sic] IB's [incendiary bombs] and 3 x 500 lb. Photo bombs. Gunners saw eight bombs hit among several ships in the dock area. Returned to base at 01 1550Z [2 Apr 0150L].

WSM-335 Lt. Wolter in Z-8 ["Duke of Albuquerque"] got off at 01 0820Z [1 Apr 1820L]. He returned to base 02 0100Z [2 Apr 1100L]. [Kinda strange there is no summary of this plane's activities on this very long, nearly 17-hour flight.]

The Operations Journal also noted personal milestones for some of the Ops Section personnel:

"Four officers of this office received promotions today:
Capt Thompson - Group Navigator - to Major
Capt English - Group Gunnery Officer - to Major
1/Lt Merrihew - Group Weather Officer - to Capt.
2/Lt Pack - Group R.C.M. [Radar Countermeasures] Officer - to 1/Lt."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 April -- Easter Sunday -- only a skeleton force worked. Prepared overlay for briefing which was held at 1830 hours. The target is 357 [Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant], Tokyo. Takeoff scheduled for approximately 2030. Capt's Moreland, McClanahan, Braden, Irby, Lt's Cheney, Barron, Ryan, Setterich, Standen and Clinkscales took off."

Willie Greene of the Haas crew of the 882nd got up early to go to Easter sunrise services this morning, then later also attended regular church services with his friend, tail gunner Paul Grove. Their crew was not scheduled for tonight's mission.

On the night of 1-2 April the 73rd Bomb Wing revisited the familiar Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant in Musashino near Tokyo, for the ninth time. However, this was the first night bombing attack on this target. The 500th Bomb Group put up 35 aircraft for this mission.

A complete list of participating planes and crews is not available. Here is a partial list:

Z-1, Bricker
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Thompson
Z-11, Law
Z-12, Curtis
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff(?)
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Hays
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-26, crew unknown
Z-27, Limpp
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Sasser
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Reeves
Z-31, "Homing De-Vice", Arbon
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hughes
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-41, "The Baroness", Barron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Moreland
Z-43, Setterich
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Cheney
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Clinkscales
Z-54, Standen
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan

[The seven missing planes and crews are from the 881st Squadron (Z-1 thru Z-19).]

The plan for this mission, as with all night attacks, was for planes to fly to the target individually and bomb at low altitude. Each plane carried 36 x 500 lb GP bombs with delayed action fuses ranging from 15 minutes to one hour. Each plane also carried, to be dropped last, four M-26 parachute flares to help illuminate the target for following bombers.

Group leader on this mission was Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron.

Take-off was from 2036 to 2138. Everything went as planned on the route out. There were no aborts. Planes arrived over the target and bombed from 0320 to 0421 and from altitudes between 5900 and 7900 feet. A few aircraft were able to bomb visually, but the flares failed to provide sufficient illumination, so most planes attempted to bomb by radar. A total of 1221 x 500 lb GP bombs and 87 parachute flares were dropped in the vicinity of the target. Due to the failure of the illumination plan, most bombs missed the target and results were poor.

Flak was generally light to moderate. Three bombers, Z-19, Z-26 and one unidentified, were struck by flak but none seriously. Numerous searchlights were active in the target area. Eight fighter attacks were reported, four of them on one B-29, but these were ineffective.

Tail turrets were loaded with ammo on this mission, but no claims of enemy aircraft were made.

One bomber (unidentified) reported being followed for a short time on the bomb run by some sort of enemy aircraft, with twin long streams of flame appearing to come from it. When the B-29 took evasive action by turning several times, the enemy aircraft followed its every move, until finally coming in well below the B-29 and exploding in the air. Then when it hit the ground, there was a second explosion. The same B-29 reported a second almost identical experience near the Japanese coast on the way out to sea. [These could possibly have been what the US called Baka bombs, which were basically manned rockets released from mother aircraft and steered toward a target by a suicide pilot. Baka’s were usually employed against ships but may have been used against enemy bombers.]

Thirty-four aircraft returned to base safely, although one of them (unidentified) had to stop at Iwo Jima to refuel and got back late. One B-29 however failed to return at all. This was Z-11 with the Law crew.

The members of the Law crew (#107A), initially listed as missing, were as follows:

AC 1/Lt Edward G. Law
Copilot 2/Lt Gerould L. Giddings
B 2/Lt David R. Gerhardt
Some crews reported seeing an explosion over the target area. Another observer reported a B-29 turning away from the target with one or more engines on fire and under attack by a fighter. Whether either or both of these sightings were of Z-11 is unknown.

What is known, from the account of the Law crew's lone survivor, right gunner Sgt Ray Hopper, is that Z-11 was hit in the right wing by anti-aircraft fire while on the bomb run. As burning fuel poured from the ruptured wing tanks, Law ordered the crew to prepare to bail out and jettisoned the bombs. Then the B-29 was hit again by flak in the rear fuselage. After a futile effort to put out the fire by climbing and then diving, Law gave the order he never wanted to give and told the crew to bail out.

All five men in the rear of the plane got out, but there was a complication up front. The nose wheel had to be lowered so the men could exit thru the nose wheel hatch, but the electrical switch malfunctioned and the wheel had to be cranked down by hand. (It is unknown why the men did not go out the forward bomb bay door instead.) Five of the six men in the front compartment made it out, the last of the five being the copilot, 2/Lt Gerould Giddings. Giddings looked back up to see if Law got out, but the plane exploded before he could.

Hopper also saw the plane explode as he was descending in his parachute. Law's badly burned body was later found in the wreckage of the plane, which crashed near Haramachida. His remains were placed in Younji temple by locals and recovered by US forces after the war.

The ten crew members who managed to bail out all reached the ground safely and were taken prisoner, but since they came down in different locations and were kept apart by the Japanese, none of them knew for a while how many had survived. Hopper initially tried to evade capture but there were too many soldiers and civilians in the area. He was seen by four soldiers as he was crossing a rice paddy. Caught out in the open with no place to hide, Hopper wisely put up his hands and surrendered. The soldiers took his jacket, watch, wallet and .45 pistol, then blindfolded him and tied his hands behind his back. One of the soldiers fired Hopper's pistol four times into the air. Hopper thought the next bullet would be for him, but the soldiers just led him away. They did not abuse him but many civilians along the way did. Hopper was hit by sticks and rocks and was painfully pinched. Someone kicked him so hard in the left leg that the resulting sore took six weeks to heal.

It took most of the day for Hopper and his captors to reach their destination, which turned out to be Kempei Tai Headquarters. Here the young airman was thrown into a cell and beaten with bamboo sticks. Late that afternoon he was subjected to his first interrogation. According to Hopper, the men had been told in mission briefings that if captured they were permitted to tell the Japanese whatever they wanted, because at this time in the war it wouldn't make any difference.

That evening Hopper was put into another cell with a Japanese civilian and given his first meal, which featured fish heads. He didn't eat much of it. During the week they were together, the civilian never said a word to Hopper.

A few days later, Hopper heard a familiar voice respond to a guard's question. It was the first he knew that other members of his crew had survived and were in the building. Some days after that, Hopper was moved to a wooden building they called the “Pig Pen”. There were six cells in this building and Hopper was put into one with four of his crewmates. The five other survivors of the crew were in the next cell. It was a happy reunion. The men weren't supposed to talk but they found ways to do so. It was here that Hopper learned of Law's presumed death and other details.

Unaccountably, only a few days after being reunited with his crew, Hopper was transferred to Omori prison camp.
south of Tokyo. He never knew why, but it saved his life, because the rest of the crew were transferred to Tokyo Military Prison, where on the night of 25-26 May, during a fire raid, the Japanese guards left the prisoners locked in their cells to burn to death.

2 Apr 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 April -- All our squadron returned safely at approximately 1115 hours. It is believed that Lt. Law, 881st, was lost over the target. Only crew from Group missing. Relaid floor in office and prepared to put two windows in. S-2 office in general today pretty much torn up."

Up on the line ground crewmen Sgts Audrey B. Carey and William B. Gabbert worked all night finding and fixing an oil leak on Z-9. This was not an uncommon occurrence in the 500th and is testimony to the determination and dedication of the ground crews.

3 April 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"3 April 45
Sgt. John L. Lippa left for ten days recreational DS [detached service] in Hawaii."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


On the night of 3-4 April the 73rd Bomb Wing launched an experimental night bombing attack on the Tachikawa Aircraft Plant near Tokyo. Secondary target was the city of Kawasaki. The 500th Bomb Group put up 31 aircraft for this mission.

A complete list of participating planes and crews is not available. Here is a partial list:

- Z-1, Bricker
- Z-2, Gieker, "20th Century Limited"
- Z-4, Wolter, "Black Magic"
- Z-7, Sullivan, "Hell's Belle"
- Z-8, Thompson, "Duke of Albuquerque"
- Z-12, Curtis
- Z-14, Thomas
- Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
- Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Limpp
- Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Hays
- Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
- Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Haas
- Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Robinson
- Z-30, "Sting Shift", Sealy
- Z-31, "Homing De-Vice", Sewell
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Coffman
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Robertson
Z-42(?), Moreland
Z-45(?), King
Z-47(?), Schmidt
Z-48(?), Adamson
Z-49(?), Cheney
Z-52(?), Irby
Z-53(?), Field
Z-54(?), Standen
Z-55, "Janice E.", Seale
Z-56(?), Gregg

[The three planes and crews completely missing are from the 881st Squadron (Z-1 thru Z-14). The ten crews of the 883rd Squadron (Moreland thru Gregg) are certain, but the planes are not; the nine planes with question marks after them are best guesses based on the planes these crews flew most often.]

The plan this time was for six pathfinder aircraft to take off first and mark the target for the rest. The lead pathfinder was Z-24, Tackett crew, with Group CO Lt Col Dougherty riding along as Force Commander and Col Sutherland, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations of the 73rd Bomb Wing, along as an observer. This plane carried 8 x M90 target marker bombers, 2 x M26 parachute flares and 24 x M64 general purpose bombs. The identities of the other five pathfinders are unknown, but each carried 184 x M47 incendiary bombs. The pathfinders took off from 2108 to 2112.

The remaining 25 planes of the 500th, which led the Wing on this mission, each carried 34 x 500 lb general purpose bombs. Take-off for these planes was from 2124 to 2144. The 500th Group was first in the Wing order on this mission.

As on all night missions, each plane flew individually to the target at low altitude, in this case between 5000 and 5500 feet. There was one abort. Z-55, Seale crew, blew a cylinder in her #3 engine. The remaining 30 aircraft all reached the target area.

When Z-24, with Lt Col Dougherty and Col Sutherland on board, arrived in the target area, they discovered complete cloud cover over the primary. Still, they did their best to mark it, and the secondary as well. On Z-24's first run, at 6100 feet, they dropped 4 x M90 target markers. Then they made a second run over the primary, this time at only 500 feet, dropping 7 x M64 general purpose bombs and the remaining 4 x M90 target markers. Finally, at 0319, they flew over Kawasaki at 6300 feet and dropped their remaining 17 x M64's and the 2 x M26 parachute flares. Unfortunately, the markers and flares could not overcome the thick cloud cover.

Most of the 500th planes decided to bomb the secondary target, although nine made a run on the primary at altitudes ranging from 5000 to 6850 feet. Bombs were dropped between 0330 and 0405. In total, 211 x M64's, 368 x M47's, 10 x M26 flares and 8 x M90's fell on the primary, and 589 M64's, 552 M47's and 28 x M26's were dropped on the secondary. No bomb results could be observed due to the undercast, but later bomb damage assessment showed the city of Kawasaki to have been heavily damaged.

Both flak and fighter opposition were generally light and ineffective. No B-29 was damaged. No claims of enemy aircraft were made.

However, Z-19, Althoff crew, encountered something very unusual which gave the crew a good scare. Near land's end at 9000 feet what was described as a "ball of fire" was observed at 5 o'clock level and about 300 yards behind the B-29. Althoff immediately took evasive action in the form of several turns, but the ball of fire stayed with the plane. In an attempt to shake it, AC Althoff and copilot Ogush pushed their yokes all the way forward and went into a steep dive down to 6000 feet, reaching an airspeed of 295. One of the side gunners who did not have his safety harness on was temporarily plastered to the top of the compartment.
Finally, the ball of fire fell behind and apparently turned back. The crew later decided that their aerial pursuer had been probably a Baka bomb.

Twenty-seven aircraft made it all the way home to Saipan and landed between 1046 and 1215. Two aircraft, unidentified, ran short of gas and had to stop at Iwo Jima to refuel. These planes got back to Saipan late, landing at 1610 and 1938 respectively. One plane never came back.

Z-31, 44-69751, “Homing De-Vice”, and the Sewell crew (#242) disappeared without a trace. They were neither seen nor heard from after take-off. Since no ground crash site has ever been discovered, it is most likely that the plane went down in the ocean, or possibly in Tokyo Bay. It is not known whether this happened before or after bombing the target.

The members of the Sewell crew were as follows:

AC  Maj Robert S. Sewell, Jr
Copilot  2/Lt Merle S. "Mike" Eaton
B  2/Lt Louis Stephen
N  2/Lt Irwin Gendelman
FE  2/Lt Isaac Samarel
Radio  S/Sgt Kurt Porjesz
Ring G  Sgt Ausbon Judd
RG  S/Sgt Thomas E McEvoy
LG  Sgt William C. Poole, Jr
Radar  Sgt Maurice R. Komocar
Tail G  Sgt Harry L. Mears, Jr

Maj Sewell had been transferred from the 498th Bomb Group to take over this crew, probably in early March, from Capt Louis C. McClure, who had been evacuated due to illness.

This was the third plane lost which had borne the tail number 31. The first, 42-24785, was lost with the Gerwick/Porter crew on 23 Jan 45 (at the time it had actually been redesignated Z-25). The second, 42-63494, was lost with the Hodge/Rouse crew on 19 Feb. With this third loss, the number 31 was now considered jinxed, and no aircraft in the 882nd Squadron would ever bear it again.

4 Apr 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"4 April -- All our squadron returned safely [from the 3-4 Apr night mission to Tachikawa]. No report from Major Sewell of 881st [correction, 882nd] as yet. Took down displays in S-2 briefing room preparatory to painting. Major Kinney, Wing Public Relations Officer, visited this PM. Gave him stories on "Three Feathers" [this was Z-49] and Lt. Ryan." [I'd like to know what these stories were. Possibly one was about Z-49 coming back from Japan on two engines on 15 Feb.]

On this day a new replacement crew, the Shuffler crew, arrived on Saipan. They were immediately assigned to the 500th Bomb Group and the 883rd Squadron, which made them happy enough. Flight engineer Sgt Myron D. Locke, from Mitchell, South Dakota, wrote in his diary that "the 500th is the top Grp. of the Wing." Or so they had been told, anyway. They were considerably less happy when they learned that the new B-29 they had flown over from the States and had come to consider theirs, fondly naming her "The Queen", was being taken away from them and assigned to another Squadron. As all new crews learned to their disappointment, this was standard practice in the 73rd Bomb Wing. New planes were given to veteran crews, while the new crews had to make do with older planes, usually the most decrepit in the Squadron.
There must have been space problems at this time in the 883rd, at least for the enlisted men. The four gunners in the Shuffler crew were assigned to a quonset, but Locke and his good friend radioman Sgt Robert W. Marling, from Bellaire, Ohio, were put in a tent with another crew. Locke wrote that this arrangement was only temporary until they could put up a tent for all the enlisted of the crew.

In the original crews of the 500th Bomb Group, all the flight engineers were officers and all the radar operators were enlisted. But the Shuffler crew was indicative of a change in this policy. Now it was the opposite; flight engineers were usually enlisted and radar operators were usually officers. The latter was probably due to a greater appreciation of the importance of the radar operator in navigation and bombing. It is uncertain if the former reflected a devaluation of the importance of the flight engineer.

The Shuffler crew had departed Mather Field, California, at 0130 on 31 March. Twelve hours later, at 1030 local, they landed without incident at John Rodgers Field on Oahu. From the air Locke was impressed by the beauty of the island and the hue of the water, “the bluest water I’ve ever seen.” He was less impressed with the city of Honolulu. They were allowed passes until 1800, and as dead tired as they were, they couldn’t pass up the opportunity. Locke bemoaned the lack of nice shops, but he was able to buy six woven place mats and six woven napkin rings for his wife Billie, and they did have a nice turkey dinner in town. They were back at base by 1700 and Locke, Marling and ring gunner Al Gramps immediately fell into their sacks. Locke didn’t stir until 0800 the next morning.

On Sunday, 1 April, Locke attended Easter Mass at John Rodgers. Later in the day, he and Marling were able to go over to Hickam Field, where evidence of the attack of 7 Dec 41 was still clearly visible – bomb craters all around and bullet holes in all the buildings.

At 0720 on 2 April the Shuffler crew took off for Kwajalein, where nine hours later they landed after another uneventful flight, only now because of the International Date Line it was 3 April. Locke was appalled by Kwajalein. “Lord what a hole this is. I can't imagine spilling good red American blood for a little hunk of coral like this.” But at least they had overnight quarters, a good meal and a refreshing shower. Locke had planned on going to bed early but found out that “Mutiny on the Bounty” was being shown that night, so he and Marling decided to go see it. Even though it was not a recent movie and he had seen it before, Locke enjoyed it. They took off from Kwajalein at 0845 on 4 April and reached their new home, Saipan, by 1630. Total flight time from California to Saipan was 28 hours and 45 minutes.

5 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

“5 April Major Limpp Z-32 ["Fever from the South"] took off 05 0818Z [5 Apr 1818L] on a radar recon mission. A maximum number of radar scope photographs, on short range setting, were obtained in the Tamashima Area at 16,000 feet. Returned to base at 05 2300Z [6 Apr 0900L].”

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“5 April 45

Six of our officers were relieved of primary duty with the Squadron and assigned primary duty with Group Maintenance per Par 8, SO #31, HQ 500th Bomb Group, dated 5 April 1945, inclosed." [See attachments. These reassignments were a response to the severe strain on maintenance personnel from the greatly increased number of missions being flown in March and April.]

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:
“5 April -- Preparations made, walls cleared, for painting office. Could not secure spray gun until 1800 so worked all night to complete job.”

6 Apr 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"6 April - Group briefing at 1630 for Mission #39, target 357 [the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant again] at Tokyo. Lt. Thompson briefed Lt. Ryan for WSM #353 G, target #1360 Saeki Naval Station."

The Haas crew was originally scheduled for this mission and attended the briefing, but later they were scratched. CFC gunner Willie Greene, who had spent part of the day cleaning guns and picking up some new barrels (the barrels wore down with use and had to be replaced regularly), wrote in his diary that it had been decided that “Only one sqd [squadron] from 500th will go.”

The newly arrived Shuffler crew of the 883rd met today with 1/Lt James J. Garrity, Squadron Adjutant, who briefed them on Squadron policies, chain of command, etc. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke wrote in his diary that Garrity “seems nice but they say this is misleading.” And that's about all they did for today.

7 Apr 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out a daylight precision strike on Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant in Musashino near Tokyo. This was the tenth attack on this important target. The 500th Bomb Group contributed only ten planes to this mission, all from the 883rd Squadron.

This would be the first mission by the B-29’s with long-range P-51 fighter escort from Iwo Jima. The 73rd Wing reduced the bombing altitudes to 12,000-16,000 feet (depending on Group), hoping that the P-51’s would allow the bombers to get thru at these lower levels and finally destroy this important target.

The participating planes and crews were as follows:

Moreland, Z-42, “Supine Sue”
Braden, Z-50, “Fancy Detail”
McClanahan, Z-48
Standen, Z-54
King, Z-47, “Adam's Eve”
Gregg, Z-56
Adamson, Z-49, “Three Feathers”
Barron, Z-41, “The Baroness”
Setterich, Z-43
Clinkscales, Z-53, “The Ancient Mariner”

Take-off was from 0253 to 0257. Bomb load was 5 x 2000 lb bombs per plane. This was the first time the Group carried 2000 lb bombs, which were intended to demolish the heavy concrete buildings in the western portion of the factory complex. Each plane also carried 7500 rounds of ammo. The 500th was last in the Wing order on this mission.

Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Bomb Squadron, was the force leader on this mission, riding with Capt Charles Moreland and crew in Z-42.

The flight out was normal. The B-29’s rendezvoused with the fighter escort at about 1019 at the island of Kosu
Shima south of Tokyo Bay. The bombers were at about 15,000 feet and the fighters took station 3000-4000 feet above, then the combined formation moved on to the target. However, the faster fighters soon migrated to the front of the formation, which left the 500th at the rear without any cover.

The Japanese fighters, which were numerous and aggressive on this mission, quickly detected the 500th's vulnerability. Attacks began as early as landfall at the northwestern corner of Sagami Bay and would continue all through the mission. The 500th's gunners would need every bit of the ammunition they had loaded.

As the squadron of the 500th attempted to make the final turn toward the IP, there was some congestion among the preceding Groups which forced the 500th off course to the right, and when the squadron was able to get back on course, they ran into intense and accurate flak, which, as with the fighter attacks, continued all through the bomb run. The 500th was in for a bad day.

At this time Z-42 was still in the lead, with Z-48 in No. 2 position on her right wing, Z-56 in No. 3 position on her left wing, and Z-43 filling in the diamond. Z-41 led the second, right, element, with Z-49 on her right wing and Z-53 on her left. Z-50 led the third, left, element, with Z-47 in No. 8 position on the right wing and Z-54 on the left wing.

As the formation flew on, the leader, Z-42, Moreland crew, was hit in the #1 engine, which had to be feathered. Moreland fell back and relinquished the lead to Z-48, McClanahan crew. Z-49, Adamson crew, also had to feather an engine due to flak or fighter damage. And then, a little before bombs away, Z-47, King crew, was hit, it was thought by flak. Two gunners in the Clinkscales crew on Z-53, Donald Chambers in the left blister and Elmo Glockner in the tail, both saw Z-47 suddenly roll over on her back and head downward in a spin, with all engines apparently still running. Sgt Joe Bischof, tail gunner on Z-49, thought that she might have taken a direct hit on the flight deck. No smoke or flame was observed, and distressingly no parachutes. The gunners had to quickly turn their attention back to the enemy fighters, which continued to swarm, but radio operator Kenneth Agee in Z-42 was able to look down thru the open bomb bay doors in his plane and follow Z-47 all the way down to the ground, where she exploded upon contact. He saw no parachutes.

As Z-47 fell in her death spiral, the formation continued toward the target, but now there was another problem in addition to the continuing heavy flak and fighter attacks. The switch of lead planes had taken place too soon before the primary and in the confusion the bombardier on Z-48 was unable to pick up the target factory in time. Consequently, the bombs were dropped from 15,650 feet on a target of opportunity, a probable ordnance center, 4-5 miles beyond the primary.

Sgt Ed Heiberger, firing away from his ring gun position in Z-54, Standen crew, was sure the Japanese fighters were trying to ram them. Two zoomed close by, and then another "came at us [from] 12:00 position, straight on. I thought my life was over! Our pilot at the last second took evasive action and pulled the plane up so sharply that the B-29 just shook. Our tail gunner said that the plane missed our tail guns by about six inches." Heiberger was credited with a kill during this action, and left gunner John Miller and bombardier William Trotter also had claims.

Z-49, now with two engines out, fell behind the formation and began to attract the attention of a bevy of Japanese fighters. AC 1/Lt Norman Adamson called desperately for help. Radioman Sgt Francis Sobeck in Z-53, Clinkscales crew, heard the distress calls and alerted his AC. Clinkscales had a lot to worry about at the time, including three 2,000-lb bombs which had hung up in the forward bomb bay, but he did not hesitate. He skillfully dropped down, throttled back and maneuvered alongside Z-49, while his gunners fired away at the fighters all around. In the running battle that followed, the gunners on Z-53 accounted for four Jap fighters destroyed and a fifth probably destroyed. Right gunner Dick Wing knew he got two of them for sure because he saw the pilots bail out.

As the B-29 formation turned away from the target, the fighter attacks continued, as far as 30 miles out to sea off Choshi Point. One particularly persistent Japanese pilot followed Z-49 and her protector Z-53 for 60 miles from Tokyo. By this time the gunners on Z-53 had run out of ammo, so they could only watch the fighter as it began boring in. But the canny Clinkscales had a trick up his sleeve. He suddenly turned the big B-29 toward the
fighter, disconcerting the Jap pilot so much that he broke off his attack and turned for home. Clinkscales then returned to escort Z-49 all the way to Iwo Jima.

Tail gunner Bischof on the Adamson crew was certain that “If Commander [sic] Clinkscales had not dropped back to help us fight off enemy fighters ... we would have been lost.” AC 1/Lt Norman Adamson felt the same way. Many years later at a reunion Clinkscales was sitting at a table when he was pointed out to a young woman, who then practically crawled across the table to give the surprised veteran a big hug and kiss. She identified herself as the daughter of Norm Anderson and explained that her Dad had told her that if it weren't for Ray Clinkscales he would not have survived that mission, so if she ever met him she should thank him for saving her father and his crew that day. The modest man from Abbeville County, South Carolina, always gave the credit to his gunners, but 1/Lt (later Capt) Ray C. Clinkscales would be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions this day.

A total of 230 attacks were reported by 500th planes. Upon return to base, it was found that every plane in the squadron had been hit by either flak or fighters. 500th gunners claimed 12 enemy fighters destroyed, 3 probables and 13 damaged. Bill Agee, ring gunner in Z-48, McClanahan crew, had a particularly good day, accounting for two of the destroyed and one of the damaged.

In addition to the bomber gunners, the P-51 escorts claimed 21 enemy fighters while losing two of their own.

Very unusually, a dictaphone recording of the interphone conversation was made aboard Z-42 on this mission and later transcribed. Most of the time it's impossible to determine who's talking, but it still gives us a rare opportunity to hear how it was in a B-29 over Japan that day. Here is a portion:

Nine o'clock high.
One at about ten o'clock over Z Square 56.
One o'clock high. One o'clock high coming in level.
Get him. ... You got him right alongside of the engine.
You got him!
Good boy.
Look at #1 engine on 49.
Who?
49 – he's got fire on it.
How is he?
#1 is on fire.
Fighter coming after him.
Fighter coming in at seven o'clock.
49 looks like he's got a fire, smoke coming out pretty bad.

Something coming from the front. That's a twin-engine job. A beautiful Irving.
He's laying out there for us.
He tried to ram 56 up there.
Keep your eyes open.

Squadron on the left side.
Got the numbers. 48, 50, 54, 43.
How many on the right?
One, that I can see.
Which one is 49?
49 below us, 1200 yards.
Three ships behind us altogether.
Throw on automatic lean.
Is that 53 behind us also?
I believe it is.
Pilot to radio operator.
Putting his headset on, sir.
This is the radio operator.
Is that dictaphone still on, Agee?
Yes sir, I think it is.
Turn the damn thing off, will you?

Seven planes returned to Saipan, landing between 1803 and 1943. Two planes, Z-49 and Z-54, Adamson and Standen crews respectively, had to land at Iwo Jima due to extensive battle damage. Standen made it there on three engines, Adamson on only two. Z-49 had over 500 holes from flak and fighters. Z-54 had bullet holes in the tail and #4 engine, a 20mm hole in the right wing, and both lower turrets had been put out of action by flak. But the crews were all right, physically at least. They left their battered bombers there to be put back into flying condition and the men returned to Saipan in transport planes.

Watching the 883rd planes return to Isley that evening were the Shuffler crew, newly assigned to the 883rd. Today was the first big mission since they’d arrived on 4 April and they were naturally curious. But it was disturbing for the new men to learn that one plane had been lost and to see so much damage on all the others. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke noted, “Number 56 [Z-56] got a direct hit just behind the put-put [the auxiliary power unit in the rear unpressurized section of the plane]. Nobody hurt. One ship lost. Lt. King’s crew went down over the target. Feel a little funny tonite after seeing the battle damage.” Locke and his buddies would no doubt have felt even more uneasy had they been able to see the two riddled B-29’s which had had to land at Iwo Jima.

The stark facts were no bombs dropped on the primary, one plane and crew lost, and three planes with serious battle damage. Not a successful mission for the 500th Bomb Group.

After the war, it was discovered from Japanese records that Z-47 had been the victim of a ramming, by a Tony flown by 2/Lt Takashi Kawano of the 244th Sentai. It seems strange that no one in the bomber formation saw the ramming, but on the other hand it happened on the bomb run, with all the bombardiers focused on the target and the gunners busy fending off the many fighters, so it is possible. Such things happen very suddenly. Also, Z-47’s sudden roll-over and vertical dive are indicative of catastrophic damage such as might result from a ramming. The B-29 crashed in Kugayama near a primary school, destroying two houses and killing one person on the ground. None of the crew survived, nor did the suicide pilot, 2/Lt Kawano.

The King crew (#345A) was a replacement crew with at least six missions to their credit. The members were:

AC 1/Lt Robert E. King
Copilot 2/Lt George N. Chaffin, Jr
B 2/Lt Jerome J. Wondrasek
N 1/Lt Charles E. Brittain
FE T/Sgt William W. Bergren
Radio Cpl Jerome M. Nettum
Ring G Sgt William C. Headley
RG Cpl Albert D. Isza
LG Cpl Walter P. Buller
Radar Cpl Elmer R. Kerschner, Jr.
Tail G Cpl Russell A. Miller

In addition to Mission #39 against Target 357, three weather strike missions were scheduled this day. Maj Luman and crew of the 881st were scheduled to take off early in Z-13 for WSM-352 but there was a problem of some sort and they did not get off the ground. Whatever it was was fixed in time for Capt Mock and crew to use the same plane for WSM-354 (see below).

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:
"[7] April  [WSM-353] Lt Ryan in Z-55 ["Janice E."] was airborne at 06 2010Z [7 Apr 0610L] to bomb the Saeki Naval Air Station #1306. A radar run was employed from 29,300 feet dropping 10 x M64. Results were unobserved. Base at 07 1250Z [7 Apr 2250L].

[WSM-354] Capt Mock in Z-13 was airborne 0830 to bomb the Saeki Naval Air Station. A radar run was employed from 27,000 feet dropping 10 x M43's. Results were unobserved. Base at 0205."

8 Apr 45

On this date the 500th Bomb Group put up 31 planes to bomb targets on Kyushu. If the weather permitted visual bombing, Kanoya Airfield would be hit; if not, the city of Kagoshima would be bombed by radar. This was a daylight, high-altitude mission.

Below is an incomplete list of participating aircraft and crews. [Only four planes and crews from the 883rd took part due to this squadron's participation in yesterday's mission and the extensive battle damage sustained. The crews are known, but only two of the planes are known.]

Z-1, Bricker
Z-2, Lewis, "20th Century Limited"
Z-3, H. Jackson(?), "Ann Dee"
Z-4, Oswald, "Black Magic"
Z-5, Calhoun, "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-6, Booze, "Booze Hound"
Z-7, Sullivan, "Hell's Bell"
Z-8, Thompson, "Duke of Albuquerque"
Z-9, Pearson, "Nina Ross"
Z-10, McNamer, "Punchin' Judy"
Z-11, Gieker, "Lucky Eleven"
Z-12, Curtis
Z-14, Mather
Z-19, Thomas, "Sna Pe Fort"
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Sasser
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-26, Haas
Z-27, Gillert
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Sealy
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Robertson
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Arbon
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Cheney
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Irby
Z-??, Schmidt
Z-??, Seale

The force leader on this mission, and also leading the first squadron, was Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon, flying with Capt Ferd Curtis and crew in Z-12. Leading the second squadron was Capt Cecil Tackett in Z-24. Leading the third squadron was Capt Vance Black, 883rd Squadron Operations Officer, flying with Capt George Irby and crew in Z-53.
Take-off was completed by 0334. Bomb load was 16 x M64 general purpose bombs per plane. Ammo load was 250 rounds per gun. The aircraft apparently formed into three combat squadrons, but their composition is not known. There were at least two aborts on this mission, Z-35 (Gray) and Z-45 (Cheney). The Harlan Jackson crew of the 881st, probably flying Z-3, may also have aborted (records are contradictory).

Twenty-eight planes reached and bombed the radar target, Kagoshima, at approximately 1130 from altitudes ranging from 17,400 to 17,800 feet, dropping a total of 448 bombs. Due to cloud cover, no results were observed.

There was no flak or fighter opposition on this mission. No B-29's were lost, and all returned safely to base by 1820. CFC gunner Willie Greene of the Haas crew called this the “easiest raid I have been on”.

Meanwhile, back on Saipan the staff routine went on. From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"8 April -- A gunners critique on mission #39 with Capt. English [Group Gunnery Officer] was held at 1300."

While most of the crews were off on the Kagoshima mission, the new Shuffler crew was still loafing around with nothing to do. Nobody seemed to be in a hurry to get them into combat. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke attended mass this morning and got his first look at Catholic Chaplain Father George Hickey, whom he thought looked incredibly like Bing Crosby. However, Locke was not impressed by the chapel, which was nothing more than a tent with bomb fin crates as seats. He had to kneel in the sand for communion, but he felt good after mass anyway.

9 Apr 45

The 73rd Bomb Wing had felt the need to establish a Wing School for new crews. This involved at present six days of classroom instruction, known as ground school, followed by four practice missions to points around the Mariana Islands. The Shuffler crew of the 883rd Squadron started school today. About all that happened was that they were issued a big stack of SOP's to read.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"9 April -- With the aid of the (medics?) carpenter and the clerks the first step at remodeling the Operations Office has been completed. A screen window running the entire length of the left side of the quonset has been installed. This factor has the advantage of better light and increased ventilation."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"9 April -- Painted some of the tables and map display board. Capt. Chapin and Lt. Huhta [882nd Squadron Intel Officer] spent the greater part of the day working on combat data report. O'Brien and Williams oiled floor in PM. Our ball team defeated Group."

10 Apr 45

Their second day in Wing School was more challenging for the Shuffler crew of the 883rd Squadron. Almost everything they were taught was different than what they had learned in training in the States, leaving flight engineer Myron Locke's head “in a whirl.” Despite that, Locke was impressed by the professionalism of the instructors, who were all officers.
From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"10 April  9 A/C [unidentified] this Group participated in a practice low level bombing on Medinella Island at 570 feet. Take-off 1230K; land 3:30K. Participants [from Operations Section:] Major Parsons [Group Operations Officer] and Major English [Group Gunnery Officer]."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 April 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 April  --  Meeting of Claims Evaluation Board at Wing A-3 office. On mission #39 [the 7 Apr mission to Target 357] results of 883rd Squadron were 11 destroyed, 3 probably destroyed and 10 damaged. This is short Lt. Standen's and Lt. Adamson's crews which will go in a supplemental report. [Those two crews had landed at Iwo Jima with damaged aircraft and were delayed in returning to Saipan.]

This last entry is revealing. It confirms that there was a Claims Evaluation Board at the Wing level to review gunners' claims. This had to done, as claims were usually too high. I believe most gunners were honest about it, but it's a human tendency to overestimate your own results. Also, when two or more gunners fired at the same target, all could be claiming the same plane. I have been told by some gunners that the board also used gun camera footage taken by cameras installed in the turrets to help resolve claims.

11 Apr 45

In contrast with yesterday, flight engineer Myron Locke thought today's Wing School was boring and mostly a waste of time, as it covered subjects he already knew.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"11 April 45
Capt. Jay J. Brown was transferred to 73rd Bomb Wing. [Brown would later be transferred to the 497th Bomb Group. - JEB]

Cpl. Julius Burson left on recreational DS in the United States for 30 days.

S/Sgt. Salvador Delgado left on recreational DS in Hawaii for 10 days."

The remainder of this 881st entry was a listing of long awaited and just announced officer promotions. 1/Lt Lou C. Kappil was promoted to Captain, and no less than 27 2nd Lieutenants were promoted to 1st.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"11 April  --  Submitted supplemental Combat Data Report. Partial promotion list came out last night and officer morale immediately went up. Briefing held in PM for mission #41, target 357 Tokyo ["What?! Again?!", you can
almost hear the combat crews mutter.”

According to 2/Lt Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron, the briefing was held at 1500 hours. In preparation, Sgt Willie Greene of the same crew installed new gun barrels on Z-28.

12 Apr 45

On this date, for the eleventh time, the 73rd Bomb Wing went back to Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant in Musashino near Tokyo. This was a daylight, high-altitude precision strike. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 30 combat aircraft for this mission, and 29 were airborne. Z-26, Sealy crew, was scratched when the #4 engine could not develop full power. The 500th also supplied a Super Dumbo search and rescue plane for this mission, Z-46, flown by the Clinkscales crew.

The 500th planes were organized into three combat squadrons, as follows:

First squadron
Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, Hays/Brannock
Z-22, “Georgia Ann”, Limpp
Z-29, “Gravel Gertie”, Robinson
Z-28, “Old Ironsides”, Haas
Z-27, Gillert
Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, Sasser
Z-36, “Li’l Abner”, Hughes
Z-30, “Sting Shift”, Holdridge
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Coffman

Second squadron
Z-47, Moreland
Z-50, “Fancy Detail”, Braden
Z-43, Setterich
Z-55, “Janice E.”, Ryan
Z-52, “20th Century Sweetheart”, Schultz
Z-11, “Lucky Eleven”, Field (883rd crew in 881st plane)
Z-12, H. Jackson
Z-14, Thomas

Third squadron
Z-8, “Duke of Albuquerque”, Thompson
Z-13, Luman
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Oswald
Z-5, “There’ll Always Be A Christmas”, Kappl
Z-7, “Hell’s Belle”, Sullivan
Z-6, “Booze Hound”, Booze
Z-19, “Sna Pe Fort”, Althoff
Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Wolter
Z-10, “Punchin’ Judy”, McNamer
Z-1, Gieker

Z-46, Clinkscales, Super Dumbo

Leading the Group and the first squadron on this mission would be Lt Col Joseph F. “Toby” Brannock, CO 882nd Bomb Squadron, flying with his favorite crew and plane, the Hale Hays crew in Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”. Leading the second squadron would be Capt Charles Moreland in Z-47. And leading the third squadron would
be Capt Donald Thompson in Z-8.

The crews were awakened at about midnight and fed a meal, then at 0100 there was a supplementary briefing to fill them in on the latest changes. After that it was on up to their planes.

Bomb load was 5 x M66 2000-pounders. Ammo load was 7500 rounds, with a little more than usual being carried in the lower turrets. This turned out to be a wise precaution, as most Jap fighter attacks would be from below.

Take-off was from 0328 to 0340. Planes flew individually to the Group assembly area at Nishino Shima, then the Group moved on to the Wing assembly area, which was at Cape Omai SW of Tokyo. There were no aborts for the 500th on this mission, all planes reaching and bombing the target. They were the only Group that could say that. However, the Haas crew in Z-28 somehow missed the Group assembly at Nishino Shima. They flew on alone for a while but luckily picked up a 499th Group formation near Sofu Gan and joined them.

At the Wing assembly point the B-29's were supposed to rendezvous with their P-51 fighter escort from Iwo Jima, which were navigationally escorted there by three B-29's of the 498th and 499th Groups. But the bombers were early (predicted winds were wrong) and the fighters were a little late, which forced the bombers to loiter for anywhere from 15 minutes to nearly an hour for some. This delay cost valuable fuel, which could have had disastrous consequences if Iwo Jima had not been open as an emergency base for the return. Finally, the P-51's showed up and the whole force moved on to the target, flying NE to the IP, Cape Ose, and from there on course 043 degrees to the target.

A visual run on the primary was attempted from altitudes ranging from 14,270 to 17,500 feet, but due to a heavy haze over the target most planes (26) were forced to bomb by radar. A total of 145 x M66 GP bombs were dropped, of which an estimated 50 hit the target. Counting the ten previous missions, approximately 63 percent of the plant's roof area had been destroyed by this time. The net effect was actually much greater, however, as after the war it was learned that Japanese efforts to disperse the production of this vital factory had resulted in further degradation of production.

The P-51 escort was again very effective on this mission, as confirmed by Don Weber in Z-28, and also by newly promoted 1/Lt Hal Towner, lead bombardier this day on the Hale Hays crew (#228) in Z-23, in this vivid diary entry:

"Boy, what a mission! We had a swell formation that really bored in on the target. We made a beeline for old 357 and the Japs were waiting for us with everything they had. If only I could have used my guns today. But we were lead crew so I had to leave them stowed till after bombs away. As we crossed the coastline and started in towards Tokyo, we were pretty well covered by our first P-51 escort [this was the Hays crew's first experience with fighter escort]. They flew the "buddy system" and were always together in pairs. I was checking off the pilotage points on our bomb run trying to pick up the target thru the haze when I leaped up to watch the flak burst all around us and saw three Jap fighters about 500 yards out coming in at our level head on. As I gasped in anticipation of hot lead bursting through the nose of our ship, two P-51's dove between us and the three Japs. At the last possible split second, they attacked those three Japs. Two of them exploded mid-flight while the third flipped over on his back and threw a phosphorous bomb at us which fell beneath the formation. I immediately went back to my bombsight, synchronized on the target and a few seconds later, our bombs were away."

With the P-51's patrolling above the bomber formation, the Japanese fighters attempted most of their attacks from below. A total of 44 fighter attacks were reported but no 500th planes were hit. 500th gunners were awarded claims of two fighters destroyed – an Irving by the right gunner on Z-4, probably Sgt Robert Caldwell, and a Tony by the left gunner on Z-13, probably Sgt Gordon Wong (a Chinese-American) – one probably destroyed, a Tony by the bombardier on Z-47, 2/Lt Charles Kolb – and three damaged – a Nick by the tail gunner on Z-22, Sgt George Mackey, a Zeke by the left gunner on Z-4, probably Sgt Richard Mischen, and a Tony by the bombardier on Z-43, 2/Lt Robert Oesterreicher.
Antiaircraft was rated generally moderate, but intense over the target. Four B-29's – Z-23, Z-24, Z-27 and Z-28 – were damaged by flak but none seriously.

Withdrawal was to the NW, then back to the SE around Mt Fuji and then S past Cape Omai again.

All planes returned safely, although nine – Z-9, Z-10, Z-11, Z-22, Z-28, Z-29, Z-34 and Z-53 because of fuel shortage and Z-52 due to an unspecified mechanical difficulty – had to land at Iwo Jima. Those planes which did not land at Iwo were back on Saipan by 2000. The others straggled in from Iwo during the night, Z-28 not getting back until after midnight.

Meanwhile, the new Shuffler crew of the 883rd spent the day still in Wing School. Today they studied navigation, a new subject to flight engineer Myron Locke, but one which he found quite interesting. "Seems they want an Engineer to be a little of everything over here." Still, though, he wanted to get back into the air and stay busy. Too much time to think was not good. "Miss Billie [his wife] like Hell now whereas at first the new environment kept it under control." Later this evening Locke got into a poker game and won 75 cents.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"12 April

WSM 367. Lt Lewis in Z-3 ["Ann Dee"] was airborne at 11 2000Z [12 Apr 0600L] to bomb Kure Naval Arsenal. A visual run was made from 27,300 feet, dropping 12 x 500 lb M64. Two bombs were observed to land in the target area. Aircraft returned to base at 12 1010Z [12 Apr 2010L].

WSM 368. Lt Shorey in Z-33 ["Slick Dick"] was airborne at 11 2011Z [12 Apr 0611L] to bomb the Mitsubishi A/C Works [at] Tamashima. A visual run was employed from 25,000 feet, dropping 10 x M64's. Bombs were observed to hit assembly buildings. Returned to base 12 1445Z [13 Apr 0045L]."

13 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"13 April

WSM 369 Lt Pierce in Z-21 ["Devils' Delight"] was airborne 12 1307Z [12 Apr 2307L]. He did not bomb due to a low gas supply.


WSM 371 Lt Parsons in Z-32 ["Fever from the South"] was airborne at 13 1500Z [14 Apr 0100L] to bomb Tachikawa. A visual run was made from 23,000 feet. Results were unobserved. Returned to base safely."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"13 April -- Capt. Irby took off approximately 0600 on WSM 370 K. Worked on combat claims all day. Operations advised WSM briefing at 1300. S-2 was not advised until 1230. S-2 was also advised that WSM 375 B [is] to be flown tomorrow, take off at 1200 Z. Briefing on Mission #42 [night fire raid on Tokyo Arsenal] at 1600. Take off time at approximately 1800."

Before starting Wing School this morning, the Shuffler crew received some shocking news. President Roosevelt was dead. Flight engineer Myron Locke wondered what effect this would have on the war effort. "I'm hoping and praying that Truman will make a good President but have little faith in him." [Locke dated this entry 12 April but he must have gotten the date wrong. President Roosevelt died at 1:00 PM Eastern Time on 12 April, which was
already 0400 13 April on Saipan.]

The men of the Shuffler crew were also unhappy about something else – their mail, or rather the lack of it. They had received absolutely none from home since arriving on Saipan and were getting very anxious about it. Unfortunately, this was a common occurrence for all new arrivals. It took the military mail system some time to catch up, and even when it did, the letters often arrived annoyingly out of order.

On the night of 13-14 April the XXI Bomber Command sent 348 bombers from all three of its Wings, 73rd, 313th and 314th, on an incendiary raid on the Tokyo Arsenal area of Tokyo. The 500th Bomb Group contributed 29 aircraft to this mission.

Here is a list of the participating planes and crews:

Z-1, Bricker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-7, "Hell's Bell", Sullivan
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mock
Z-9, "Nina Ross", H. Jackson
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", McNamer
Z-12, Curtis
Z-13, Thomas
Z-14, Mather
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Limpp
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Hughes
Z-27, Sealy
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Haas
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Hanft
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Robertson
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Coffman
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Arbon
Z-43, Grosse
Z-46, Standen
Z-47, Cheney
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Schmidt
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Adamson
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Clinkscales
Z-55, "Janice E.", Gregg
Z-56, Barron

Lt Col Ralph Reeve, CO 881st Bomb Squadron, was the force commander on this mission, flying with Capt Ferd Curtis and crew in Z-12. Deputy force commander was Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Bomb Squadron, flying with 1/Lt William Grosse and crew in Z-43.

The crews ate chow at 1530, then headed over to the S-2 quonset for the mission briefing at 1600.

Take-off was completed by 1851. The flight out was routine for most crews, but there was one abort, Z-34, Robertson crew, which was later found to have a cracked cylinder in #4 engine.

The Althoff crew in Z-19 had an anxious thirteen minutes on this mission. Right gunner Joseph Altott reported that right at landfall at 0106 they were picked up by 20-30 searchlights, which stayed on them until after bombs
away at 0119. While they were in the lights, the Japanese antiaircraft guns concentrated on them. "God spared us I guess. We could hear the flak popping and I could see it all around the wings etc. We bounced all over the place."

The Haas crew in Z-28 had a little easier time of it. They reached the target area at 0150 and headed in over Tokyo Bay toward the Arsenal at 307 degrees true. They caught searchlights too, and flak as well when they reached the edge of Tokyo, but it appeared to be bursting overhead and they were not hit. They dropped their bombs by radar even though it was clear and copilot Don Weber could see fires down below.

Of the 28 planes which reached the target, 26 bombed by radar and one visually from altitudes between 6750 and 7800 feet. One plane (unidentified) failed to bomb due to "mechanical difficulty", probably meaning a rack or bomb bay door malfunction. A total of 1,064 x E46 incendiaries, 28 x M64 general purpose bombs and 10 x M46 photo flash bombs were dropped on the target.

This mass attack by the XXI Bomber Command burned out another 10.7 square miles of an already ravaged Tokyo.

Four bombers were damaged by flak. One of these was Z-19, which "had a lot of flak holes." Eleven enemy fighter attacks were reported, damaging one B-29, possibly Z-56, Barron crew. Z-56, with two engines out, managed to make it to Iwo Jima. The crew was flown back to Saipan on a Navy plane, while the bomber remained on Iwo for temporary repairs. All other planes made it back to Saipan safely, landing between 0800 and 0900. Last to land was Z-28 and the Haas crew.

14 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"14 April  WSM 372. Capt McClanahan in Z-48 aborted due to a bad oil leak in number 4 engine. WSM 373. Major Luman in Z-3 ["Ann Dee"] was airborne 2154Z [14 Apr 0754L] to bomb Saeki Naval Base. A visual run was made on the target from 27,600 dropping 8 x M64's with poor results. WSM 374. Lt. Gillert in Z-33 ["Slick Dick"] took off but had to land at Iwo due to engine trouble in number one and two."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"14 April 5  
Sgt Lester E, Johnston left on recreational DS [detached service] to Hawaii for 10 days.  
Eleven (11) planes raided Tokyo (fire raid) -- returned safely -- slight damage.  
One (1) plane raided Japan (weather strike) -- returned safely -- no damage."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"14 April - Capt. Irby returned from WSM approximately 0100. All crews from Mission #42 landed approximately 0730, safely. Bombing results appeared good from first reports."

The Shuffler crew completed the classroom portion of Wing School today. Flight engineer Myron Locke was rather pleased with his performance this morning on the flight plan he'd been given to work on. He was off by only 39 gallons and 6 minutes. Also, he had scored 100 and 95 on the two tests that were administered. The crew were given the afternoon off, and Locke spent it playing poker. He got on a hot streak and won $7. This evening Locke and some friends went to see the movie "Roughly Speaking", starring Jack Carson and Rosalind
Russell. He thought it was very good.

15 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"15 April

WSM-375  Lt. Setterich in Z-45 ["Mustn't Touch"] was airborne 14 1249Z [14 Apr 2249L] to bomb target #198 [Aichi Aircraft Works, Atsuta Plant] Nagoya, Japan. Because radar was out, warehouse installations at Toyohashi were bombed visually from 27,800 feet dropping 12 M-64's [500 lb general purpose]. Results were excellent with heavy fire and explosions. [Returned to] base 15 0314Z [15 Apr 1314L]."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"15 April - Memorial services held for President Roosevelt in Group Theater. Briefing for mission #43, target Kawasaki Area, held after services. Capt. Braden, Lt's Field, Seale, Schultz, Clinkscales, Ryan, Schmidt and Grosse took off at approximately 1700 hours. Lt. Setterich flew WSM 375 B; returned safely."

Attending the memorial services for the late President was Sgt Myron Locke, flight engineer on the Shuffler crew. He recorded that they included the reading of FDR's biography, prayers and a speech by Col Dougherty, all very nice he thought. "A great man is dead & the world well knows it," he wrote. For the rest of the day, Locke played poker and practiced softball.

Sgt Willie Greene of the Haas crew was also at Roosevelt's memorial service. Greene also had a pleasant visit today from an old friend from his days in the 313th Bomb Wing in Nebraska, John "Fatman" Ryan, who was now stationed on Tinian. Greene and Ryan had a great time talking over old times. "Fatman" stayed the night before heading back to Tinian.

On the night of 15-16 April the 73rd Bomb Wing put up 120 bombers for an incendiary attack against the urban area of southern Tokyo and adjacent Kawasaki. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 33 bombing aircraft plus a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane for this mission. Thirty-two of the bombers made it airborne. Z-3, Harlan Jackson crew, was scratched due to a magneto drop in the #1 engine. The Super Dumbo also got into the air, but not without an adventure (details below).

The participating planes and crews were as follows, in approximate scheduled take-off order:

Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Grosse/McDowell
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Sasser
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Limpp
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-12, Curtis/Brandon
Z-1, Bricker
Z-43, Field
Z-47, Schultz
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Seale
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Robinson
Twenty-two planes carried a full load of 180-184 M47 incendiary clusters. The remaining ten planes carried 38 or 39 E46 incendiary clusters plus 1 M64 high explosive. Several planes additionally carried an M46 photo flash bomb. Ammo load was what was now standard for night missions, 200 rounds in the two aft turrets and the tail.

Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon was the force commander, flying with Capt Ferd Curtis and crew in Z-12. Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, flying with 2/Lt William Grosse and crew in Z-49, was deputy force commander. Other command and staff along on this mission included Maj John Van Trigt, on Z-7, Mitchell crew; Group RCM Officer 2/Lt Milton Pack with the Ryan crew in Z-55; and Group Engineering Officer 1/Lt Arthur Rand with the Seale crew in Z-53.

Take-off was from 1650 to 1655 for the first 12 planes, which were to act as pathfinders to mark the target. The rest of the bombing planes took off from 1710-1722, except for Z-7, which got off late, at 1815, for some reason. Then there was the Super Dumbo.

The Clinkscales crew of the 883rd Squadron had drawn the Super Dumbo assignment on this mission. They started to take off in Z-46 as scheduled, but as they approached the midpoint of the runway, flight engineer Jim Wride saw that the #4 engine was running away, surging up to 3500 rpm from the optimum 2600, and still rising. At that rate the engine was almost certain to overheat and catch fire. Wride yelled to Clinkscales to abort the take-off. By that time they were past the mid-point and almost airborne, so stopping the plane in time would be a challenge, but Clinkscales and copilot Tommy Benwell cut the throttles and jammed on the brakes. Even as the two men strained to bring the heavy B-29, fully loaded with fuel and extra tanks, to a safe stop, Benwell was on the radio reporting to the tower that they were aborting the take-off and requesting emergency vehicles to be waiting at the end of the runway. Meanwhile, Wride told the waist gunners via the interphone to watch #4 and let him know if they saw any trace of fire coming from it. Sure enough, flame soon burst from the overheated engine. Wride quickly activated the fire control system, but the fire refused to go out. It must have been quite a sight to see the big bomber screeching down the runway in the twilight streaming bright flames from her engine. But luck was with the crew this day. The brakes held and Clinkscales and Benwell were able to bring the plane to a halt before they ran out of runway, and then the firefighters quickly put out the fire in the engine. Later examination determined that an oil line had ruptured.

The men of the Clinkscales crew breathed a sigh of relief at their narrow escape but there was no time to linger. There was still a job to do. They quickly transferred to “Terrible Terry”, the Wing TB-29 (T for training), which had been held in readiness as a spare, and took off about 20 minutes late, this time thankfully with no suspense. According to right gunner Dick Wing, the mission itself was fairly routine: “We had no emergencies to take care of, although some planes did ditch close to a destroyer so we were of no assistance.”

Meanwhile, the rest of the planes were on their way to Japan. There were two aborts. One of these was Z-10,
Mock crew, which suffered a fuel transfer problem. The other abort was the Wolter crew in Z-9, which lost an engine, subsequently determined to be due to an unsafetied sump plug which allowed all the oil to drain out, an egregious maintenance error. The two aborts left 30 planes to bomb the primary target.

Z-23, Maj John Limpp crew, one of the pathfinders, made good time on the route out... too good, in fact. When they reached the vicinity of Iwo Jima, the navigator, 2/Lt Clinton Cator, realized that the wind data they had been given was wrong, and they needed to kill some time in order not to arrive over the target too soon. Limpp throttled back to 165 mph IAS (Indicated Air Speed), but by the time they approached the coast of Japan they were still ahead of schedule, so he started circling to kill more time. But it was a clear night, and after making only two orbits the crew could see fires already burning in what appeared to be the target area. It seems that other pathfinders had not delayed. So they headed on in to the target, early or not.

Limpp characterized the bombing run as “excellent... no need for corrections.” But the enemy was now well alerted. Flak was light at first but just before bombs away the plane was caught in the blinding glare of searchlights. It was bright enough to read inside the cockpit. They got most of their bombs off but some hung up in the forward bomb bay. The searchlights stayed on the plane for seven to nine minutes.

According to the official reports for this mission, 3 planes bombed visually and 27 by radar from 8900 to 9650 feet, dropping a total of 343 x E46 and 3,378 x M47 incendiaries, 9 x M64 GP's and 8 x photo flash bombs. Results were unobserved due to the darkness but later bomb damage assessment determined that the Wing had burned out 5.2 square miles of Tokyo.

Right after bombs away, Z-23 was rocked by an accurate AA salvo which inflicted a great deal of damage. The first thing that happened was that the “Unsafe to Land” light on the copilot's instrument panel came on. No kidding! But it wasn’t safe to fly either. The #3 engine was hit, briefly caught fire and had to be feathered. The wings were holed and the wing fuel tanks began leaking badly. Shell fragments tore thru the fuselage, knocking out the interphone, the radar, the Loran (Long Range Navigation) and the fuel transfer system. The controls for the bomb bay doors were also damaged, as they would not close. A shell fragment also ripped thru the jacket of the radio operator, Sgt Elmo Neal, but he himself was unhurt.

Japanese night fighters were in the air tonight in unusually high numbers. Fifteen attacks were reported, and four B-29’s were damaged. One enemy twin-engine fighter destroyed was credited to the tail gunner on Z-29, Cpl Edwin A. Davidson. As many as seven fighters homed in on the wounded Z-23, which was still illuminated by the searchlights. After the first fighter attack, all guns on Z-23 ceased to function. The remote fire control system had apparently been damaged too. Several fighters continued to follow the bomber even after she finally escaped the searchlights, but they were unable to mount effective attacks in the darkness and turned back after 20-30 minutes.

It was a good thing the fighters gave up, because while still over Honshu the #4 engine quit and had to be feathered. Now the plane was flying on only two engines, and both on the left side. It had been proven previously, most notably on 27 Jan 45 by Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, and the Carrico crew, that a B-29 could make it back home with two engines out on the same side, but it wasn’t easy and took some skillful flying. In one crucial respect the Limpp crew had it easier, because they only had to make it as far as Iwo Jima, about 650 miles away. On the other hand, the plane was shot up very badly.

The gunners in the waist could see thru the window of the door to the rear bomb bay that fuel was leaking into the bomb bay from the wing tanks. When they opened the pressure door to get a better look at the damage, the wind whooshed up thru the still open bomb bay doors and blew gasoline into their compartment, thoroughly drenching the men. No one was going to light up a cigarette in that plane anytime soon.

Meanwhile, the crew attempted to salvo the 14 incendiaries still hung up on the right side of the forward bomb bay. The top eight bombs came loose but stacked up on the six lower ones. The bombardier, 2/Lt David Green, had to crawl into the bomb bay, with doors yawning open below, and try to dump those bombs out manually. Pretty scary. He was able to kick out the eight loose ones, but the other six could not be moved. Looking to see why, Green discovered that the shackle had been put in backwards. All he could do was remove the fuses from the six bombs. By this time, the bomb bay doors finally responded to the controls and closed. Green brought
the six fuses back into the forward compartment and dumped them out thru the flare chute near the radio operator’s position.

But now the flight engineer, T/Sgt Ralph S. “Stan” Breeden, decided that he had to go into the bomb bay. They were losing a lot of fuel, and if they had any hope even of reaching Iwo, some of it had to be saved. Breeden thought he might be able to repair one of the fuel transfer pumps, which were in the bomb bays. If he could fix one, they could transfer fuel from the leaking tanks to good ones. So he went thru the pressure door into the forward bomb bay. The two fuel transfer pumps and associated wiring were located on the underside of the mid-wing section between the two bomb bays. One pump was accessible from the forward bomb bay and the other from the rear bomb bay. Just as it sounds, they were difficult to get to in flight. You had to lie down at least partially on the bomb bay doors, which was very dangerous under any circumstances, but Breeden took the chance. He apparently examined the forward fuel pump and decided either that it looked okay or was too badly damaged to bother with, because he then moved back to the rear bomb bay. To move from the forward to the rear bomb bay entailed crawling across the mid-wing section – a tight fit but it could be done. But no one in the forward compartment saw Breeden leave the forward bomb bay.

The gutsy flight engineer had been working in the bomb bays for 10-15 minutes when the crew felt a big thump. For a moment they thought they had been hit by flak again, but how could that be? They were well away from Japan. The navigator, Cator, leaned over and looked into the forward bomb bay thru the window in the pressure door. He saw that the bomb bay doors had popped open again... and he did not see Breeden. The shocked Cator shouted out, “Stan fell out the bomb bay!” The men in the forward compartment were stunned. Everybody liked Stan. There was stricken silence for what seemed like a long time. Then Breeden’s head popped out of the tunnel as he crawled matter-of-factly back into the forward compartment. The stricken silence turned to joy. Stan was all right!

What had happened was that after Breeden moved into the rear bomb bay, he worked on the fuel pump or wiring there until he thought he had it repaired. Then, rather than crawling thru the tight space back into the forward bomb bay, he decided to return to his flight engineer’s position via the gunners compartment and the tunnel. It was just as he was stepping into the gunners compartment, with one foot still on the bomb bay doors, that they suddenly fell open. Fortunately, right gunner Sgt Harry Lofblad grabbed Breeden and hauled him in.

The crew were able to re-close the bomb bay doors, but they fell open several more times that night. As for the fuel pump, Breeden couldn’t tell for sure that he had fixed it because the gauges were inoperative, but he went thru the motions of transferring fuel anyway and crossed his fingers.

With the radar out and celestial fixes impossible due to the bad weather, navigator Cator gave AC Limpp his best dead reckoning heading, and they limped toward Iwo Jima. Flight engineer Breeden thought they would fall a few minutes short of the island but the crew decided to try it anyway rather than ditch. Their airspeed was slow, between 150 and 165 mph IAS, so it should take about four hours to get there. About two hours out from Japan a welcome friend, Z-55, Ryan crew, showed up to escort Z-23 to Iwo. It was a good thing that they had the escort, because when they reached the vicinity of the island, Ryan informed them that they had overshot it, so they carefully circled and descended until they had the pork chop-shaped bit of land in sight. Now it was a matter of landing, something not easily done with two engines out on the same side and with the extent of other damage unknown. Already Limpp knew from how the plane handled that there was something wrong with the right aileron, and there was no telling what shape the landing gear was in. But they had to land, and the gear came down okay, which was a promising start.

Limpp thought that “our approach for landing was as good as could be for two engine operation.” He brought her in at about 100 mph and touched down about a third of the way down the runway. Limpp thought the landing would have been normal if the left tires had not been shot out, which of course wasn’t discovered until they touched the ground. The plane veered off to the left and they could not keep her on the runway with the brakes. Limpp wrote later, “We ran through a light tower, two trucks, a cletrac and a tent on the left side of the runway and we finally stopped by hitting a hill on the left.” Later Limpp was told by an officer that one truck driver had been killed.

As soon as the B-29 crunched to a stop, the crew wasted no time in scrambling out of the plane. She was full of
fumes and those six bombs were still in the bomb bay. But all the men got out, with the most serious injury a cracked rib to the bombardier, Green.

Old “Ramblin Roscoe”, a scarred veteran of 26 combat missions, would never fly another. She ended her life on Iwo Jima, perched awkwardly atop a large pile of dirt with her right wing broken, her belly torn open, and her tail forlornly up in the air. But she had brought her crew to safety.

All other planes returned to Saipan by 0811 16 April.

As a tragic epilogue to this story, the Limpp crew was given rest leave on Oahu after this harrowing incident. While there, Maj John Limpp became ill, was admitted to the hospital and died a few days later, on 2 May 1945, of cirrhosis of the liver.

16 Apr 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 April 45
The following officers and enlisted men left on recreational DS [detached service] to Hawaii for 10 days:


Eleven (11) planes raided Kawasaki -- returned safely -- slight damage."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 April - All crews returned from mission #43 at approximately 0730 hours. Held class in target study on [Target] #357 [Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory in Musashino near Tokyo]. Capt's McClanahan, Braden and Lt Barron's crews attended. Prepared briefing material for Izumi Air Field [this was the 500th's next mission]."

The Shuffler crew flew their first practice mission today. They took off at 1520 and flew north 200 miles to still Japanese-held Pagan Island, where they dropped four bombs. They were supposed to be real bombs but practice bombs had been loaded by mistake. After the bombing practice, AC Capt Harry J. Shuffler flew south to Guam and circled the large island so the men could get a good view. Then it was back to Saipan for a practice landing, then quickly off again to circle the island and then come back in for a final landing. Everything went well on the mission, except for the mix-up with the practice bombs and one other thing. Flight engineer Myron Locke was a little nervous about his parachute the whole way. It seems that the crew's own parachutes were in for re-packing, so they had to borrow some others, and Locke didn't like having to depend on someone else's parachute.

17 Apr 45

On this date the 499th and 500th Bomb Groups bombed Izumi Airfield on Kyushu in support of the ongoing invasion of Okinawa.

The existing official records are very scanty for this mission. The 883rd Squadron War Diary says that 12 crews were briefed, but the 500th Group Operations Journal says that 11 planes were airborne, so either one plane failed to take off or the twelfth crew was a spare.
Three of the crews and planes were from the 881st Squadron but their identities are unknown. Four crews and planes were from the 882nd but only two are known: Hays crew, Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II"; and Hanft crew, Z-33, "Slick Dick". Four crews were from the 883rd -- Irby, Grosse, Schultz and White -- but the planes they flew are not known.

Force commander was Lt Col Joseph Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, flying with the Hays crew in Z-23.

The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal contains a very brief summary of this mission:

“In accordance with 73rd Bomb Wing F.O #80, mission 44, 11 A/C this Group were airborne to attack Izumi Airfield by 2135Z [0735L].
All eleven planes bombed primary, dropping on leader from 16,100 feet. A total of 351 x M81 200# frag bombs were dropped on the field. 44% of the bombs hit within 2,000 feet of AP [aiming point].
All of our planes returned to base by 1220Z [2220L].”

The official mission summary adds, “Good to excellent bombing results was (sic) secured on the airfield, but due to the limited number of enemy aircraft near the aiming point, only five enemy aircraft were destroyed and one damaged.”

The Shuffler crew of the 883rd went on their second practice mission today. This one was to Pajores Island, about 220 miles north of Saipan. Pajores was an active volcano, and it was spewing a lot of smoke today. They made a radar bombing run and radar operator 1/Lt Earl Knechtel put one of the bombs right into the mouth of the volcano. Outstanding bombing.

Back on Saipan later, some of the crew went to see the movie “Saratoga Trunk” with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman. Flight engineer Myron Locke thought it was “really an excellent picture.”

18 Apr 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command again struck airfields on Kyushu, keeping up the pressure on the Kamikaze units flying against U.S. ships off Okinawa. The 497th and 498th Bomb Groups were assigned Tachiarai Airfield, while the 499th and 500th hit Izumi Airfield. This would be a night take-off and a daylight attack.

The 500th Bomb Group provided 12 aircraft for this mission, four from each Squadron, as follows:

Z-12, Curtis/Reeve
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Oswald
Z-3, “Ann Dee”, Sullivan
Z-5, “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, Kappil
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray
Z-26, Shorey
Z-30, “Sting Shift”, Haas
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Robertson/Cordray
Z-48, Gregg
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Adamson
Z-47, Standen
Z-55, “Janice E.”, Cheney

The 500th planes began taking off about 30 minutes past midnight Saipan time and all were in the air by 0037. Bomb load was a mix of M81 260-pound fragmentation bombs and M57 250-pound general purpose (high explosive) bombs. The formation leader was Lt Col Ralph Reeves, CO 881st Bomb Squadron, flying with Capt Ferd Curtis and his lead crew in Z-12.
The flight out was at an altitude of 5,000 feet and was routine, except for Z-34, which never reached the assembly point at Kusagaki Jima. At some point along the way, probably near Yaku Shima after starting the climb to altitude, Z-34 began experiencing engine problems, first with one engine, then another. Soon both #2 and #3 engines had to be feathered and Z-34 and the Robertson crew were in bad trouble, a long way from home. Even with the bomb load jettisoned, which the crew most certainly did, a B-29 cannot maintain altitude on only two engines. Eventually the plane and crew would run out of altitude and have to ditch, unless they could reach an airfield somewhere before that happened. AC 1/Lt William E. Robertson, Jr., had some tough decisions to make.

The Robertson crew were a replacement crew that had arrived on Saipan in March. This was their sixth mission. Robertson was probably grateful for the presence in the right seat today of Capt Robert M. Cordray. Cordray had considerable experience, having flown out as one of the original AC's in November 1944. But he had been transferred to Wing in January or February and had lost his crew, which were now flying with Leonard "Shorty" Hughes as AC. So here was Cordray back with the 882nd Squadron but without a crew. For reasons unknown he was filling in as copilot on the Robertson crew today.

Robertson's first and most critical decision, probably with input from Cordray and his flight engineer, T/Sgt Robert A. Weirich, was which way to head. Iwo Jima was about 700 miles away and he wasn't sure they could make it that far. But there was a closer place. Okinawa had been invaded on 1 April and Yontan Airfield had quickly fallen into American hands. Okinawa was about 200 miles closer than Iwo. Robertson turned toward Okinawa.

Meanwhile, the remaining 11 500th planes reached the assembly point at 0726 and assembled "with out difficulty" in 28 minutes. The 500th formation then headed toward the target, followed closely by the 11 planes of the 499th Bomb Group. At some point K-14, a straggler from the 330th Bomb Group, 314th Wing, joined the 500th squadron and bombed with them.

The 500th formation, with Z-12 still in the lead, reached Izumi Airfield and bombed visually at 0828, dropping a total of 279 x M81's and 64 x M57's from 15,390 feet. The 499th dropped just one minute later. There was no fighter or anti-aircraft opposition and no battle damage, and bombing results were labeled "good to excellent, but because of the limited number of enemy aircraft near the aiming point only three enemy aircraft were destroyed and four damaged." All 11 bombing planes returned safely to Saipan by 1527.

Sgt Willie Greene, CFC gunner on the Haas crew of the 882nd, called this mission a "milk run". And for the crews which reached the target it was.

But it was not a milk run for the Robertson crew in Z-34, trying to make Okinawa on only two engines. Finally, after several anxious hours with the plane steadily losing altitude, the island came into sight, and at 0755 local time (0855 Saipan time) the big bomber set down safely on Yontan Airfield. The crew must have exhaled a big sigh of relief. And that's how Z-34 became the first B-29 to land on Okinawa.

Later today, at about 1300, 1/Lt Robertson managed to get a radio message back to Saipan: "B 29S CALL 34 V 609 REMAINING X LOST 50 GALS OIL ON NUMBER 2 AND 3 ENGINES X ENGINES [sic] CHANGES SUGGESTED BY BASE MAINTENANCE X NO PERSONNEL OR ENGINES AVAILABLE HERE." A few hours later the Commander Naval Airbases (Okinawa) followed up with a confirmation that included the additional details that filings had been found in the cuno filters and sumps of #s 2 and 3 engines and that "ENGINE CHANGE CREWS TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT [ARE] NECESSARY." They were anxious to get this big bomber off their base as it was "SUBJECT [TO] DAILY ENEMY ATTACKS."

Back on Saipan, routine activities continued today. From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"18 April 45
Four (4) planes raided Kyushu -- returned safely -- slight damage.
Capt. Horace E. Hatch promoted to Major per Par 4, SO 102, Hq AAFPOA, dated 12 April 1945."

Also noted in this entry were the promotions of 2/Lt's Burton L. Wilner, William H. Byerley, Gus C. Maxwell, Jr., and William A. Welty to 1/Lt.

The Shuffler crew of the 883rd Squadron flew their third practice mission today. This one involved low-level bombing, at only 6,000 feet, and was again to Pagan Island. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke sweated a lot on this mission, not out of nervousness but because it was very warm in the plane at that low altitude. They ran the mission early so they could get back in plenty of time for tonight's "Girl Crazy" USO show. Real girls! Real American girls! No one was going to miss that.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"18 April - .... Lt. Thompson briefed 4 crews in squadron briefing room at 1630 for radar reconnaissance mission to Nagoya. Work on line stopped at about 1600 hours to permit personnel time to get to theater for "Girl Crazy" show. Lt. Schmidt and Lt. Clinkscales flew radar reconnaissance and returned. [The radar recon mission actually took place on the night of 18-19 April.]

The "Girl Crazy" show was highly anticipated by all 500th personnel. Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hale Hays crew, 882nd Squadron, noted it in his diary: "... We've been on this "Rock" five months today and will have an opportunity to celebrate our anniversary tonight. The stage show "Girl Crazy" -- we hope it's a leg show -- will appear on our own stage tonight. We figure if we start walking over about two hours early, we should get pretty fair seats."

Willie Greene, also from the 882nd, didn't miss the USO show, even after flying today's mission. He even had enough energy to play in the band at the Officers Club later.

Myron Locke of the Shuffler crew really enjoyed the "Girl Crazy" show, which featured Annie Rooney, Jim Baldwin, MC Bob Trent and most importantly seven gorgeous girls. He pronounced it "damn good". After the show Locke went to see the evening movie, with Donald O'Connor, Peggy Ryan and Jack Oakie in "The Merry Monahans", which he rated only "fair".

And oh yes, today the Shuffler crew's mail finally caught up with them after two weeks on Saipan, lifting their spirits sky high. Everyone got a big stack of letters. Locke got 13 from his wife Billie.

19 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"19 April - Four planes this Group flew Radar Recon to Nagoya, Japan. [Three of the participating crews were Thompson of the 881st and Schmidt and Clinkscales of the 883rd. Thompson flew Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque" and Clinkscales flew Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", but the identities of the fourth crew and the two other planes are unknown.] Lt Pack [Group Radar Countermeasures Officer] participated.


The Shuffler crew of the 883rd did not fly today's practice mission. They were ahead of the other crews and so were given the day off. Flight engineer Myron Locke slept late, then played poker most of the rest of the day. He came out $4 ahead.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"19 April - Meeting at Group of I & E [Information & Education] Officers. Program outlined for discussion group
to be held. Will try to hold our meeting each Sunday night before show and another late in the week in squadron."

Stranded on Okinawa with Z-34, AC 1/Lt William E. Robertson had apparently heard nothing from Saipan in response to his message of yesterday reporting the status of his plane, so today he sent a request for information. Later that day a message from 73rd Bomb Wing informed Okinawa that “FACILITIES ARE BEING DISPATCHED FROM DEPOT GUAM. ETA OF FACILITIES NOT KNOWN. WILL NOTIFY YOU OF FURTHER PLANS.” Presumably the “facilities” comprised a cargo plane with two replacement engines and the maintenance personnel required to install them.

20 Apr 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"20 April 45


From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"20 April - At 0930 Col. Dougherty awarded Air Medals and Purple Hearts to squadron Commanding Officers, who in turn made awards to squadron personnel. Formation held on Hansen Field [probably named after Maj Harold M. Hansen, AC of the first crew lost in the 500th Bomb Group on 29 Dec 44]. Scheduled meeting of Group A & D [probably Awards & Decorations] board postponed. Briefing for missions 46 and 47 at 2200. Take off scheduled for approximately 2400 hours."

The Shuffler crew of the 883rd flew their fourth and final practice mission today, another radar bombing mission on the Pajores. They led the formation this time and according to flight engineer Myron Locke, radar operator Earl Knechtel nailed the target again. Locke had developed a great deal of confidence in the young radar man. "The kid's really good. We'll let him take old 357. [Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory near Tokyo, the 73rd Bomb Wing’s most difficult target.] Bet he hits it too."

There was one more requirement to fulfill before the crew would be cleared to fly their first combat mission. AC Capt Harry Shuffler and navigator 2/Lt Walter Epstein would first have to fly two orientation missions with other crews.

A happy Locke got three more letters from his wife Billie today. "[I]t's sure swell to be getting mail again. God how I love her & miss her."

21 Apr 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command again sent its bombers against airfields on Kyushu in support of the invasion of Okinawa. The 500th Bomb Group was directed to split its force between two targets. Ten aircraft bombed Oita Airfield in conjunction with planes from the 499th Group, and nine aircraft bombed Usa Airfield in conjunction with planes from the 497th Group.
Once again records are fragmentary, so it is impossible to compile a complete list of participating crews and planes. It is not even possible to determine which planes bombed which airfield.

Seven crews and planes from the 881st Squadron participated but only two are known – Z-7, “Hell's Belle”, Sullivan crew, and Z-8, “Mission to Albuquerque”, Thompson crew.

Six crews and planes from the 882nd Squadron participated, as follows:

Z-21, “Devils’ Delight”, Pierce
Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe II”, Sealy
Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, Tackett
Z-26, Hughes
Z-28, “Old Ironsides”, Gillert
Z-32, “Fever from the South”, Parsons

Six crews and planes from the 883rd Squadron participated:

Z-41, “The Baroness”, Barron
Z-45, “Mustn't Touch”, Cheney
Z-47, Schultz
Z-49, “Three Feathers II”, Setterich
Z-51, “Tail Wind”, Field
Z-52, “20th Century Sweetheart”, Irby

The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal summarized the two missions as follows:

"21 April In accordance with 73rd Bomb Wing F.O. #83, mission 48, 10 A/C this Group were airborne 1405Z [0005L] to bomb the primary target Oita Airfield.

1 A/C bombed from 14,800 feet visually dropping 19 x M64’s on a target of opportunity: Tomitaka Airfield. 9 A/C bombed visually dropping on leader from 15,000-15,300 feet, dropping 171 x M46’s [probably a typo for M64’s] on the primary. Use of long delay fuses makes assessment of hits impossible. We met no opposition. Returned to base 0451K [probably another typo -- should probably be 0451Z, which would translate to 1451L].

In accordance with 73rd Wing F.O. #83, mission 49, 9 A/C were airborne from this Group as a squadron of a 3-squadron force to attack Usa Airfield.

9 A/C made a visual run dropping on leader from 15,000-15,800 feet, dropping 171 x M64’s. Bombs away at 2312Z [0912L]. Long delay fuses make assessment impossible. No enemy opposition was encountered."

The narrative history adds the following data on the Oita results: "A total of thirty-six aircraft were visible on the field from strike photos. Of these, eleven single-engine aircraft were probably destroyed and two twin-engine aircraft probably destroyed. Approximately eight buildings were also damaged."

Lt Ed Betts, who flew this mission as copilot on the Tackett crew in Z-24, inserted a succinct account into the Hal Towner diary: "We go in on one of those "easy" missions to Kyushu where we have been bombing the airfields used by the Japs for their suicide attacks on Okinawa. We led a squadron of 500[th] ships tacked onto the 499th Group. We got a very poor briefing at the 499th group but were the only squadron out of three to hit the target."

Flight Engineer Myron Locke and most of the Shuffler crew of the 883rd Squadron had the day off and just "loafed", but Locke and radio operator Bob Marling drew plane guard duty for tonight. It turned out to be not too bad, because the men were able to take turns sleeping in a little shack near Z-56. Locke had himself awakened at midnight so he could watch the planes take off on the mission to Izumi airfield (see below). He was impressed at how quickly the planes got into the air one right after the other. His AC Capt Harry Shuffler and navigator 2/Lt Walter Epstein were on one of those planes, going along on their first orientation mission, but it is not known on which one.
Nearly 1400 miles to the northwest, on Okinawa, the Robertson crew was still awaiting the arrival of a maintenance team from Guam with two replacement engines for Z-34, which had aborted to Okinawa during the 18 April mission to Izumi airfield. The help promised two days ago had not materialized and 1/Lt William E. Robertson was getting anxious. He sent another message to Saipan today reporting that he had “RECEIVED NO INSTRUCTIONS DISPOSITION OF MEN OR PLANE AT [O]KINAWA.” The base personnel at Yontan airfield were also getting anxious. They did not like having the huge bomber on their field. They reminded Saipan in a message today that this “BIG PLANE” was “IN CONTINUAL DANGER ENEMY AIR ATTACK.”

22 Apr 45

On this date B-29’s from the XXI Bomber Command continued their suppression raids on Kyushu airfields. The 499th and 500th Bomb Groups were ordered to hit Izumi Airfield again.

The 500th put up 11 aircraft for this mission. The participating planes and crews were:

Z-1, Bricker
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mather
Z-13, Luman
Z-27, Haas
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Holdridge
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Coffman
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Hanft
Z-41(?), White
Z-48(?), Black
Z-55(?), Ryan

[The assigned planes for the three 883rd crews are uncertain. Best guesses have been made based on the planes these crews flew most often.]

Capt Vance Black, 883rd Squadron Operations Officer, was apparently force leader on this mission.

Cliff Smith, flight engineer on Z-1, Bricker crew, felt that they spent too long (50 minutes) at the assembly point. There was one abort, Z-3, Harlan Jackson crew, due to #4 engine failure. The remaining ten aircraft all bombed the primary target.

Previous attacks on Kyushu airfields had been met by little or no opposition, but this one was different. The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal summarizes the mission:

"22 April

In accordance with 73rd Bomb Wing F.O #84, mission #91, 11 A/C were airborne 1434 [presumably Zulu time, which would be 0034L] to strike Izumi Airfield.

Due to AFCE [Automatic Flight Control Equipment, i.e., automatic pilot] failure in Capt Black's A/C during bomb run the target was passed without bombing. Major Luman [Z-13] assumed the lead and the formation made a 180 degree turn and dropped 170 x M64 G.P.'s visually on leader from altitudes of 16000 to 16950 feet. One A/C [Z-3?] bombed target of opportunity, Shimizu, due to mechanical failure.

This Group suffered 31 fighter attacks. Our gunners claim 2 enemy A/C probably destroyed and one damaged. Four ships were damaged by meager flak and two by fighters.

All ships returned to base by 0646Z [1646L]."

One of the fighters put a burst into the #3 engine of Z-27, Haas crew. The engine lost all its oil, couldn't be feathered, and the prop ran away. Meanwhile, Sgt Willie Greene, ring gunner on Z-27, was shooting back, to good effect. He hit no less than three of the fighters and saw black smoke come streaming out behind them but
could not claim better than probables because they didn't blow up in the air and the bomber was too high to see anything hit the ground.

The #3 prop on Z-27 continued to spin away, causing the plane to vibrate and lose speed as it moved out over the sea. The crew knew the propeller would eventually fly off and possibly slam into the fuselage or the #4 engine, so they prepared to bail out if necessary. Fortunately, when the prop finally did come off, it flew out and up, still spinning, then slowly fell below and behind. Z-27 made it safely back to Saipan on three engines.

Another of the damaged planes was Z-1, which had her right wing shot up.

The historical narrative reports the results of the bombing as follows: "The strike photos of this Group show no planes destroyed; three single-engine probably damaged; one twin-engine aircraft probably damaged; eight aircraft damaged by previous raids. A total of seventy-five aircraft were on the fields. Three buildings were damaged."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 April 45
1st Lt. Hershel W. Connor was transferred to 73rd Wing Headquarters."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 April - .... Warning sent out to tie down all loose equipment as heavy wind storm expected. Lt. Clinkscales took off approximately 0800 to escort 4 P-38's to Okinawa. Returned safely." [This escort mission was in Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner." Also participating was Z-33, "Slick Dick", of the 882nd Squadron, crew unknown. The planes escorted were actually F-5's, the reconnaissance version of the P-38. - JEB]

After being relieved of plane guard duty early this morning, flight engineer Myron Locke and radio operator Bob Marling of the Shuffler crew of the 883rd slept until noon. Then Locke played cards for most of the rest of the day.

23 Apr 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


Although there is nothing in the official records about it, flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke of the Shuffler crew of the 883rd noted in his diary that today there was another practice mission to Pagan Island, with 12 planes of his Squadron participating. The planes made both individual and formation bombing runs. Group Operations Officer Maj Freeman Parsons flew along with the Shuffler crew.

The four gunners of the Shuffler crew – left gunner Ed Kennedy, CFC gunner Al Gramps, right gunner John "Midge" Migliarrio and tail gunner Bert Dresser – drew plane guard duty tonight, so Locke and his good buddy radio operator Bob Marling went to see the movie "Greenwich Village". Locke had seen the movie in the States with his badly missed wife Billie, so he "didn't enjoy it half as much this time."

24 Apr 45
On this date the XXI Bomber Command took a break from bombing airfields on Kyushu to strike the Hitachi Aircraft Plant in Tachikawa, 15 miles west of Tokyo, in a daylight, medium altitude precision attack.

Documents are again spotty. The 500th Bomb Group put up 11 aircraft for this mission. The 881st Squadron furnished four planes and crews. One of these was Z-19, Althoff crew. The Wolter crew of the 881st also flew this mission but it is not known in which plane. The other two 881st crews and planes are unknown. Four planes and crews were from the 882nd Squadron. Two of them were Z-27, Hays crew, and Z-30, "Sting Shift", Gray crew. A third plane was Z-37, "Belle Ruth", possibly flown by the Hughes crew. The fourth plane and crew are unknown. The 883rd Squadron supplied three crews -- Schmidt, Adamson and Clinkscales. Clinkscales flew Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", but the other two planes are unknown.

Two planes failed to bomb the primary. About an hour out, Z-41 aborted when she lost her #4 engine, later determined to be due to a bent push-rod and intake valve stem in #15 cylinder. Closer to Japan, Z-37 developed a problem with her #2 engine, later found to be a faulty electrical governor head, and bombed Shizuoka as a target of opportunity. The remaining nine planes all bombed the primary.

Fighter opposition was heavy on this mission, and there was no fighter escort. Hal Towner in Z-27, Hays crew, called it a "rough mission" and added that it "reminded us of the old days when we went over Nagoya and flew through clouds of flak and swarms of fighters." Ring gunner John Norton in Z-30, Gray crew, agreed that there were plenty of fighters but thought that they did not press their attacks. The flak on the other hand was "intense and accurate" and put five small holes in their plane. Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-19, Althoff crew, claimed a Tony, and left gunner Harry Drnec and tail gunner Robert Blankman shared credit for a Tojo. After they landed, Altott counted 15-20 holes in their plane, some from flak and some from fighters.

Z-30 and Z-19 were far from the only planes hit; nearly all were. The copilot and bombardier in the Wolter crew, 2/Lt Donald Hacker and 1/Lt Frederick Frye, were slightly wounded. It's surprising there were not more casualties.

The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal summarized the mission as follows:

"24 April  In accordance with 73rd Bomb Wing F.O. #85, mission 53, 11 A/C were airborne 1650Z [0240 local] to bomb Tachikawa.

9 A/C bombed primary target visually, dropping on leader, a total of 170 x M64 GP's from 11145 to 12300 feet. One ship bombed Shizuoka due to mechanical difficulty and one ship aborted.

Our formation sustained 40 fighter attacks. Gunners claim 3 destroyed and 4 probably destroyed. Nine of our ships were damaged by flak and one by fighters."

The historical narrative for this mission says that the bombs dropped by the Group hit from 1500 to 4000 feet south of the target and did no serious damage. Hal Towner confirms this, admitting frankly that he "missed the target".

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"24 April  WSM 403 Lt Cheney, Z-42 ["Supine Sue"], took off 23 2005Z [24 Apr 0605 local] to bomb Saeki A/F. 10 x 500 lb. GP's were dropped visually from 27,000 feet with good results. Engine trouble forced plane to land at Guam.

WSM 404 Lt Setterich, Z-47, took off 23 2000Z [24 Apr 0600 local] to bomb the Yokohama Dock Area. 10 x 500 pounders were dropped visually from 29,000 feet and were observed landing in water. Base -- 24 0905Z [24 Apr 1905 local].

WSM 405 Lt Sealy, Z-21 [Devils' Delight"], took off 1300Z [24 Apr 2300 local] on weather recon. Returned to base 0400Z [25 Apr 1400 local]."
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 April - .... Lt. Thompson and Sgt. Gibson went to Wing Informational school in PM. Worked on reports. Meeting of Group Awards Board."

25 Apr 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"25 April   WSM 406 -- Lt Gillert, Z-29 ["Gravel Gertie"], took off 2000Z [0600 local] to bomb Tachikawa Assembly Plant. A visual run was made from 25,800 feet dropping 10 x M64's [500-lb High Explosive]. Results were unobserved due to ground haze. Base 1700Z [26 Apr 0300 local].

WSM 407 -- Lt Hughes, Z-26, took off 24 2009Z [25 Apr 0609 local] to bomb Mitsubishi A/C Works. A visual run was made from 25,000 feet dropping 10 x M64's. Bombs hit 3 main assembly buildings. Base at 25 1307Z [25 Apr 2307 local].

WSM 408 -- Lt Gregg, Z-57, took off 25 1300Z [25 Apr 2300 local] to bomb Ube Soda Works. A radar run was employed dropping 10 x M64's with unobserved results."

Regarding the last WSM, #408, the 883rd Squadron War Diary says that the Shuffler crew flew this mission, and the diary of Sgt Myron D. Locke, flight engineer on the Shuffler crew, confirms that. It is quite possible that because this was the Shuffler crew's first mission, veteran AC 1/Lt Jarvis Gregg went along to provide support and guidance. In any case, Locke's diary gives us much more detail than the two brief sentences above.

According to said diary, the Shuffler crew learned about the mission at 1500 on 25 April and spent the rest of the afternoon getting ready. The plan was to take off at 2300 hours, fly at 1500 feet on the route out, then before reaching Japan climb to 25,000 feet. They were to go as far as Korea, taking weather readings all the way, then turn and come back over Japan, bomb Ube, and head home.

The crew were understandably excited about their first mission. Locke brashly ended his diary entry for 25 Apr with, "Look out Japs here we come." But as they soon learned, these missions never came off as briefed.

To begin with, the plane wasn't quite ready, so they got off 30 minutes late, at 2330. Then about 600 miles out they ran into a storm, which they tried to climb over. That turned out to be a bad decision, because it took longer than expected, used up a lot of fuel and caused icing on the wings, which significantly reduced their speed. Locke had to move his fuel settings from the normal auto lean to auto rich, and that got them up only to 195 indicated air speed. As they neared the Japanese coast, Locke calculated that they didn't have near enough fuel to complete the mission as planned and advised Capt Shuffler to go directly to Ube. And that's what they did. They hit the coast at 0700, looked for Ube visually but it was socked in, so they dropped their bombs by radar at 0715 and turned immediately for home. There was no opposition. On the way back they saw the main force of B-29's on their way to bomb Saeki (see below). They stopped at Iwo Jima to take on enough fuel to get home, then as had become the norm for WSM's flew to Guam to turn in their reports. Then it was back to Saipan for interrogation (debriefing), a shot of whiskey, some chow and then to bed for an exhausted sleep. Duration of the mission was a long 16 hours and 30 minutes.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


Also on this day the Robertson crew of the 882nd Squadron brought Z-34 back from Okinawa, where they had landed on two engines after aborting on the 18 April mission to Izumi Airfield on Kyushu. The two defective
engines had been repaired or replaced, a brief test flight had been made this morning, and then the crew flew six hours and 20 minutes home to Saipan, arriving at about midnight.

26 Apr 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command turned its attention back to the Kyushu airfields. The 500th was assigned Saeki Airfield as its target. Twenty-two aircraft were scheduled plus one spare, and all 23 were airborne by 0047.

Eight planes and crews were supplied by the 881st Squadron, but only three assignments are known – Z-7, “Hell’s Belle”, Sullivan crew; Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Pearson crew; and Z-12, Curtis crew.

The 882nd also sent eight planes and crews, as follows:

Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Coffman
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Pierce
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Holdridge
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Robinson
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Haas

The 883rd sent six crews -- Braden, Irby, Clinkscales, Setterich, Standen and Seale. The Setterich crew flew Z-43, the Seale crew flew Z-47, and the Clinkscales crew flew Z-53, but the other three planes are unknown.

Eight plus eight plus six equals 22, so there’s also a twenty-third plane and crew, all particulars unknown, out there.

As the Clinkscales crew prepared to climb aboard Z-53 at their hardstand, flight engineer Jim Wride suddenly doubled over with a severe pain in his abdomen. Wride did not want to miss the mission, but the intense pain would not let up, his knees felt weak, and he could not force himself to stand upright. A concerned AC Ray Clinkscales came over to see what was the matter, and after a brief discussion with Wride decided he would need a back-up flight engineer for this mission. Wride was taken to see the flight surgeon and was soon on the operating table having his appendix removed. He would miss a total of four missions while recovering but would return to complete the required 30.

Reflecting later on this incident, Wride was very grateful that the attack occurred when it did. If it had happened a few hours later in the middle of the mission, his life and the safety of his crew would have been at risk.

There were four aborts on this mission: Z-9, Pearson crew, with a blown cylinder in #1 engine; Z-33, Hanft crew, with no compression in #6 cylinder of #2 engine; Z-43, Setterich crew, when the #4 prop stuck at 2650 rpm; and Z-47, Seale crew, because of a blown cylinder in #3 engine.

The historical narrative for this mission reports that the climb to bombing altitude “was through overcast and our aircraft were still in the soup at assembly point.” The remaining 19 planes climbed to get above the clouds, and most of them ended up bombing individually by radar from altitudes between 20,800 and 25,400 feet. A total of 323 x M64 GP bombs were dropped, but due to the undercast results were unobserved.

Ed Betts, originally copilot on the Hays crew but now flying with other crews, added this entry for 26 April to the Hal Towner diary: “Back to Kyushu on another one of those “rough” missions. The weather was stinko again, so we hit the airfield by radar. We had to go to 25,000’ to get on top, which is very high altitude for us now. I flew with Gray [Z-35] again today.”
There was no enemy opposition, flak or fighters, on this mission. All planes returned safely to base by 1508.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"26 April  WSM-409 - Capt Bricker, Z-1, took off 25 2000Z [26 Apr 0600 local]. 10 x M64's were dropped on the city of Hamamatsu by Navigational ETA [estimated time of arrival?]. Due to cloud cover, results were unobserved. Base - 26 1145Z [26 Apr 2145 local].

WSM-410 - Lt King, Z-3 ["Ann Dee"], took off 25 2000Z [26 Apr 0600 local] on a Weather Recon. Returned to base 26 1315Z [26 Apr 2315 local]. [Another apparent error here. The only King on the 500th Group Officer Roster was Robert E. King, who had been lost in action with his crew in Z-47 on 7 Apr 45. So who flew this WSM? Don't know.]

WSM-411 - Lt Schultz, Z-45 ["Mustn't Touch"] took off 26 1300Z [26 Apr 2300 local] to bomb O'Shima [sic] Naval Stations. 10 x M64's were dropped, one of which was observed to hit the target. Returned - 27 0400Z [27 Apr 1400 local]."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"26 April - .... Capt. Shuffler took off at 2300 [25 April] on WSM 408 M. Returned after landing at Iwo. Lt. Thompson briefed mission #51, target Izumi."

Meanwhile, over in the 882nd, Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew (#228), was pondering a small problem concerning his absent quonsetmates from the LaMarche (former Savage) crew (#224). "Capt. LeMarche [sic] and his crew, including Dutch [flight engineer Robert E. Versluis] and Sonns [navigator Clarence M. Sonne, Jr.] should be back from their rest leave in Hawaii any day now. I'm afraid to face Dutch. He had a G.I. toolkit. I got it out the other day needing a file and didn't put the kit away when I'd finished. A couple gears [staff officers] came through picking up G.I. property and so Dutch's kit is gone. What shall I do?"

Towner added as sort of an afterthought, "Our new airplane [Z-23, 42-94049, "Ramblin Roscoe II"] is O.K. Those new-fangled doors [meaning certainly the pneumatic bomb bay doors] don't work so hot, though."

27 Apr 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command returned to striking airfields on Kyushu. The 499th and 500th Bomb Groups were again assigned Izumi Airfield in northeastern Kyushu as target. The 500th scheduled 11 aircraft plus one spare. All 11 planes made it airborne and the spare was not used.

Only a few of the participating planes and crews on this mission can be identified:

Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Sealy
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Hanft
Z-41(?), White
The Sasser crew of the 882nd participated but it is unknown in which plane.

Take-off was completed by 0140. There were no aborts.

The planes assembled at a point off the coast of Kyushu and then moved off to the IP and target, with Z-23 in the lead position.

Bombing altitude was between 17,100 and 17,700 feet. Twelve fighter attacks were reported but no damage
was sustained. One enemy fighter was claimed damaged. Flak was light and inaccurate. A total of 186 x M64 GP bombs were visually dropped on the target. According to the official mission summary, the B-29's maintained a "good tight formation on [the] bomb run and excellent bombing results [were] reported."

No B-29's were damaged by enemy action on this mission. All planes were safely on the ground by 1710.

Willie Greene of the 882nd's Haas crew, which did not go on today's mission, spent the day printing pictures and writing letters. For a change, the crew didn't have to clean guns today because they had not fired them on their last mission.

28 Apr 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent several Groups to work over Kyushu airfields again. The 500th drew the by now very familiar target of Izumi Airfield. The Group scheduled 22 aircraft plus two spares and a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane, and all 25 got off.

The 881st Squadron contributed 11 planes to this mission, as follows:

Z-1, Gieker
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil
Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Sullivan
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter
Z-12, Curtis
Z-13, Althoff
Z-14, Mather

The 882nd's participation is not documented.

The 883rd sent 12 planes and crews:

Z-41, "The Baroness", Barron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Grosse
Z-43, Setterich
Z-46, Adamson
Z-47, Seale
Z-48, Gregg
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Black
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Field
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-57, Cheney

Take-off was completed by 0155. There was one abort, Z-14, Mather crew, due to #2 prop stuck at 2800 RPM. The remaining 24 planes followed the briefed course and assembled off the coast, hindered slightly by haze. One plane (unidentified) missed the assembly due to compass and LORAN problems, and the Super Dumbo remained off the coast, so 22 planes formed into two combat squadrons went on in to bomb the target. The plane which missed the assembly bombed the target alone later.

Z-13, Althoff crew, flying No. 3 position in the third element, developed a bad oil leak in #1 engine after assembly.
but pressed on to the target anyway. By bombs away, the oil was down to 15 gallons from 60, so they feathered the engine, but by increasing the RPM's in the other engines, they were able to keep up with the formation.

Formation over the target was good, and 564 x M64 GP's were dropped visually from 18,000 feet. Bombing results were excellent.

Two fighter attacks were reported and one B-29 was damaged by flak.

One plane which had a fuel transfer problem had to stop at Iwo Jima to refuel before flying on to Saipan. The rest all made it back to base safely, although Z-13 ran very low on fuel and the crew had to "sweat it out" toward the end.

The enlisted men of the Shuffler crew, 883rd Squadron, were awakened early today by Squadron Adjutant 1/Lt Garrity to work on the day room, which they did until 1100, when they went to chow. They got the rest of the day off, except that flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke had plane guard tonight. For Locke it was a sad day. It was his second wedding anniversary and he was reminded all day of how much he missed his wife Billie.

**29 Apr 45**

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron war Diary:

"29 April - Lt. Thompson completed A/A map of Honshu. No mission today. Sgt Gibson on duty in S-2. Meeting at A-2 on combat data." [In military parlance, S-2 is the Intelligence Section at regimental/group or battalion/squadron level. A-2 is the Intel Section at higher air levels -- Wing, Command or Air Force. The ground forces equivalent of A-2 would be G-2. This meeting was probably at the 73rd Bomb Wing.]

According to his Sgt Willie Greene's diary, the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron flew a practice mission today, but Greene provided no details.

This morning flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke of the Shuffler crew of the 883rd slept late after getting off plane guard but had to get up in time for the 1200 briefing for a mission they would be flying tonight and tomorrow. This would be their second mission but since the first one was a weather strike mission on 25-26 April, this one would be their first regular bombing mission. In the afternoon the crew checked their plane and equipment and got everything ready, then rested in the evening.

**30 Apr 45**

On this date the XXI Bomber Command directed the 73rd and 313th Wings to bomb the Tachikawa Air Arsenal near Tokyo as primary, with the city of Hamamatsu as the secondary. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 22 aircraft and a Super Dumbo for this mission, and all 23 were airborne.

The 881st Squadron put up 12 planes and crews, but only four of them can be identified – Z-1, Bricker crew; Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Sullivan crew; Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson crew; and Z-12, Althoff crew.

The 882nd contributed 10 planes and crews:

Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Gillert
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Haas
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Gray  
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Arbon  
Z-36, "Li'L Abner", Coffman  
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson

One crew from the 883rd Squadron -- Shuffler -- took part, but the plane they flew is unknown.

Take-off was completed by 0330. There were two aborts, Z-8, Thompson crew, due to an oil leak in #2 engine; and Z-21, Pierce crew, when she lost her #1 engine.

The 20 bombing aircraft headed for the primary, leaving the Super Dumbo circling off the coast. According to Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-19, Althoff crew, the formation was supposed to have a P-51 escort, but the friendly fighters got to the rendezvous late, after the B-29's had already left for the target. One bomber, identity unknown, was forced to leave the formation between the Control Point and IP due to mechanical trouble; she peeled off and bombed the secondary target, Hamamatsu.

As the 19 planes still with the formation approached the primary target, the Tachikawa Arsenal, they discovered it to be completely covered by clouds, so they diverted to the secondary target. Hamamatsu was also cloud-covered, so a total of 472 x M64 GP's were dropped on the city by radar from altitudes ranging from 17,800 to 18,500 feet. Results were rated excellent. Altott reported seeing several large explosions, possibly of oil tanks.

Flak was meager, and only four fighter attacks were reported. No B-29's were damaged, but four planes, one of them Z-28 and another the unidentified plane flown by the Shuffler crew, had to land at Iwo when they ran low on fuel (one also had a prop governor problem). After taking off again for Saipan, the #1 engine on the Shuffler crew's plane caught fire and had to be feathered. They flew the last three hours to Saipan on only three engines but they got there okay. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke sweated it out and later wrote tongue-in-cheek in his diary, "Don't like fires." Except for the ones that had to stop at Iwo, all aircraft returned safely to base by 1830. Locke recorded that they went to interrogation, had their slug of whiskey, ate and then went to bed. The Haas crew, one of those that stopped at Iwo, got to bed a little later. They didn't make it back to Saipan until 2130.

Ed Betts, flying as copilot on Z-34, Gray crew, and logging his seventh mission this month, couldn't help ribbing his friend Stanley Pierce, who had apparently bombed Hamamatsu as a target of opportunity one too many times, and who had been forced to abort on this mission. Betts wrote in Hal Towner's diary, "We went to Tokyo again today but because of the undercast we came back to Hamamatsu -- Pierce's private target. Unfortunately he wasn't along, missing his first chance to bomb that target legally."

Bombing Japan was not the only mission the 500th Group carried out on this day, and not the only one with danger. The Standen and Cheney crews, flying Z-43 and Z-46, escorted a group of P-47's to Truk, where the fighters strafed a radar station. On the way back, the #3 engine on Z-43 began acting up, could not be feathered, and the prop ran away. It eventually flew off and fortunately did not further damage the ship. The plane made it home safely.

In a concluding Remarks section, the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary summed up some significant events from April:

"In the early part of the month a show with "females" played in the Group Theatre and two of the young ladies were guests for supper in the Enlisted Mess.

Projects for the development of the area continued slowly. All showers were finally piped to the sea and some progress was made on the completion of the wash rooms adjacent to showers. Lack of plumbing is still the main "stumbling block."
A small group of native Chamorros were made available to the Squadron and in ten days work transformed the looks of the area around the Orderly Room, Operations, and the "Pub".

In the accomplishment of our "mission" the 881st wrote a proud chapter for the month of April -- the highest total of combat hours flown and the most bombs on the primary target. This was a subject for commendation to the whole Squadron by Lt. Col. Reeve."

1 May 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"1 May 45  The work has been completed of changing the Group's designation symbol, the square. The new markings consist of a huge letter "Z" covering the majority of fin and rudder. The Group number is now located on the sides of the fuselage behind the blisters, and another set of numerals below the cockpit."

This changeover obviously took some time. You can't repaint almost 200 planes in one day. I haven't seen a copy of the order, but my bet is that the Wing ordered the remarking on 1 April and gave the Groups a month to do it.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 May: The award and presentation of Air Medals was made at 0900 on Hansen [should be Hansen, I think] Field. Meeting at A-2 on combat data at 1030."

After yesterday's long mission, the Shuffler crew of the 883rd Squadron were so exhausted that they slept thru breakfast this morning, and they would have kept right on sleeping if it had not been pay day. So they had to get up to get paid. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke drew $67.55, then won $17 more playing poker in the afternoon. A profitable day.

But Joseph Altott, right gunner on the Althoff crew of the 881st, had an even more lucrative May Day, as described in his diary:

"05/01/1945  Got up at 0700 hours. Ate chow and put on our class A uniforms and had a formation at the 883rd ball field. We received the air-medal big gear [high-ranking officers] ceremony. We cleaned the guns after chow, got paid, and made a few bucks at dice. I went to a movie and then about 2230 hours got into a big dice game in the Dayroom, by 2330 had made 400.00 bucks. [Radio operator Andrew R.] Muldoon made $200.00."

2 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 May  Major Hatch and his crew returned from Recreational D.S. [detached service] in Hawaii."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 May: Group declared a half holiday until 1300 hours. Only a skeleton force was on duty. Officers' Call at Group S-2 at 1300. Conduct in Officers' Club was the subject of a discussion by Colonel Dougherty. [Sounds like somebody had been getting a little rambunctious at the O Club.]"
The Shuffler crew of the 883rd enjoyed their half holiday this morning. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke noted that there was no explanation given for the holiday, which made him suspicious. He wondered if the command was working up to a blitz. In the afternoon Locke went to an engineering meeting, where he received "a lot of new poop."

3 May 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"3 May  27 A/C participated in a training mission over Pajoras Island [a small island at the northern end of the Marianas chain, about 400 miles from Saipan]."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"3 May  
Lts. Sullivan, Craig, Hufty, and Seder left for ten days detached service with XXI Bomber Command."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"3 May:  Practice mission flown. Takeoff approximately at 0900. Airplane Commander and Pilot meeting in Briefing Room at 0900. Meeting at A-2 [probably 73rd Bomb Wing Intel Section] at 1000. Lt Thompson [883rd Intel Officer] attended a meeting of I & E [Intelligence and Electronics?] Officers at Special Service at 0900."

Sgt Myron Locke, flight engineer on the Shuffler crew of the 883rd, drew plane guard duty again tonight. It was a little annoying to have it so often, but at least Locke was able to get a lot of reading and letter-writing done. He had to report for duty at 1630.

4 May 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"4 May  Capt James S. Connell, Hq 73rd Wing assigned this office as flight control officer."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"4 May  
Captain Arthur S. Miller left for Detached Service at AFTAC, Orlando, Florida. Lt. Caufield inadvertently (sic) shot himself in the foot while cleaning his carbine in his tent and has been hospitalized in the Wing Dispensary. [J. Vincent Caufield was the original bombardier on the Fitzgerald crew (#115), but he was not on the mission on which that crew was lost on the night of 16-17 March.]

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"4 May:  Prepared briefing on Mission 54, Target 357 [the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory near Tokyo again]. Briefed gunners at 1330. Main briefing at 1600 was cancelled. New target designated 660, Hiro Naval A/C
Sgt Myron Locke of the Shuffler crew of the 883rd slept late this morning after getting off plane guard duty. After lunch he played cards again. Locke was still on his hot streak and won another $10. After supper he went to see the movie, which was “Objective Burma” starring Errol Flynn. Locke’s verdict on the film: “Pretty good.”

5 May 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing, joined by the 58th Bomb Wing in its inaugural mission from the Marianas, struck the Hiro Naval Aircraft Factory in Kure in a daylight precision attack. There were problems with this mission from the start. The 73rd was originally alerted for an attack on old Target 357 near Tokyo and had already fueled its planes and loaded them with 6 x 2,000-pound bombs when the target was suddenly changed on the afternoon of 4 May to the Hiro Factory in Kure. This change threw 73rd Wing mission planning into turmoil, as almost the entire mission briefing scheduled for that night had to be hurriedly redone. Also, the bomb load had to be reduced to 4 x 2,000-pound bombs, because the new flight plan would expend more fuel and there was insufficient time to install auxiliary fuel tanks in the bomb bays. While this was feasible, it left the B29’s, especially the ones built at the Renton plant in Washington which had smaller center wing tanks, with a dangerously small fuel reserve. There would be consequences to this decision, as we shall see.

While the poor ordnance men who had worked hard to load those six 2000-pounders in each plane now worked even harder to remove two of them (and no doubt blistering the air with curses), the briefing specialists scrambled to rewrite practically everything. A probable result of the hasty planning was the decision to situate the Group assembly points on the Japanese coast itself – normally they were at small islands off the coast – and there would be consequences to this decision too.

The 500th Bomb Group originally scheduled 36 aircraft for this mission, but Z-6, “Booze Hound”, H. Jackson crew, had to be scratched due to magneto trouble with #2 and #4 engines. The remaining 35 planes all made it airborne. At least one spare and probably more were arranged for this mission but none was needed. The Althoff crew of the 881st was one of the designated spares. They got up at 2200 the night before for the 0130 briefing but were told they were not needed, so they went back to bed.

The plan was to organize the 35 planes into three combat squadrons, as follows:

**First (882nd) squadron**
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays/Brandon  
Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, Sasser  
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Robertson  
Z-28, “Old Ironsides”, Haas  
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray  
Z-26, Gillert  
Z-22, “Georgia Ann”, Shorey  
Z-36, “Li’l Abner”, Coffman  
Z-30, “Sting Shift”, Reeves  
Z-21, “Devils’ Delight”, Pierce  
Z-33, “Slick Dick”, Hanft  
Z-37, “Belle Ruth”, Robinson

**Second (883rd) squadron**
Z-47, McDowell/Isham  
Z-49, “Three Feathers II”, Feathers/Van Trigt  
Z-56, Gregg  
Z-53, “The Ancient Mariner”, Clinkscales/Rand  
Z-42, “Supine Sue”, Setterich  
Z-41, Grosse
Z-57, Cheney
Z-51, “Tail Wind”, White
Z-52, “20th Century Sweetheart”, Irby
Z-50, “Fancy Detail”, Standen
Z-55, “Janice E.”, Ryan
Z-48, Seale

Third (881st) squadron
Z-13, Luman
Z-8, “Duke of Albuquerque”, Thompson
Z-14, Mather
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Oswald
Z-2, “20th Century Limited”, Lewis
Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Conn/Hatch
Z-1, Gieker
Z-12, Curtis
Z-7, “Hell’s Belle”, Thomas
Z-5, “There’ll Always Be A Christmas”, Kappil
Z-11, “Lucky Eleven”, Wolter

Leading the Group and the first squadron today was Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon, riding with the Hays crew in Z-23. Deputy lead for the first squadron was 1/Lt Willie Sasser in Z-24. Second squadron was led by Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, flying with the Isham (formerly Moreland) crew in Z-47; Deputy Lead was Maj John Van Trigt in Z-49 with the Feathers crew. Lead for the third squadron was Maj Robert Luman in his usual plane, Z-13, and Deputy Lead was Capt Donald Thompson in Z-8. Riding along as an observer in Z-53 was 1/Lt Arthur Rand, Group Engineering Officer.

The 500th Group was last in the Wing order today. Take-off was about 0400. Bomb load for this mission was 4 x M66 2,000-pounders. Amm load was 7,500 rounds – 800 rounds per gun in the two lower turrets and a little less in the others. Average fuel load was 6,800 gallons. Average gross weight for take-off was 131,000 pounds.

Assigned altitude on the route out was 9,000 feet. Two planes aborted early. About an hour out, the #4 prop on Z-1, Gieker crew, stuck at 2400 rpm. About an hour after that, the Haas crew in Z-28 lost their #4 engine, determined later to be due to an exhaust valve failure in #3 cylinder. Both planes returned safely to base.

At a little over five hours out the climb was made to bombing altitude of 23,000 feet and the planes continued to the assigned assembly point, which was on the coast of Honshu, west of Cape Shiono, south of Osaka. Here things got a little messy. The 500th's official mission summary admits that "Assembly was not accomplished according to schedule", but doesn't explain why. It took a little digging to put together the full story.

First of all, some planes had run into bad weather on the way to Japan, which affected their navigation and flight times. Secondly, the selection of the assembly points on the Japanese coast proved to be unwise, as it put the planes in range of some anti-aircraft guns and closer to Japanese fighter fields. The AA fire was generally ineffective -- only one plane was hit and that not seriously -- but it did interfere with the bombers' efforts to form up into their assigned squadrons, with some B-29's taking evasive action and others moving to safer areas. The same was apparently happening with the other Groups, whose assembly points were in the same general area. As a result, the formations became mixed, with three planes from the 499th Group and one from the 497th joining the 500th squadrons. Also, for some reason several planes formed up on Z-24, Sasser crew, not a designated lead plane, thus creating four squadrons. When all was said and done and the planes departed the assembly area, several minutes past schedule, the 500th squadrons looked like this:

First squadron:

Z-30 Z-23
Z-34 Z-22
Z-56
Z-57
In addition, while trying to assemble, Z-41, Grosse crew, lost power in #1 engine and could not keep up with the formation when it headed for the target. AC 1/Lt William Grosse attempted to bomb a small village as a target of opportunity but discovered that the rear bomb bay doors would not fully open, so they headed home and when out to sea were able to open the doors manually and jettison their load. They reached Saipan safely.

The remaining 32 500th planes continued to the target by heading WSW, then generally NW across Shikoku, the Inland Sea and Fukuyama to Kure. This flight plan entailed significant time over Japanese territory, which meant being shot at by anti-aircraft guns for a prolonged period of time. For most of the way the flak was light, but over Fukuyama and Kure it was heavy, even intense by some accounts, with some of it coming from warships – Kure was a naval base – which were always more accurate. The crews could always tell which bursts were from warships, as the Japanese Navy used differently colored dies in their shells. Ed Heiberger, ring gunner on the Standen crew, flying Z-50 today, fully realized that the flak was dangerous but couldn't help observing that it was also "really pretty." No fewer then 20 B-29's were hit, but fortunately none fatally. Z-50 was one of the more seriously damaged. According to Heiberger, their #2 engine was hit and the right blister was cracked. "There were also holes in the right wing and a gash in the aileron and the radio compass got hit." Z-35, Gray crew, was also hit, with two holes in the right wing and one in the #2 engine. Z-9, Hatch crew, was probably also hit. Both Robert Sollock and Jack Heffner, copilot and radar operator respectively on the Lewis crew in Z-2, reported that Z-9 feathered one of its engines over the target. The loss of an engine caused the plane to drop back, so both Z-2 and Z-4, Oswald crew, in the same element, reduced speed to stay with him.

As for fighters, some other Groups were attacked but the 500th luckily was left alone.

The 500th bombed by squadrons from 23,000 feet, dropping on the squadron leaders at 1151, 1154, 1158 and 1200, respectively. Bombing was done visually, however the compact target was greatly obscured by smoke rising from fires started by the earlier squadrons. The lead bombardiers of the second and third squadrons displayed commendable initiative in shifting their aiming points to undamaged areas of the plant complex that were visible, and by doing so obtained good results. But there was then so much smoke over the target that the fourth squadron's results could not be observed. A total of 126 x M66 2,000 lb bombs were dropped by 500th planes. Results were rated excellent, with 75-80 percent of the target estimated destroyed.

Exit from the target area was first to the SW, then generally SSE across Shikoku (again) and on toward home. Now the consequences of a marginal fuel reserve kicked in. Extra time consumed at the assembly point and adverse winds ate up fuel. The flight engineers checked and re-checked their remaining fuel calculations and many reluctantly came to the conclusion that they might not be able to make it to Saipan. Also, reports had been
coming in that the weather between Iwo Jima and Saipan was not good. No less than 68 73rd Wing aircraft decided to stop at Iwo, 64 of them because of low fuel. Of these, 18 were 500th planes – Z-2, Z-7, Z-9, Z-11, Z-13, Z-14, Z-22, Z-23, Z-26, Z-30, Z-33, Z-34, Z-37, Z-47, Z-49, Z-52, Z-53 and Z-56. Due to the bad weather to the south, most of the crews decided to remain overnight. Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew in Z-23, noted the primitive conditions on Iwo. His crew had to eat K-rations and sleep in the plane.

But not all the crews were willing to spend the night on Iwo. Some, including the Lewis crew in Z-2, decided to risk the bad weather. It took them about an hour to refuel, then they headed off for home. According to copilot Sollock, the weather report for Saipan gave a ceiling of 1200 feet and visibility of more than eight miles, but when they reached the island it was almost socked in. They couldn't see either the island or the runway until they were almost upon them. But 1/Lt William Lewis made a good landing and all was well. They were back home, which was a lot better than Iwo.

Of the 14 crews which had decided to try to make it thru to Saipan without stopping at Iwo, some ended up cutting it very close. Ed Heiberger on the Standen crew, Z-50, says that they were running so low on fuel that AC 1/Lt William Standen elected to go straight in to Isley without flying a landing pattern. It was a good decision, because just after landing their engines cut out. They had to be towed to their parking place.

The next day all the planes which had overnighted on dirty, smelly, sulphurous Iwo flew home to the comparative luxury of Saipan and were very glad to get there.

In other events on this day, the Parsons crew in Z-32, “Fever from the South”, flew a weather strike mission to Yokosuka, where they dropped 5 x 1,000 lb GP bombs by radar from 25,000 feet at 1315 Saipan time. They observed about 40 Japanese ships anchored in the harbor.

The Shuffler crew of the 883rd Squadron was not scheduled for today’s mission to Kure. Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke thought it was time to send some of his poker winnings home, so he walked down to the post office and filled out a money order for $70, which he enclosed in a letter he wrote to his wife Billie tonight. “She'll faint when she gets that much.” The movie tonight was “Practically Yours”, starring Fred MacMurray and Claudette Colbert. Locke’s critique was “very good.”

The Farrell crew of the 882nd Squadron reported back today from rest leave in Hawaii, but without their AC, 1/Lt James Farrell. No, Farrell wasn’t in the hospital or AWOL. He had actually reported back to the 882nd the day before, having caught a ride with a good friend he had made on Saipan, Maj Frank Ormes, who was the personal pilot for Maj Gen Robert Douglass, commander of the 7th Air Force, headquartered at East (Kagman) Field on the island. Farrell and Ormes, as a matter of professional courtesy, had earlier given each other time behind the controls in Farrell’s B-29, Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, and Ormes’ plane, an LB-30, a passenger and cargo version of the B-24. Before Farrell left for Hawaii, Ormes had told him he would be flying there too with Gen Douglass, and as luck would have it he and Farrell were scheduled to return to Saipan at about the same time, so the Major offered his B-29 friend a ride back. That was fine with the young Lieutenant, who got to meet Gen Douglass in the bargain.

But arranging his own transportation was nothing new to Farrell. He had pushed the limits much farther than that on this leave. In fact, he was very lucky he wasn’t brought back to Saipan under arrest. The young man from San Francisco was an excellent pilot who completed his missions, took good care of his crew and was well-liked by the command, but he enjoyed his drinking and partying and seemed to view military regulations as little more than a challenge to circumvent.

The idea for his latest escapade came to Farrell back on 11 April when he and his crew departed Saipan for a well-earned rest leave in Hawaii on an Air Transport Command C-54 out of Kobler Field. The young B-29 pilot was invited into the cockpit by the two ATC pilots, both Captains, one being given a route check by the other. The head pilot had flown a tour in Europe in B-17’s and was eager to hear all about the B-29, the biggest, baddest bomber in the world. It was clear to Farrell that the man was angling to be invited for a ride in Farrell’s B-29 the next time he came to Saipan. And when he learned that Farrell was from San Francisco, only 30 miles from the ATC home base at Hamilton Field, he even remarked off-handedly, “Too bad we’re not going all the way
through or I'd take you back with us.” Farrell jiggled his hook tantalizingly. “Yeah, Dick, I know you would, and be sure to look me up on your next trip to Saipan and I'll check you out in my bird.” An outrageous plan was forming in Farrell's mind.

The plane stopped at Kwajalein, where Dick and his buddy left the plane and another crew took over for the next leg to Hawaii. But Farrell was sure he'd see his new friends again soon. After he got to Hawaii, all Farrell had to do was check regularly at Hickam Field for incoming ATC flights from the west, and sure enough, a few days later, when the two ATC pilots showed up, Farrell was there to meet them and set the hook. Dick was caught. It was strictly against regulations for unauthorized personnel to fly on ATC planes, but he had promised, and a fellow pilot doesn't go back on his word. So it happened that not long thereafter, Jim Farrell was getting off a plane at Hamilton Field north of San Francisco.

After a week of a totally unauthorized but thoroughly enjoyable leave at home, Farrell decided he'd better get back to the war. But how to do it? He figured it wouldn't work to try to catch an ATC flight out of Hamilton. Too many questions would be asked. But the clever young officer had an alternative plan. He knew that replacement crews flying new B-29's overseas regularly transited thru Mather Field near Sacramento, and they always stopped in Hawaii. So all he had to do was go to Mather and hitch a ride with a willing crew, which turned out to be no problem at all. They were only too happy to have a veteran B-29 pilot ride along with them on their way to war. Soon Farrell was on a brand-new B-29 on his way back to Hawaii.

Everything would have worked out fine, with the AAF none the wiser, except for the fact that on the long flight to Hawaii Farrell volunteered to spell the AC and copilot for a while, and, per regulation, they entered his name, rank and serial number in their Form 5 log book. Unaware of this, Farrell returned to his temporary officers quarters at Hickam Field as if nothing unusual had happened. However, a few days later, as Farrell and a buddy were heading out to the Officers Club for a few beers and dinner, an MP jeep drove up looking for a Lt Farrell. After admitting his identity, Farrell was escorted to the Provost Marshall's Office, where the Provost Marshall, a Major, had a few questions. He had learned about Farrell's unauthorized trip, but he assured the young pilot that they weren't interested in him, it was the names of the ATC crew that gave him a ride back to the States that they wanted to know. Farrell wasn't about to squeal on his fellow pilots, so he decided to play dumb and deny everything. Luckily for him, the B-29 crew he had returned with had already left Hawaii on their way west, so there was no one around to bear witness against him. After about 30 minutes of fruitless questioning, the Provost decided to kick the case upstairs. "Farrell, Colonel ________, the Wing Intelligence Officer will see you at 9 AM tomorrow. Don't even think of leaving the base!"

Sure enough, the next morning an MP jeep arrived to pick Farrell up and take him to ATC Wing HQ for his meeting with the Colonel. Here is Farrell's own description of the ensuing conversation:

"Again the Col was very friendly, assuring me that they were only interested in finding the crew that had violated their very strict policy of NO Hitchhikers or Unauthorized Cargo. After a fairly brisk encounter, thoroughly frustrated, the Col lost his cool and in a very threatening manner promised to make life tough on me if I didn't cooperate! To which I replied, 'Col., I've just been on 15 trips into the bowels of Hell, and I'm going back to face another 20. If you think you can make life rough on me, go ahead, I think I would enjoy it!' To which he replied, 'Get the Hell out of here!'"

And that's how 1/Lt James R. Farrell engineered an unauthorized stateside leave and got away with it.

6 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"6 May

Lts. Sullivan, Craig, Hufty, and Seder returned from D.S. XXI Bomber Command [on Guam] due to a mix-up in orders."
I wonder what the problem was. This was a waste of several days of these officers’ time. But hey, the Army is good at that.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“6 May: Framework of the Day Room is about 80% completed. Two prefabricated barracks for the enlisted men have been erected. The office was inspected by Colonel Dougherty in the morning. New target folders are being compiled for use in target study. Major Adams flew a WSM.”

Up to this point, the 500th Bomb Group Operation Journal was faithfully listing every WSM. But now they stop doing that, even though, as this entry indicates, WSM’s were still being flown. Don’t know why. Maybe they just got lazy.

Flight engineer Sgt Myron Locke of the Shuffler crew of the 883rd slept until 1000 today, then got up, went to chow, and made it to 1200 mass, where he took communion and went to confession. In the afternoon Locke read “Magnificent Obsession”, which he thought was “a wonderful book.” Then it was poker again in the evening, where Locke’s hot streak continued. He walked away with another $18.

7 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“7 May
Sgt. Harold G. Thomason evacuated to General Hospital, Oahu.
Lt. Patrick Calhoun and crew returned from recreational D.S. in Hawaii.”

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“7 May: A routine day. Special Service presented Claude Thornhill, Dennis Day and Tommy Riggs at Surfside. An excellent show. After show, Thornhill and Riggs were fed in our Mess Hall. Capt Barron, Lt Grosse and Lt Adamson flew WSM. SO 127, AAFPOA promotion list came out.”

881st Squadron alumnus Capt Herschel Connor came down to Surfside from Wing to see the show. He thought it was “one of the best shows I’ve seen in a long time,” despite the fact that there was “not a girl in it.”

8 May 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

“8 May 1945 3 A/C on training mission to Pojoris [Pajores] and Pagan [islands in the northern Marianas].”

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“8 May
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"8 May: Scheduled mission postponed for approximately 24 hours. Announced that today is V-E Day in the States; that all German organized resistance has ceased, and that Germany unconditionally surrendered. President Truman spoke at 2300 hours K [Saipan] time."

The Althoff crew of the 881st spent almost all of this day on a Weather Strike Mission (WSM). They took off at 2320 on 7 May, flew to within 50 miles of the China Coast, then to Kyushu where they dropped some bombs on Yawata and and 1500 pounds of propaganda leaflets, and finally to Guam to deliver their weather information. They were delayed at Guam several hours due to a problem with their plane and did not get back to Saipan until 2120, 22 hours after they had left.

9 May 45

On this day two planes of the 500th Bomb Group, Z-4, "Black Magic", crew unknown, 881st Squadron and Z-32, "Fever from the South", Hanft crew, 882nd, escorted 16 P-47 fighters to Truk for a bombing and strafing mission. The B-29's took off at 0831 and returned safely at 1509.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"9 May 1945 Local formation training mission. TO [take-off] at 0900K, land at 1200K."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"9 May: Prepared briefing for Mission 55. Started rearranging briefing room maps, photos, etc."

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/09/1945 Went up to the line to clean our guns and put them back into the ship for the mission tonight. Lt. Thomas' crew will be flying our ship [Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort"]. Colonel Dougherty came by and gave us a little speech saying that we have broken several records for a B-29 bomb group. We have 5,250 flying hours, we have dropped 1,921 tons of bombs, and we have flown over 300 missions. 'That's going strong.'"

10 May 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing struck at the Naval Station in Tokuyama. The 497th and 498th Groups targeted the fueling station, while the 499th and 500th Groups hit the coal yard/briquette plant. The 500th Group scheduled 33 aircraft plus a Super Dumbo. One plane, Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan crew, failed to take off due to excessive mag drop on two engines, so 33 total were airborne.

The participating planes and crews were as follows:

Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-4, "Black Magic", Mather
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Pearson
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Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Mitchell  
Z-12, Curtis  
Z-13, Luman  
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Thomas  
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce  
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Coffman  
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Haas  
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sasser  
Z-26, Sealy  
Z-27, LaMarche  
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Mock  
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey  
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Reeves  
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Hughes  
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell  
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray  
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Gillert  
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson  
Z-45 (Super Dumbo), "Mustn't Touch", Arbon (an 882nd crew)  
Z-41, Cheney  
Z-46, Field  
Z-47, Adams  
Z-48, McClanahan  
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Feathers  
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt  
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby  
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Shuffler  
Z-54, Standen  
Z-56, Gregg

Mission briefing was at 0030, take-off began at 0220. Bomb load was M-64 GP's, probably about 20 per plane.

There were four aborts. Z-47, Adams crew, had a prop stick at 2800 RPM. Z-36, Gillert crew, suffered an electrical failure which resulted in fires in the #2 and #3 nacelles, as well as a burned-out turbo. Z-56, Gregg crew, had the #3 prop governor stick at 2400 RPM. And Z-9, Pearson crew, turned back due to what turned out to be a blown plug in the #2 cylinder of #3 engine.

For the rest of the planes, the route to the assembly point was as briefed, but once there, problems developed due to too many planes attempting to form up at the same time. Willie Greene, CFC gunner on the Haas crew of the 882nd, employed barnyard language to describe the situation: "More B-29's than a horse can shit." The congestion resulted in a delay of 13 minutes and some mixing of formations. Eventually, the 500th planes formed into a reasonable semblance of three combat squadrons and moved off toward the IP.

The first combat squadron was led by Z-49, Feathers crew, and consisted of eight 500th planes plus three from other Groups. The second combat squadron was led by Z-27, LaMarche crew, and consisted of ten planes from the 500th plus one from another Group. The third combat squadron, led by Z-13, Luman crew, was composed of nine 500th planes plus three from other Groups. One 500th plane, apparently Z-26, Sealy crew, joined a formation of planes from other Groups. And the Super Dumbo, Z-45, remained off the coast as per SOP.

In all, 28 planes from the 500th reached and bombed the primary target.

The route to the IP was as briefed, except for the poor formation. However, things began to tighten up at the IP and the formation was good on the bomb run. The axis of attack, altitude and other factors were all as briefed.

Bombs were dropped at 1108 from 19,000 feet, visually on the leader, with a total of 548 x M64 GP bombs falling
on the target. Ten planes suffered partial rack malfunctions. One of these was Z-13, on which the "bombardier did not set intervalometer high enough to account for the four stations on the bomb bay tank." [Not sure how to interpret this. - JEB]

The first two squadrons reported observing excellent bombing results. Observation by the third squadron was hampered by smoke obscuring the target.

There was no fighter opposition. Flak was overall light but heavy at times from some naval vessels at the base. Four planes, including Z-48, were slightly damaged.

All planes returned safely to base, although three, including Z-23 and Z-26, had to stop at Iwo Jima, probably because of low fuel. Landing at Iwo Jima was getting to be almost routine for the Haas crew in Z-23. This was their third time. But nobody stopped at the barren, sulphurous little island unless they really had to. The crew didn't get back to Saipan until 2030 and weren't able to crawl into their bunks until considerably later than that.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 May
Lt. Booze and his crew left to attend Lead Crew school at Muroc AAB, California."

Around this same time, Capt (soon to be Maj) Joseph M. Savage, Jr, formerly AC of Crew #224, then 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, was also sent back to the States to train lead crews. He would be replaced as Sqdn Ops Off by Capt (soon to be Maj) Austin W. LaMarche, who had replaced Savage as AC Crew #224. I guess you could say that Crew #224 (my father's crew) had a talent for training operations officers.

11 May 45

On this date the 497th and 500th Bomb groups were sent to bomb the Kawanishi Aircraft Factory in Kobe. The 500th scheduled 11 aircraft, all of which were airborne.

The 881st Squadron supplied three planes and crews. Two of these were Z-1, Gieker crew, and Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Sullivan crew. The Wolter crew was also on this mission, but they flew an unidentified plane and had to abort due to severe air sickness of the flight engineer.

The 882nd Squadron furnished four planes and crews, including the lead, Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett crew, and the deputy lead, Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Hays crew. The other two planes and crews are unknown.

The 883rd Squadron sent four crews -- Schultz, Seale, Gregg and Setterich. The Gregg crew flew Z-56. Another of the planes was Z-47, but which crew flew it is unknown. Nothing is known about the other two planes.

Except for the one abort already mentioned, the route out and assembly at Kita Iwo Jima went without incident. A few minutes were then spent waiting for the squadron of the 497th to form up, after which the two squadrons headed for Japan. They arrived at the IP slightly ahead of schedule but in good formation. There were ten planes in the 500th formation at this point.

The bomb run was made at the briefed altitude, course and airspeed, but due to a thick ground haze it had to be made by radar, and unfortunately the target could not be picked up in the scope. About five minutes before bombs away, the formation was jumped by fighters, which continued making aggressive attacks -- 81 were reported -- throughout the run and for about ten minutes afterward. Most of the attacks were head on. Z-1, Gieker crew, was hit early in the bomb run in the #3 engine and fell behind the formation. She promptly became the target for several fighters, which knocked out another engine and riddled her fuselage, winding three crew
members, two of them seriously. But Z-1 kept going and got her bombs away.

A total of 268 x M64 GP’s were dropped at 1052 with as much accuracy as circumstances permitted, but most of the 500th’s bombs missed the target factory. Z-21 had two bombs hang up due to a faulty A-4 release, and Z-47 had trouble re-latching her pneumatic doors. Apparently, the 497th’s bombing was better, as later bomb damage assessment put the target at 38% destroyed.

In addition to Z-1, two other bombers were damaged by fighters and three by flak, which was moderate to heavy and accurate over the target. B-29 gunners claimed three fighters destroyed, two probably destroyed and one damaged. One of the destroyed was credited to Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew, who flew Z-21 on this mission.

Despite the damage, all planes made it back safely. However, Z-1 was in bad shape and was escorted to Iwo Jima by Z-7. When she got there, two of her crew members, radar operator Lt Robert DeNeve and tail gunner Sgt Clyde Miller, were hospitalized. Two other planes also had to land at Iwo.

The other seven planes made it back to Saipan safely.

12 May 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"12 May 12 A/C participated in local formation flying; they landed at 1200K."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"12 May: Practice mission flown in morning. Lt Thompson [883rd Intel Officer] worked up eight crews for Air Medal Clusters. Submitted claims for Mission 56 [the previous day's mission to Kobe]. The film "Two Down and One to Go" [meaning Italy and Germany defeated and Japan yet to go] shown to entire squadron at Group Theater."

Since V-E Day was only 8 May, that seems a pretty quick turnaround in getting a film made and distributed... unless the film had been made earlier in anticipation of Germany's defeat. Doubt that this could happen today, even with our greatly superior technology, as there are too many people whose job it is to gum up the works.

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/12/1945 Finished fixing the flak equipment [protective curtains] around my [right] gun position. Rested today and went to a live "Claude Thornhill" show with Jackie Cooper on the drums and Dennis Day. It was a terrific show. Later we saw a show about the defeat of Germany and Italy. Now there is only Japan left. They also showed us the point system for demobilization."

The point system was introduced late in the war to allow the most deserving men to be discharged. A set number of points was awarded for time in service, time overseas, time in combat, wounds, medals and other factors. I believe you had to accumulate 85 points to qualify. For most B-29 air crewmen, the quickest way home was still to put in your 30 (or 35) missions. For ground crew, you might as well reconcile yourself to being out there for the duration.

13 May 45
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"13 May: Received radio back from Special Service repair shop. Completed and submitted combat data report to A-2. Cpl Williams to work at Group S-2 until the end of the month. Briefing at Group S-2 on Mission 57 Target Nagoya."

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/13/1945 Mother's day. Went up to the line and checked our guns for tonight's mission. Had chow at 2145 hours, briefing at 2300."

14 May 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent every available bomber on an unusual daylight fire raid on the urban area of Nagoya. With the 58th Wing now fully in place on Tinian, this was the biggest force put up yet, with 524 planes taking off and 472 of them reaching and bombing the target. The skies over Japan were getting crowded.

The 500th Bomb Group scheduled no less then 45 aircraft plus a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane for this mission, and all were airborne, a new record. (Over the past several months, as with all Groups of the 73rd Bomb Wing, the number of assigned planes had gradually been increased from the original 30 to 48 or 50. Unfortunately for the hard-working ground crews, there was no corresponding increase in maintenance personnel. They simply had to do more with less... which they did, magnificently.)

The 881st Squadron put up 16 planes and crews:

Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-7, "Hell's Bell", Sullivan
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter
Z-12, Curtis
Z-13, Mitchell
Z-14, Mather
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bricker
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff

The 882nd Squadron put up 15 planes and crews:

Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Robinson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Sealy
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sasser
Z-27, LaMarche
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Haas
The 500th Bomb Group Day By Day – Part 3 - Victory

Z-29, "Gravel Gertie, Shorey
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Reeves
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hughes
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-36, "L'il Abner", Hanft
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Gilert
Z-39, Coffman

The 883rd Squadron put up 14 planes and crews:

Z-41, Barron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", McDowell/Isham
Z-43, Setterich
Z-46, Adamson
Z-47, Adams
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Clinkscales
Z-50, "Fabcy Detail", Braden
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Field
Z-54, Standen
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-56, Gregg
Z-57, Grosse

The Super Dumbo, Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", was flown by the Arbon crew of the 882nd, with 1/Lt Donald Habermehl and Sgt Harvey Bethel of the 883rd filling in as navigator and radioman respectively.

Take-off was about 0100 and all 46 planes were airborne within 23 minutes. Bomb load was 30-35 x E46 incendiaries per plane.

Planes flew individually to the assembly point, Safu Gan, at 3000 feet. There were four aborts. Z-2, Lewis crew, blew a spark plug in #17 cylinder of #3 engine. Z-14, Mather crew, turned back due to a split cylinder in #2 engine. Z-54, Standen crew, had a blown fuse in the landing gear circuit. And Z-56, Gregg crew, suffered a "#1 eng nose section failure".

There were some problems at the assembly point. Thirty-eight of the 500th planes began forming into four combat squadrons. Three planes were missing. No matter. Their places were taken by two planes from the 499th Group and one from the 314th Wing. After nearly an hour, the 41-plane combat group headed for the departure point, passing it at 0918, six minutes early. It was learned later that the three missing planes of the 500th joined other formations. Z-10 and Z-46 bombed with the 39th Group of the 314th Wing, while Z-33 went in with the 29th Group of that Wing.

The 500th formation flew on, passing the IP at 0922 "with Sqs in trail and stacked up at 750 ft intervals. Formation was excellent from assembly to target." So wrote Group CO Col John Dougherty in his Group Commander's Report. Bombers seemed to fill the sky. Ed Betts, flying as copilot with Jim Farrell in Z-34, was impressed. "Everywhere we looked we could see formations of 29s." Willie Greene, CFC gunner on the Haas crew in Z-28, wrote later that this was the biggest mission yet, with over 500 B-29's involved.

As the formation approached the target at close to the briefed axis of attack of 90 degrees, they found the aiming point already covered by smoke, so bombing was accomplished by reference point. Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-19, saw fires and three huge columns of smoke rising as high as 18,000 feet. Bombs were dropped between 0929 and 0934 and from 16,000 to 18,250 feet, depending on squadron. Again due to the smoke, no
bomb hits could be observed. Six planes experienced partial rack malfunctions. A total of 1,221 x E46 incendiaries fell on the city. Later damage assessment showed 2.8 square miles of Nagoya burned out in this raid.

Col Dougherty reported "meagre but aggressive fighters from 12 o'clock high". Flak ranged from light to heavy, and some of it was accurate. Six aircraft, including Z-19, suffered minor damage from either fighters or flak, and four men were slightly wounded. B-29 gunners claimed two enemy fighters destroyed, two probably destroyed and four damaged. Some of those gunners were a little careless, as Z-24 was struck twice by 50-caliber bullets.

On the way home, Bob Schurmann, right gunner on Z-48, McClanahan crew, saw a ditched B-29 in the sea. He also noted, "Heard one ditching pilot say 'Pray for us, nothing can stop the Army Air Corps!' as he set her down."

All 500th planes returned to Saipan by late afternoon, but some were running very low on fuel and the traffic pattern over Isley was very crowded. Z-3, possibly Mitchell crew, and Z-34, Farrell crew, landed at Kobler Field north of Isley. Farrell had little choice. The engines started banging and sputtering from lack of fuel and he knew he had to get down immediately, so he went right into Kobler with no time to get clearance. By the time their wheels hit the runway only one engine was still running, and that one quit soon after. Other crews had close calls too. The crew of Z-46, afraid they were going to have to ditch off Saipan, were gathering up all loose gear and dumping it into the bomb bay when the bomb bay doors opened accidentally. They lost all their navigational equipment but fortunately got down in time to avoid ditching.

15 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"15 May
Lt. Adam J. Blasko assigned as 500th Group Unit Personnel Officer."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"15 May: Worked on combat data reports; submitted to A-2 on Mission 57 [the previous day's mission to Nagoya]. Party at Surfside for enlisted men in the evening."

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/15/1945  I went to the line and cleaned the guns. We got 3 free beers from the squadron fund. There is going to be a Big Blitz starting tomorrow night. There will be maximum raids. The northern section of Nagoya was almost completely demolished, only the docks in the southern section remain."

16 May 45

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/16/1945  ... Went up to the line and took out the upper forward and lower forward guns. The next mission is tonight and because it is a burnout raid we will only carry ammo for the 3 rear gun turrets. Briefing at 1630 hours, take off at 2035 hours. ...."
M/Sgt Carl Williams was a very deserving one, with only one abort in 32 missions.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 May: Crews briefed on Mission 58, Target Nagoya (south) at 1630. All crews of the squadron except Capt Barron's, Lt Clinkscales', Lt Field's, Grosse's, Adamson's and Capt Braden's took off at approximately 2030. ..."

On the night of 16-17 May the XXI Bomber Command sent all four of its Wings on another incendiary raid to burn out what was left of Nagoya. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 45 planes for this mission but one, Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", was scratched due to a broken piston ring on #2 engine, so 44 were airborne.

A complete list of participating planes and crews is not available. Here is a partial list:

Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-3, "Ann Dee", Mitchell
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Sullivan
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-12, Thomas
Z-13, Luman
Z-14, Mather
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bricker
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-27, Sealy
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Haas
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Reeves
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hughes
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Farrell
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Arbon
Z-39, Gillert
Z-43, Setterich
Z-46(?), White
Z-47(?), Adams
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-49(?), Feathers
Z-50, Schultz
Z-51(?), Schmidt
Z-52(?), Irby
Z-53(?), Shuffler
Z-54(?), Standen
Z-55(?), Ryan
Z-56, Gregg
Z-??, Cheney
Z-??, Isham  
Z-??, Seale  
One plane and crew combination is completely unidentified.

Lt Col Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, flew in Z-23 with the Hays crew on this mission.

Take-off was at about 2030 hours. Bomb load was a mix of incendiaries. As usual on night fire raids, all planes flew individually to the target. Six planes (unidentified) flew ahead as pathfinders to mark the target area.

There were three aborts. Z-7, Sullivan crew, turned back due to a sick copilot. Z-8, Thompson crew, developed an oil leak in #1 engine. Z-29, Shorey crew, had a violently backfiring #2 engine. One of these planes, unknown which, was apparently a pathfinder.

Forty-one planes reached Japan. Near Osaka, Z-50, Schultz crew, hit a patch of extremely rough air, so rough that the AC thought there was something wrong with the aircraft, so he diverted and bombed Shirahama Air Field as a target of opportunity.

The remaining 40 planes flew on to Nagoya. Five pathfinders bombed from 0317 to 0329. The other 35 planes dropped bombs between 0334 and 0404. Briefed bombing altitude was between 9000 and 9800 feet, and most planes adhered to this. Three planes -- Z-14 (Mather), Z-16 (Bricker) and Z-43 (Setterich) -- bombed from higher altitudes, probably because they were lifted up by thermals. All planes bombed by radar except for two, Z-35 (Farrell) and Z-43 (Setterich), which had inoperative radars.

A total of 1386 x M17A1 and 912 x M47 incendiaries and 6 x photoflash bombs were dropped on the city. Crews reported that the initially scattered fires seen burning below were starting to join into larger conflagrations. Later bomb damage assessment showed 3.1 square miles of the city burned out by the entire force.

Hal Towner, bombardier on Z-23, Hays crew, noted that "We dropped "rope" [long strips of aluminum foil designed to confuse radar by creating false targets] for the first time on this mission and it seemed to confuse the Jap radar. At any rate, we got through without being picked up by searchlights. As a further defensive tactic, we were told to de-synchronize the props over the target to throw off the radar detection devices."

There was no fighter opposition and only light flak. No B-29's were lost or damaged on this mission.

Route back to Saipan was normal. All planes landed safely by 1116 hours on 17 May. On the landing, Lt Col Brannock decided to see if he still had the touch, so he brought Z-23 in. Hal Towner noted that while the CO was well-respected and an excellent pilot, and he made a beautiful approach, the landing itself "wasn't so hot."

Towner added one more important observation to his diary: "Eight more missions should do it for the Ramblin' Roscoes! Boy, are we sweating out these last flights!"

17 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"17 May  
... Lt. Harlan C. Jackson and his crew left for Recreational DS in Hawaii."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"17 May: All crews returned from Mission 58 [the previous night's raid on Nagoya]. Excellent results. Awards ___  

93 | P a g e
and Decorations meeting at 1500. Postponed until Lt Col Brandon [500th Group Deputy Commander] could attend. Lt Thompson [883rd Intel Officer] briefed Capt Feathers on WSM 'Charlie.'

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/17/1945 ... We landed [from the Nagoya mission] at 1040 hours, played a few games of ping-pong, and went to go see a stage show. Hit sack at 2000 hours."

18 May 45

The Pearson crew of the 881st Squadron flew WSM 475K today, taking off at 0605 in Z-15. The K indicated a straight route from the Marianas to the East China Sea between Kyushu and Okinawa and back. This was actually a pure weather mission, with no bombs carried. Everything appears to have gone routinely. As usual on WSM's, Shorey flew back to Guam to deliver the data, then on home to Saipan, arriving at 2250. M/Sgt Harrie "Hal" Foster was the weather observer on this mission.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"18 May: Capt Feathers took off on WSM "C" at 0600, returned at 1902 with one engine feathered. He lost it before reaching the IP. Lt Thompson [883rd Intel Officer] briefed Capt Braden and Lt Sichel on WSM "K" and "M". This squadron did not participate in Mission 59 [Tachikawa]."

This war diary entry is not completely correct. One plane and crew of the 883rd did participate in the Tachikawa mission, albeit in a support role. Fighter escort from Iwo Jima was planned for this mission. To accomplish this, two planes of the 500th Group, Z-39, Robinson crew of the 882nd, and Z-58, Clinkscales crew of the 883rd, were scheduled to fly to Iwo this morning. They would overnight on the small island, then tomorrow escort the fighters to Japan and rendezvous with the bombing force, then shepherd the fighters back to Iwo afterwards. The B-29 escort was necessary because the P-51’s were not equipped for long-range navigation over water. But this auxiliary mission did not start off well. Today Z-58 lost her #3 engine about an hour out from Saipan and had to abort. Z-39 continued to Iwo while the Clinkscales crew took Z-58 back to Saipan, switched her for Z-56, and then flew that plane to Iwo.

19 May 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent over 300 B-29’s to bomb the Tachikawa Arsenal west of Tokyo. For at least the 500th Bomb Group, the Tachikawa Arsenal was designated the primary visual target, while the city of Hamamatsu was designated the primary radar target. The 500th scheduled 22 planes and one spare, plus a Super Dumbo for this mission, and all 24 were airborne.

The participating planes and crews were as follows:

Z-3, "Ann Dee", Mitchell
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-7, "Hell's Bell", Thomas
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-12, Curtis
Z-13, Gieker
Z-14, Mather
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bricker
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Gillert
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hughes
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-27, Holdridge
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Sealy
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Reeves
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Coffman
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-45 (Super Dumbo), "Mustn't Touch", Arbon (882nd crew)

The original plan was to form two combat squadrons of 11 aircraft each, the first composed of 882nd planes, the second of 881st planes. However, circumstances conspired to change this. First, the decision to include the spare plane increased probably the 881st squadron to 12 planes. Then weather would make a hash of the whole thing.

Take-off on Saipan was about 0445. Bomb load was approximately 24 x 500 lb GP’s per plane.

Group Operations Officer Maj Freeman Parsons flew in the right seat with the Tackett crew in Z-24, and Group RCM Officer 1/Lt Milton Pack rode in the same plane as an observer.

Planes apparently flew individually to the Assembly Point. There were no aborts. After taking a few minutes to assemble, the two squadrons moved off for the Departure Point, the lead (882nd) squadron in fair shape and the second (881st) squadron in good shape. However, about halfway between the Assembly and Departure Points the planes ran into foul weather which partially broke up the formation. Joseph Altott, right gunner in Z-19, Althoff crew, of the 881st, recorded that at landfall they climbed to 25,000 feet to get over the cloud cover. "Our B-29's were all over the sky and were lost in the clouds, separated from their formations." Altott also noted that the bad weather kept the P-51's from linking up with the B-29 formations, leaving them without fighter escort on in to the target.

Altott is correct about the fighter escort. That part of the mission had run into a series of problems. The abort of Z-58 yesterday has already been noted. Then this morning Z-39, Robinson crew, took off from Iwo at 0727 as planned, but Z-56, Clinkscales crew, found that they had a flat tire, which delayed their take-off for about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, Z-39 rendezvoused with the approximately 100 fighters at 10,000 feet. When Z-56 finally got airborne, they discovered they had been issued the "wrong series UCOPAC [probably weather codes] at Iwo." Off went the whole group for Japan anyway, but they ran into the same bad weather as the bombing formation, and nearing the Departure Point somebody wisely decided to call the whole thing off and turn back. The weather had ensured that there would be no large formations for the fighters to protect, and the P-51's would have had great difficulty in finding their way back to the escorting B-29's in the poor visibility.

As for the bombing force, by the time the first B-29's arrived at the Departure Point about two minutes behind schedule, there were only five planes left in the lead squadron. The others were scattered or had joined the second squadron, which now had 15 planes, one of those an orphan from another Group.

With the adverse weather and extensive cloud cover, it was obvious that nothing was going to be bombed visually today, so at the IP the target was changed to the radar target, Hamamatsu, and course was altered accordingly.

The second squadron, led by Z-12, Curtis crew, got there first, going in at 25,000 feet on an axis of attack of 240 degrees. Bombs were dropped on the leader at 1222.
The five planes of the first squadron came in on the same heading but at 24,000 feet. However, first the leader, then the deputy leader, had radar problems. The lead finally devolved on Z-33, Hanft crew. Bombs were released at 1258.

One plane of the 500th, Z-29 (Shorey), bombed Hamamatsu with a formation from the 313th Wing. Two other planes -- Z-28 (Sealy) and Z-23 (Hughes) -- bombed the city individually by radar. The final plane, Z-30 (Reeves), with her radar not working, dropped her bombs by dead reckoning in the vicinity of Hamamatsu.

There was one B-10 shackle malfunction in Z-35 (Gray). A bigger problem occurred when one of the bombs dropped by Z-21 (Gillert) due to a faulty intervalometer setting hit another bomb about 1,000 feet below the plane. The resulting explosion damaged two nearby B-29's, fortunately neither seriously.

A total of 556 x M64 GP bombs were dropped on Hamamatsu. Due to the solid undercast, no results were observed.

Probably because of the terrible weather, no flak or fighter opposition was encountered on this mission.

All planes from the bombing force returned safely to Saipan, although Z-33 had to stop at Iwo Jima due to a fuel shortage. Z-39 and Z-56 shepherded their P-51's back to Iwo Jima safely and landed there themselves, at 1402 and 1443 respectively. But they didn't tarry long, soon taking off and returning to Saipan, landing at Isley at 1802 and 1807 respectively.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"19 May
Twelve of our planes raided Tokyo [actually, Hamamatsu], all returned, no damage.
Sgt. Canty L. Hodge and Cpl. Donald E. Morgan returned from Recreational DS [detached service] in the U.S."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


Some of the 882nd's Haas crew, which did not go on today's mission, went swimming today.

20 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"20 May
Two of our planes raided Japan Mainland on a weather strike, both returned, no damage."

The Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron was scheduled for a weather strike mission tonight and spent much of the day preparing for it.
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"20 May: Meeting at 1300 with Capt Hudgins MISX [?]. Gave instructions to fourteen crew members until 1630. Capt McClanahan returned from WSM. Received radio back from Special Services."

Robert Schurmann of the McClanahan crew, #353, 883rd Squadron, briefly describes their WSM in his diary. They flew Z-48, taking off at 2245 19 May and returning to Saipan at 1355 20 May. "Weather mission over Homeland, Okinawa to Honshu. Bombed Sachi [Saeki?] Naval base. Took pictures of Fukuyama. Landed at Guam." The WSM planes usually stopped at Guam to deliver their weather data before returning to their home base.

21 May 45

The Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron took off last night at 2305 on WSM 483-G to the Nagoya area. They flew Z-38, an F-13 photo recon B-29 variant. Everything went OK. They reached Japan, were over land for almost two hours, passed Nagoya at 0630, flew back to Guam to deliver their weather data, then came home to Saipan. CFC gunner Willie Greene got to sit up front in the bombardier's seat for both take-off and landing, quite a different view than from his usual ring seat position.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"21 May 27 plane training mission: bombing Rota."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"21 May: Practice mission flown. Take-off approximately at 1300. Carpenter shop started work on counter. AAFPOA SO 134, 14 May 45 out, re: promotions for officers."

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/21/1945 Had a class today on JAM Handy [a gunnery training device] down at the Wing HQ from 0830-0930 hours. Had chow and then flew a training mission at 1300 hours. After flying for 2 hours the #3 engine sprung a bad oil leak so we returned to base. The plane had to have an engine changed. Had guard duty on the #8 plane [Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque"]."

22 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 May Captain Arthur S. Miller transferred to Hq 500th Bomb Group. Lt. Dorman E. Francis assigned as Squadron Adjutant."

Willie Greene of the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron got up early today and cleaned all 12 guns on their plane, probably Z-28. For the rest of the day the energetic Greene went swimming, played in a jam session and saw a movie, then got to bed late.
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 May: Capt Braden, Lts Korsmo and Keller appointed to write recommendations and citations. Awards and decorations board meeting in [Deputy Group Commander] Lt Col Brandon's office. Briefing and mission postponed. 883rd Soft Ball [caps as in original] team won from Group Staff Officers, 4-3."

23 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"23 May

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"05/23/1945 We are flying plane Z-16 ["Je Reviens"] tonight. Our ship wasn't ready until the last minute and a crew from the 882nd Squadron flew it. [The Althoff crew usually flew Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort". Records unfortunately do not show which 882nd crew flew Z-19 this night.] There was a briefing at 1530 hours. We ate at 1700 hours. Loaded guns and equipment and took off at 2100 hours. The weather was clear with a bright moon. Our bomb load was 40-425lb incendiaries."

[Note: Official documentation on the last three missions in May -- dates 23/24, 25/26 and 29 -- is very scanty, sorry.]

On the night of 23-24 May the XXI Bomber Command launched a maximum force from all of its Wings, 558 B-29's, of which 520 reached and bombed the target, to lay waste the southern part of Tokyo in an incendiary attack. This was the greatest number of B-29's to bomb a single target during the war. For its part, the 500th Bomb Group scheduled 42 planes, including a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane, and all made it airborne.

Only some of the participating planes and crews are known:

Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Thomas
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-12, Curtis
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Althoff
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", unidentified 882nd crew
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce(?)
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-27, Holdridge
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Sealy
Z-30, "Sting Shift", Hughes
Z-32, “Fever from the South”, Parsons  
Z-33, “Slick Dick”, Hanft  
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Farrell  
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray  
Z-??, Sasser  
Z-43, Setterich  
Z-45, Bricker, “Mustn’t Touch”, Super Dumbo  
Z-46(?), White  
Z-47(?), Adams  
Z-48, McClanahan  
Z-49(?), Feathers  
Z-52(?), Irby  
Z-54(?), Standen  
Z-55(?), Ryan  
Z-56, Gregg  
Z-58, Clinkscales  
Z-??, Field  
Z-??, Grosse  
Z-??, Isham  
Z-??, Schultz

Take-off was about 2100. As normal on night missions, planes flew individually to the target. The route out was as briefed. There were no aborts.

When the bombing planes reached the target area and prepared to drop their 1,670 x E46 incendiary and 10 x M46 photo flash bombs from about 11,000 feet, they found themselves flying into a hell of fire and smoke.

Hal Towner, bombardier on Z-23, Hays crew, tried to describe in his diary the next day what it was like over the target: “It was rough last night and weird -- eerie -- screwy. More damn lights and balls of fire and tracers coming from nowhere and B-29s going down. We turned over the I.P. and started driving in on it at 220 M.P.H. Ahead we saw flak and searchlights both in great quantity. We started throwing rope [lengths of aluminum foil to disrupt enemy radar] and thought for a while we’d go through slick as a whistle, but suddenly we were blinded by glare, and simultaneously tracers shot past us from our tail -- flak hit us -- and we dropped our bombs. The whole thing didn’t last more than three or four minutes, and then we plunged into the towering smoke column, bounced up a thousand feet, and felt relatively safe in that stygian blackness.”

The McClanahan crew in Z-48 ran into a thermal which gave them a very rough ride but they made it through all right.

Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-16, Althoff crew, reported that his plane arrived over the target at 0345 and dropped bombs at 0350. There was already an inferno below. “There was smoke up to 14,000 feet and the target area looked as if it was being destroyed by fires. ... There was plenty of flak and an abundance of searchlights. We went clear through with no trouble and no lights caught us.”

Tokyo was burning so brightly that Cliff Smith, flight engineer in the Bricker crew flying the Super Dumbo at quite some distance from the city, could read his instrument panel from the light.

The 500th Bomb Group had not lost a plane and crew since Z-47 and the King crew on 7 April, but on this night their luck ran out in a big way. They lost not one but two B-29's and crews.

Many crews reported seeing B-29's go down over the target. A total of 17 were lost this night. But in the darkness and confusion no one could identify a specific B-29. It was only when a plane failed to return to base that it was known to have been lost. In the 500th Bomb Group Z-7, Thomas crew, and Z-30, Hughes crew, failed to return. Only after the war, when it was discovered that one man from each crew had survived as a POW, could details of their loss be pieced together.
1/Lt Robert G. Phillips, bombardier on Z-7, Thomas crew, described later what happened to their plane:

“We reached the Initial Point at approximately 0350 ... and turned on our bomb run. Shortly thereafter, we were picked up by searchlights. However, we were not seriously hit until immediately after I released our bomb load at 0359. At that time a burst of flak hit our right wing, setting it on fire and knocking out number three and four engines.

“We were unable to extinguish the flames or feather the engines, so we headed for the nearest submarine hoping to ditch. [The Navy actually stationed rescue submarines inside Tokyo Bay. Dangerous, yes, but not quite as risky as it sounds, as the bay is a large body of water with many deep places where a sub could hide during the day, then surface at night.] In a very few seconds we were again hit by flak, the second burst hitting the plane somewhere in the rear, rendering all the controls useless.”

With the plane out of control, Thomas ordered the crew to bail out. Phillips was the fourth man out of the front compartment, after copilot Glacken, pilot Thomas and flight engineer Bradford. Right after he jumped, Phillips saw the plane explode and plunge into Tokyo Bay, probably taking the other seven of the crew with it. Phillips landed in the water and was eventually picked up the Japanese. He never again saw any of the three men who jumped before him. They most likely drowned in the water.

There is less detail available on Z-30, Hughes crew. We know only that like Z-7 it was hit twice by flak after bombing the target, became uncontrollable, and crashed in Tokyo Bay. Two men made it out of the plane, copilot 2/Lt William H. McClure and flight engineer 1/Lt William L. Ryalls, but Ryalls drowned, leaving McClure as the sole survivor.

The Thomas crew was a replacement crew that had arrived on Saipan in probably late March or early April. Its members were:

- AC 1/Lt Eugene M. Thomas, Jr.
- Copilot 2/Lt Francis X. Glacken
- B 1/Lt Robert G. Phillips (survived as POW)
- N 2/Lt Norman B. Bassett
- FE S/Sgt Sam H. Bradford
- Radio T/Sgt Bishop K. Mitchell, Jr.
- Ring G Sgt George P. Demers
- RG M/Sgt Richard C. Armstrong
- LG Sgt John F. Slater
- Radar 1/Lt William H. Hain
- TG Sgt Louis A. Dorio

The Hughes crew, #239, was an original crew but Hughes was not the original commander. They had arrived on Saipan in November 1944 under the command of Capt Robert M. Cordray. Hughes, who started out as copilot on the Savage crew, #224, was transferred over as AC in early February 1945 after Cordray was reassigned to Wing. Crew #239 had also lost several other original members due to reassignments, including John A. Ciardi, the poet-gunner, whose literary skills were put to work at headquarters writing up award recommendations and such. On 23 May 1945 the crew was composed of the following:

- AC 1/Lt Leonard I. Hughes
- Copilot 2/Lt William H. McClure (survived as POW)
- B 1/Lt Lynn N. “Doc” Grow
- N 1/Lt Edwin R. O’Hara
- FE 1/Lt William L. Ryalls
- Radio T/Sgt Loyd W. Franklin
- Ring G S/Sgt Richard C. “Tiger” Johnson
Most of the men in the 500th spent this day recovering from last night's raid on Tokyo and mourning their losses. Willie Greene of the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron wrote in his diary about the Cordray-Hughes crew, "We lost a crew last nite – good boys."

"Shorty" Hughes in particular was very popular, and his loss was keenly felt. Hal Towner of the Hays crew of the 882nd wrote in his diary:

"24 May 45 Just back from our 24th mission -- sitting in a very quiet barracks and getting in a mood as the Ink Spots do "I'm Making Believe" -- wish we were just making believe that Shorty Hughes didn't land at Iwo Jima and hasn't been heard from. But this isn't make-believe -- again that fact is impressed upon us. ...

"I sure feel gloomy about Shorty Hughes, as does the whole squadron. He was a favorite with all of us -- nice wife, too. With him went four [actually six -- Towner may have thought all the gunners didn't go, which was sometimes the case on night fire raids] enlisted men, and Lt. O'Hara, Lt. "Doc" Grow, Lt. Giles [Ryalls] and Lt. Bill McClure. He's the first to go out of this barracks. In six months, he's our first loss. I hope he's also the last."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 May: All crews in the Squadron returned safely at approximately 0945. Bombing results excellent. Lt Thomas, 881st, and Lt Hughes, 882nd, reported missing. Major Paley and Lt Colvin from Wing visited."

Sgt William Eilers, assistant crew chief on Z-9 of the 881st Squadron, transferred today to the same position on S/Sgt Clay "Bird Dog" Powell's ground crew for Z-14. Powell had requested Eilers by name.

25 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"25 May
Lt. Sullivan and his crew left on DS [detached service] to APO 953 [Hickam Field, Hawaii]."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"25 May: Prepared briefing for Mission 61 and briefed at 1500. Target, South Tokyo area. Following crews took off at approximately 1600 hours: Major Adams, Capt Shuffler, Setterich, Feathers, McClanahan, Braden, Irby, Lts Grosse, Sichel, Schmidt, Ryan, Seale, Clinkscales and Gregg,"

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:
"05/25/1945 ... Went to a gunners briefing and checked our guns for tonight's mission. Took off at 1800 hours with 40-425lb incendiary type bombs. Ammo was loaded into all the turrets."

On the night of 25-26 May the XXI Bomber Command sent nearly 500 bombers to burn out what was left of Tokyo. This would be the last major raid on the capital city. The 500th Bomb Group contributed 40 planes to this mission.

Only some of the participating planes and crews are known:

Z-??, Kappil
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-12, Curtis
Z-13, Luman
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-27, Holdridge
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Dougherty (Haas crew less Haas, sick)
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Sasser?
Z-41, Shuffler
Z-43, Setterich
Z-45, Bricker, "Mustn't Touch", Super Dumbo
Z-47(?), Adams
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-49(?), Feathers
Z-51(?), Schmidt
Z-52(?), Irby
Z-55(?), Ryan
Z-56, Gregg
Z-58, Clinkscales
Z-??, Braden
Z-??, Seale
Z-??, Grosse
Z-??, Sichel

Take-off was at about 1800. Planes flew individually to the target, as was standard on night missions.

The Haas crew of the 882nd went on this mission but without their AC, Otto Haas, who was sick. Bombardier Frank Sharp was also under the weather. Copilot Don Weber was first told that Squadron Operations Officer Maj Austin "Shorty" LaMarche would fill in for Haas, but at the 1500 briefing he learned that that had been changed and that Group CO Col "Black Jack" Dougherty himself would act as AC. Squadron Bombardier Capt Charles "Chili" McClintick would fill in for Sharp as bombardier. Also, a Maj Martins, probably from Wing, would come along as an observer. There would be a lot of brass up front in Z-28 tonight.

When Z-28 took off from the cliff at the east end of the runway, Dougherty put her into the usual dive toward the water to pick up speed, but he brought the big plane down closer to the waves than the crew were accustomed to. Weber somewhat understatedly wrote in his diary later that "Blackjack really put her down on the water".... The reactions of McClintick, sitting up front in the bombardier's seat, and Willie Greene, in the top blister, were stronger. The episode remained vivid in Greene's memory many years later. "Haas always got us off & up before we reached the cliff BUT ON THIS MISSION [Greene's caps] hotshot Dougherty dropped us down so low all 4 props were picking up ocean spray & throwing it back over the wings... - scary!!" Years later when they discussed this incident at a reunion, McClintick confessed to Greene that he “was so scared he couldn’t say
anything but he looked back at the Col & he was laughing & said he needed to pick up some speed before he started to climb!!' Greene continued, "All of us agreed that Dougherty was trying to kill us just like LeMay!!" But Dougherty gradually brought the plane up and they settled onto their course toward Japan. According to Weber, they flew "at about 2500' to Japan" before climbing to their briefed altitude of 10,400 feet.

The 500th planes passed Mount Fuji and began arriving over the target area after midnight. Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-19, Althoff crew, noted that it was a clear night with a full moon. Z-19 reached the target area at 0030 and dropped her bombs at 0045. Altott observed that large fires were already burning. Greene in Z-28 thought it was the largest fire he'd seen yet. Weber in the same plane noted in particular a "well concentrated fire" near the Emperor's palace. The Group dropped a total of 1,587 x E46 incendiaries and 8 x M46 photo flash bombs from about 10,500 feet. Later bomb damage assessment established that the two missions of 23/24 and 25/26 May burned out 18.2 square miles of Tokyo.

Hal Towner, bombardier on Z-23, Hays crew, thought that the clear skies only intensified the opposition over the target and made the mission "a little bit rougher." Ed Betts, probably flying again as copilot on Z-34, Farrell crew, also opined that the opposition was stronger, although they came through again without a scratch. Altott reported "plenty of flak" and about 200 searchlights. Overall, flak was rated moderate to heavy, and fighters were also active over the target. 500th planes reported eight fighter attacks, which damaged five B-29's, but none severely.

A new wrinkle on this mission was the extensive use of Baka suicide bombs, manned rockets dropped by mother aircraft. The Althoff crew saw about 15 of them and claimed two of them destroyed. This caused quite a stir back on Saipan later, as this was the first instance of Bakas being shot down by B-29 gunners. S-2 enthusiastically interrogated Altott and his fellow gunners. However, it appears they weren't the only crew that claimed a Baka. In his diary entry for this mission, Bob Schurmann, right gunner on Z-48, McClanahan crew, wrote "Haught got a Baca [sic] bomb." Sgt Paul A. Haught was tail gunner on the Gregg crew, which flew Z-56 on this mission.

The B-29 stream exited the target area to the east via Choshi Point and then turned south for home.

A total of 26 B-29's were lost this night, the most downed on any mission over Japan. One of these was from the 500th.

It is still a mystery exactly what happened to Z-13, Luman crew. She was not lost over the target but apparently went down at sea later. Capt Lou Kappil of the 881st submitted the following statement upon return to Saipan: "I heard Z square 13 answering HAPPY 38's [HAPPY-38 was the radio callsign of A-38 of the 497th Group] call for help about 25 minutes off of the Jap mainland. The transmission was partly garbled. I then called Z square 13 and asked whether he was in trouble. He answered that he was okay and was going to try and find HAPPY 38 to buddy him home. I maintained watch on "A" Channel and heard Z square 13 asking HAPPY 38 to fire some flares in seeking his position." Gunner Altott of the Althoff crew recorded a similar story: "Major Luman's ship ditched and is very mysterious. No one heard anything else from them. At 20 minutes after Landsend he reported that all engines were okay and that he had plenty of gas." However, the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal reported "Maj Luman, Z-13, is missing. Right wing was observed to be afire before A/C crashed into the sea." Sometimes Japanese fighters pursued B-29's far out to sea. The Bricker crew in Z-45, the Super Dumbo, reported firing on a Jap observation plane over one of our submarines. Could fighters have been out there too and found Z-13? Whatever the case, there were no survivors to tell the tale.

Here are the men lost on the Luman crew:

AC Maj Robert D. Luman
CP 1/Lt Donald E. Hardy
B 1/Lt Admer N. S. Boren
N 1/Lt Robert E. Oliphant
FE T/Sgt Fred M. Montgomery
Radio S/Sgt Homer G. Braziel

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The original flight engineer on the Luman crew was 1/Lt Theodore R. Von Schliede but he had been reassigned to the States on 20 April for lead crew training, which saved his life. Von Schliede was replaced, at least on this mission, by the regular tail gunner, T/Sgt Fred Montgomery. The TG was usually also a school-trained airplane mechanic, MOS 748, and for that reason was used on many crews as a second FE to give the regular FE a break during the long flights. Maybe a flight engineer wasn’t available from another crew, or maybe Montgomery had become the regular flight engineer on the Luman crew. Anyway, Montgomery moving to FE left the TG position open and Bonelli, who was on the Brown-Lewis crew, either volunteered or was assigned to fill in.

Z-28 with the Haas crew (with Col Dougherty filling in for Haas) got home to Saipan at 0840. According to copilot Don Weber, "Colonel Dougherty let me make the landing and it turned out very well. I think we [the crew] satisfied him pretty well."

There is one more sad epilogue to the account of this mission. A large number of B-29 POW's were confined in the Tokyo Jail in the western suburb of Shibuya, which was right in the middle of the target area. This night, the guards removed all Japanese prisoners, about 300 in number, from the jail but deliberately left all 62 B-29 POW's locked in their cells to be burned to death as the massive fires engulfed them. A few somehow managed to get out of their cells, but most of those were beheaded by the guards. After the war, the prison warden and four subordinates were tried for war crimes and originally sentenced to death by hanging. However, all these sentences were later reduced to lengthy prison terms.

26 May 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"26 May: All crews returned safely from Mission 61. Bombing results good. Major Luman, 881st, missing over target. Mr McCormick, International Red Cross Chairman, visited the area this morning."

From the Hal Towner (Hays crew, 882nd) diary:

"26 May 45. We need six more missions now and the next one is a snap -- escorting P-47's to Okinawa and we hope to get credit for it. At briefing we learned that fighters may jump us, but that will be a pleasure compared to what we've been running into over Tokyo."

27 May 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"27 May: Meeting at Wing A-2 [Intel Section] on fighter tactics at 0900"

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/27/1945 ... I cleaned the guns and had an interview with the Group S-2 Officer regarding the Baka Bomb we shot down."
Willie Greene of the 882nd also cleaned and checked guns today, but not before he went to church. After the cleaning, Greene spent some time on the Jam Handy gunnery simulator, and in the evening there was a movie.

28 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"28 May
Pfc. Elliot B. Doft left for recreational DS [detached service] in the U.S."

From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"05/28/1945 Had an interview with Wing S-2 officer regarding the Baka Bomb. It seems that we're the only crew that has seen one silhouetted against the sky and they are all very excited about it."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"28 May: Briefing at Group S-2 [Intelligence] at 1400 on Mission 62, Target Yokohama, for gunners. Regular briefing at 2400. Lt Colvin interrogated Lt Althoff's crew on Baka fighters."

I cannot identify this Lt Colvin. There is no Colvin on the 500th Officer Roster as of 30 April 45, which is the latest one I have. Is Colvin possibly the Wing S-2 officer mentioned above by Altott? But at a minimum, this war diary entry confirms what Joseph Altott said about the intelligence interest in the Baka incident.

Postscript. Many years later, Altott added the following note to his wartime diary:

"In 2006, 60 years after this episode, I was contacted by an aeronautical engineer who had become an aeronautical historian about this. There are no records about this anywhere. In his visits to Japan he revealed a claim that no such event occurred, but we saw the silhouette of the Baka Bomb in the fire background and my relating of this event is authentic. It seems that we are the only crew that EVER shot one of these down. Some fighter pilots shot them down but there is no record of a bomb crew that ever did this. Our interrogations with S-2 in our squadrons, bomb group, and Wing HQ, have never been located. It is still a mystery."

29 May 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent a maximum force, over 500 B-29's, in a daylight incendiary attack on the city of Yokohama. The 500th Bomb Group contributed 42 aircraft to the bombing force. [The 500th Group narrative summary says that the Group had 49 planes airborne but this must be a mistake. My calculations show that the Group did not have more than 44 planes available at this time. All sources do agree however that 42 aircraft of the 500th bombed the target.]

The 881st Bomb Squadron sent 14 planes and crews, but only some are known:

Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Lewis
Z-12, Curtis
Z-14, Mather(?)

105 | P a g e
Z-15, Pearson(?)
Z-16, “Je Reviens”, Bricker
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff

The 882nd Bomb Squadron furnished 13 planes and crews, as follows:

Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Holdridge
Z-26, Sealy
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", LaMarche (Haas crew less Haas, sick)
Z-32, “Fever from the South”, Parsons
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-36, “Li'l Abner”, Sasser

The 883rd Bomb Squadron sent 15 planes and crews. The crews are known but only three of the planes. Where possible, best guesses of assigned planes are given, based on the planes these crews flew most often:

Z-43, Setterich
Z-46(?), White
Z-47(?), Adams
Z-49(?), Feathers
Z-51(?), Schmidt
Z-52(?), Irby
Z-54(?), Standen
Z-55(?), Ryan
Z-56, Gregg
Z-58, Clinkscales
Z-??, Braden
Z-??, Grosse
Z-??, Schultz
Z-??, Seale
Z-??, Field

The briefing was at 0100. Willie Greene, ring gunner on the Haas crew of the 882nd, remembered that “on this type mission, before we went up to the flight line we would have breakfast in the officer’s mess & have real eggs with real bacon and toast & jelly – how’s that for a 'last meal’?"

Take-off was at about 0300. Planes apparently flew individually to the Group assembly area at Aoga Shima, about 220 miles south of Tokyo. Weather was clear. There were P-51 escorts on this mission.

The Haas crew in Z-28 were flying this mission again without their AC, 1/Lt Otto Haas, who had a bad cold. Taking his place this time was Squadron Operations Officer Maj Austin LaMarche. It didn't seem to matter much, however, as copilot Don Weber recorded that LaMarche “slept most of the way up & back,” leaving Weber to do most of the flying. As for Willie Greene, he was much happier having LaMarche, sleepy or not, in the left seat than their Group CO: “LaMarche took off OK & he didn't have to drop down to ocean level to gain speed like Col Dougherty did on our last mission!!"

At Aoga Shima, the planes of the 500th formed into four combat squadrons. Weber judged the assembly to be “pretty good”, with Z-28 taking her position as #2 plane in #3 element of what Weber called the "composite squadron", probably the fourth squadron.

The 500th was led on this mission by Maj Curtis Holdridge in Z-23. Holdridge’s crew was a lead crew that had been together since the beginning but Holdridge was their third AC. That was because the first two AC’s, Joe Savage and Austin LaMarche, had been promoted in succession to be Squadron Operation Officer. I guess it
Pays to have a good crew.

In approaching the port of Yokohama, the formation passed over the nearby naval base at Yokosuka, where there were usually warships. The B-29 crews were already aware of the differences in the methods and effectiveness of Japanese army and navy anti-aircraft gunners. As Willie Greene recalled, "Jap army anti-aircraft gunners tracked their targets & shot at them, whereas naval anti-aircraft gunners would shoot into a given box area through which we would fly on our straight & level bomb run from the initial point (IP) over the target & beyond before we changed either course or elevation – it was awesome to see & fly through!!"

The flak on this mission was officially rated moderate to heavy, but most participants leaned toward the heavy end of the spectrum. Ed Betts, probably flying as copilot on Z-34, Farrell crew, called the flak "intense". Don Weber of the Haas crew saw "walls of flak over the Yokohama area." Willie Greene of the same crew pronounced it the most flak he ever saw. As they began their bomb run, Greene looked ahead and "I first thought we were going to be flying through some big black storm clouds – then I realized it was flack bursts – that's when everything gets real quiet & all you hear is the rhythmic drone of the engines!!" But despite the bursting shells all around them Z-28 made it thru the storm unharmed.

As the 500th formation began their bomb run, leader Holdridge in Z-23 discovered that her bomb bay doors would not open, so the deputy leader took over and was able to put the formation's bombs on target. All squadrons released bombs within one minute of each other. Joseph Altott (881st, Althoff crew) in Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", called it "a perfect run" and claimed their bombs hit dead center. A total of 7,471 x M47 incendiaries was dropped at 1030 from approximately 19,000 feet. As the Group headed for the coast, smoke was seen rising above Yokohama up to 22,000 feet. Later bomb damage assessment showed 6.9 square miles of the city burned out by the Command's attack.

Some fighters were seen on this mission but Ed Betts thought the P-51's kept most of the Japanese fighters away. Fourteen fighter attacks were reported. Eight B-29's were damaged either by flak or fighters, but none seriously. One Jack was claimed as probably destroyed.

A much-reproduced photograph of Z-19 dropping her bomb load on this mission, with other 881st planes in the background, was later made into a famous propaganda leaflet, millions of which were dropped over Japan.

On the way home, some planes, including Z-1 and Z-19, dropped down low to search for survivors of Maj Luman's crew, who had gone down three days before. Z-19 found only some empty P-51 pilot rafts.

Z-23 was able to finally release her bombs on the way home on Chichi Jima, an island in the Bonins about 150 miles north of Iwo Jima.

All planes returned safely to base by 1815 or so, although two ran themselves low on fuel by their searches for survivors and had to stop at Iwo Jima to gas up. According to Sgt William Eilers, a ground crewman in the 881st, the Gieker crew in Z-9 found two fighter pilots who had ditched.

30 May 45

The Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron got some bad news upon returning from yesterday's mission. To quote CFC gunner Willie Greene, "We are pissed off – after 20 missions they send us to lead crew [school]!!" It was actually a mark of confidence to be selected as a lead crew, but what raised the Haas crew's ire was that while in school for the next two weeks they would accumulate no missions, which meant two weeks longer to finish their mission quota and go home.

The Farrell crew, with Ed Betts as copilot again, flew a WSM (weather strike mission) on this date in Z-38, an F13 photo recon version of the B-29. Betts entered a summary of this mission in the Hal Towner diary:
"With only 12 hours on the ground, we were off for Tokyo again today, this time it is a weather strike mission. We cruised around over the city of Tokyo and Yokohama for about 45 minutes taking pictures of the entire area and dropping propaganda leaflets. The weather was exceptionally clear and I got a good look at the place and the damage we have done. Enemy opposition was nil."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 May: Squadron assembled on Hanso [Hansen?] Field at 0600 and marched to Service Center Apron where Memorial Day Services were held. General O'Donnel [sic] felt it an appropriate time to pause and render homage to the 1000 officers and men who have been lost from this Wing since we started operations against Japan on 24 November 1944. Meeting at Wing A-2 at 1300 on fighter tactics. Island locker distribution made; six bottles per man."

From the Joseph Altott, 881st, diary:

"05/30/1945  Memorial Day. Supposed to go to formation but we all slept late and went up to the line to clean the guns. We went to Memorial Day Mass at 1230 hours."

31 May 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"31 May
Two of our planes participated in a weather strike mission over the Jap Mainland, returned safely, no damage.
Captain Donald W. Thompson and crew [in Z-8] completed thirty missions and became the first crew in the 500th Bomb Group to be eligible for rotation."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"31 May: Wing declared a holiday for all personnel."

1 June 45

[The official records for the June missions are in a little better shape than those for April and May.]

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent all its Wings on a daylight fire raid on the urban area of Osaka. More than 500 B-29's were airborne for this mission. For its part, the 500th Bomb Group scheduled 40 aircraft, of which 39 made it airborne. The scratched plane was Z-11, Wolter crew, reason unknown.

The 40 scheduled planes and crews were divided into four combat squadrons, as follows:

First squadron
Z-12, Curtis/Brandon
Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Conn/Hatch
Z-19, “Sna Pe Fort”, Althoff
Z-2, “20th Century Limited”, Lewis
Z-6, “Booze Hound”, Calhoun
Z-16, “Je Reviens”, Gieker
Z-14, Mather
Z-11, “Lucky Eleven”, Wolter
Z-5, “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, Kappil

Second squadron
Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, Hays/Brannock
Z-27, Sasser
Z-33, “Slick Dick”, Reeves
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray
Z-28, “Old Ironsides”, Cordray
Z-26, Sealy
Z-21, “Devils’ Delight”, Gillert
Z-32, “Fever from the South”, Parsons
Z-29, Shorey
Z-22, “Georgia Ann”, D. Jackson

Third squadron
Z-42, “Supine Sue”, Isham/McDowell
Z-47, Adams
Z-57, Adamson
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-58, “Marylyn Gay”, Clinkscales
Z-52, “20th Century Sweetheart”, Shuffler
Z-43, Grosse
Z-50, “Fancy Detail”, Braden
Z-55, “Janice E.”, Ryan
Z-54, Standen

Fourth squadron
Z-39, Holdridge/LaMarche
Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, Coffman
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Farrell
Z-36, “Li’l Abner”, Arbon
Z-10, “Punchin’ Judy”, Mock
Z-37, “Belle Ruth”, Robinson
Z-3, “Ann Dee”, Mitchell
Z-49, “Three Feathers II”, Gregg
Z-51, “Tail Wind”, Schultz
Z-46, Field

In addition, Z-45, “Mustn't Touch”, Bricker crew, served as a Super Dumbo.

Lt Col Harry Brandon, Deputy Group Commander, would lead the Group and the first (881st) squadron, flying with Capt Ferd Curtis and crew in Z-12. Lt Col Joseph Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, would lead the second (882nd) squadron, riding with Capt Hale Hays and crew in Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe II”. Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, would lead the third (883rd) squadron in Z-42, “Supine Sue”, with Lt Roy Isham and crew. And Maj Austin LaMarche, 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, would lead the fourth (composite) squadron in Z-39 with Capt Curtis Holdridge and crew.

Take-off was about 0400. Planes flew at altitudes from 3000 to 3800 feet to the assembly point, the island of Sofu Gan south of Tokyo Bay. There were two aborts. Z-52, Shuffler crew, had a problem with the #1 engine, which turned out to be due to the rear sump plug not being safetied. Z-47, Adams crew, lost her #3 engine but bombed Chichi Jima, an island in the Bonins north of Iwo Jima, on her way back. This left 37 planes to continue
However, when the planes reached Sofu Gan they found bad weather and were unable to accomplish the assembly into four combat squadrons "staggered and stacked high to the left" as planned, so they continued north to the reassembly point. Once there, however, many 500th planes were missing and other air traffic was heavy, so the combat squadrons formed up however they could.

The attached chart shows the composition of the formations at bombs away. Now leading the first squadron of ten planes was Z-23 (Hays/Brannock). The second squadron now had only five planes, led by Z-42 (Isham/McDowell). The third squadron, led by Z-12 (Curtis/Brandon), had nine planes -- seven from the 500th and two from other Groups. The fourth squadron contained only four planes, led by Z-24 (Coffman). The remaining 500th planes either bombed alone or with other formations, as shown.

Two 500th B-29's, Z-51 (Schultz) and Z-54 (Standen), were on their way to the target when they ran across a P-51, the pilot of which indicated he was low on gas and requested an escort back to Iwo. The two bombers decided to accommodate him, but first dropped their bombs on the coastal city of Tanabe as a target of opportunity. The P-51's had had a very rough day. While being escorted from Iwo to Japan by a B-29, they ran into a weather front with severe turbulence. Some fighters collided and others went out of control or became disoriented and went into the drink. Fully half, 27 of 54, were lost. But the survivors gamely made their way to Japan and tried to do their job. This P-51 was one of those.

In all, 35 500th planes bombed the primary target in one formation or another. 979 x M17 incendiary clusters and 35 x T4E4 fragmentation clusters were dropped from 19,000 feet or higher between 1133 and 1157. Fires were already raging, and smoke billowed up to 25,000 feet. See attachment two. Later bomb damage assessment showed over three square miles of the city burned out.

Flak was moderate but mostly inaccurate. Group CO Col Dougherty says in his report that there were no Japanese fighters but the operations journal recorded 11 fighter attacks, with one destroyed by B-29 gunners. The Operations Journal also reported eight bombers damaged, but none seriously.

All planes returned safely to base, but Z-19 and Z-22 had to stop at Iwo because of low fuel.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 June: .... Meeting at Wing A-2. Lt Gregg flew (WSM?) #18 to Okinawa. Capt Setterich completed his 30th mission."

[This month's 883rd War Diary is very blurry and hard to read. Looks like it came from a fifth or sixth carbon copy. WSM #18 doesn't make sense, as WSM numbers were up into the 300's by this time... but that's what it looks like. Maybe it was a fighter escort mission instead.]

2 June 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 June: Lt Col McDowell [883rd CO] appointed Capt Setterich and Lt (Kolb?) to write citations. Lt (Hulbert?), formerly Flight Engineer of Lt Cheney's crew, visited the Squadron. He is now stationed on Tinian. Presentation of Air Medals."

From the Hal Towner (Hays crew, 882nd) diary:
"2 June 45

We escorted 17 P-38s and 6 P-47s to Okinawa today -- saw the battlefield and navy warships shelling the coast and fighters strafing the Japs.

Wex's [navigator Wilbur S. Weksler] navigation was unerring as usual, and I imagine the fighter pilots were sweating him out and were relieved to see the silhouette of Okinawa through the overcast -- nasty weather up there -- had to go right down on the deck to get under it.

We hope and expect to be credited with today's mission, for it will leave only four more missions for most of us. [Radio operator Henry P.] Koert has only three left, and [radar operator Stanley A.] Burulia has been up there 28 times and has only two to go. [Men who were sick or otherwise unavailable for missions had to be replaced, so some men ended up substituting on other crews.]

Replacement crews are still non-existent as far as we're concerned and we need them, damn it! We can't leave here till they arrive. We've expected them for weeks now. Their barracks are ready and we're ready. They'll be welcome arrivals."

Actually, the 882nd Squadron had received seven replacement crews in February and March. However, the Squadron had lost six crews since arriving on Saipan and another had been broken up, so that just kept them even... and there were more planes assigned now and the mission load was as heavy as ever.

3 Jun 45

On this day the Shorey crew of the 882nd Squadron flew WRM (Weather Reconnaissance Mission) 109-E in Z-26. Weather reconnaissance mission was the new name for weather strike mission, the word "strike" being stricken probably because bombs were no longer being carried. The E indicates a route to the Yokohama area south of Tokyo. M/Sgt Harrie "Hal" Foster was the weather observer on this mission.

The crew took off at 0608 and the flight to Japan was apparently without incident. Z-26 settled into her photo run at 25,000 feet and began taking pictures and radar scope photos, but at 1338 between Yokohama and Yokusuka all hell broke loose. Two Japanese Zeke suddenly appeared from ahead and below and pumped several 20mm rounds into the nose wheel well area. The bombardier, who was busy taking photographs, was caught by surprise and did not return fire. Hardly had the fighters disappeared than the plane was bracketed by very accurate anti-aircraft fire from the naval base below. Z-26 was perforated. As if that wasn't enough, a couple of minutes later the two fighters (or possibly two other fighters) returned for another pass. However, this time the crew was ready for them. The fighters scored no hits this time and one of them was possibly damaged.

The combined effect of the fighter and flak damage was severe. Several control cables were cut, including the "up elevator" cable, the rudder trim tab cable, the control lock cable and the fuel transfer selector cable. The interphone system was shot out, the windows in the tail compartment were hit and the tail guns knocked out. Also, the #2 fuel tank was punctured and much gasoline lost, which caused the #2 engine to sputter to a stop about 200 miles out from Japan. Finally, the K-22 camera was shot full of holes. Back at base over 300 holes were counted in Z-26, 18 of them measuring four inches or larger. Three crew members received minor wounds.

Shorey and crew made it back to Iwo Jima by 1712 but they weren't safe yet. According to M/Sgt Foster's later recollections, the plane swerved off the runway during landing and almost went over a cliff into the sea. Z-26 would be out of commission for a while, but the crew flew back to Saipan in A-41, bringing the undamaged cameras and film with them. They reached Saipan after a long and very harrowing day just after midnight.

4 Jun 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"4 June: Meeting at A-2 [Wing Intel Section] at 0900. Submitted recommendation for DFC on the crews of Capt Clinkscales, Capt Setterich and Major Moreland for 22 missions. Briefing for Mission 64, Target Kobe U/A [urban
area] at 2345 K [K = Saipan time]."

5 Jun 45

B-29's continued to systematically destroy Japan's cities. On this date it was Kobe's turn. The XXI Bomber Command again sent in excess of 500 bombers. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 42 planes for this daylight mission but one, Z-57, Schultz crew, failed to take off for unknown reasons, which left 41 airborne. These planes were formed into four combat squadrons as follows:

First (882nd) squadron
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett/Brannock
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-36, "L'il Abner", Arbon
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Gillert
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Cordray
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Sealy
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Reeves
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey

Second (881st) squadron
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn/Reeve
Z-12, Curtis
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-14, Mather
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Kappil

Third (883rd) squadron
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Adams
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Adamson
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Black (Cheney)
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-43, Grosse
Z-54, Standen
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Field
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-46, White

Fourth (composite) squadron
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-27, Coffman
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Clinkscales
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Shuffler
Z-56, Gregg
Lt Col Ralph Reeve, CO 881st Squadron, was the Force Commander on this mission, and also second squadron leader, flying with 1/Lt John Conn and crew in Z-9, "Nina Ross". Lt Col Joseph Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, led the first squadron, flying with Capt Cecil Tackett and crew in Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees". Maj Charles Adams in Z-49, "Three Feathers II", led the third squadron. And Capt Curtis Holdridge in Z-39 led the fourth squadron.

Take-off was about 0145. Planes flew individually at an altitude of 6,000 feet to Kita Iwo Jima, then headed for the assembly point, which was about 120 miles southwest of Kobe, climbing to 13,000-14,000 feet along the way. There were no aborts.

Instructions for assembly seem a little complicated: "We assemble east of a line drawn south from assembly point 33 degrees 37 minutes N 134 degrees 26 minutes E, marked by lead and deputy lead aircraft of the 498th Bomb Group, each dropping a cluster of 3 M-47A2 WP [white phosphorous] filled bombs. Assembly pattern will be right, leaders with nose-wheel down." But complicated or not, and despite the great number of planes congesting the area, assembly was successful, and the formation moved off to the departure point, then on to the IP.

Kobe was already burning as the 500th approached, with smoke rising up to 20,000 feet, but the Group was able to make a visual run at 16,500 feet, dropping 7,173 x M47 incendiaries and 41 x T4E4 frag clusters at 0921 to stoke the conflagration. Over four square miles of the city were destroyed in this raid.

The 883rd Squadron War Diary says that Maj Adams and his (883rd) squadron "was forced to make a 360 deg turn and make a second run on the target." However, the Group Commander's Report says nothing about this, and in fact implies nothing of that sort happened by stating "Formation was good all the way and all A/C dropped on leader."

Flak was moderate and 20 fighter attacks were reported. 500th gunners claimed two fighters destroyed. Seven bombers suffered battle damage, and two men were wounded by fragments of a 20mm shell. The unwilling recipients of the Purple Heart were 1/Lt Robert Oesterreicher, normally bombardier on the Setterich crew of the 883rd but filling in on another crew on this mission, and S/Sgt William Lange, radar operator on the Shorey crew of the 882nd.

Other Groups were hit harder. Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-19, Althoff crew; "Wex" Weksler, navigator on Z-23, Hays crew; and John Norton, ring gunner on Z-35, Gray crew, all saw a B-29 in the Group ahead of them go down burning. They saw 10 chutes come out, and Altott observed that "They shot the Jap fighter at the same time so that pilot bailed at the same time."

All 500th planes returned safely, although one (unidentified) had to land at Iwo on three engines.

6 Jun 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"6 June: Routine, no special happenings. S/Sgt Gibson to report to Wing Surgeon for CCS(?) physical. Lt Barron back from TDR/R (Temporary Duty, Rest & Recreation?)."

7 Jun 45
On this date the XXI Bomber Command went back to Osaka, again in daylight, to burn out what was left after the 1 June mission. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 42 planes, including a Super Dumbo, but three of these failed to take off. One of those scratched was probably Z-35, Gray crew. The identities of the other two are unknown, although they most likely came from the 881st and/or 882nd Squadrons.

The scheduled planes and crews, organized into four squadrons, were as follows:

First (883rd) squadron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Isham/McDowell
Z-47, Adams
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Kangas
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Clinkscales
Z-43, Grosse
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-54, Standen
Z-46, White

Second (881st) squadron
Z-12, Curtis
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", Althoff
Z-4, "Black Magic", Sullivan
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-14, Mather
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun

Third (882nd) squadron
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-27, Sasser
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-39, Sealy
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Arbon
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Gillert
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell

Fourth (composite) squadron
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Feathers
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Adamson
Z-56, Gregg
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Sichel
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Cordray
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Reeves
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-45 (Super Dumbo), "Mustn't Touch", Bricker

The Force Commander and leader of the first squadron on this mission was Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, flying with 1/Lt Ray Isham and crew in Z-42. Capt Ferd J. Curtis in Z-12 led the second squadron. Capt Hale Hays in Z-23 led the third squadron, with Col John Sutherland, Chief of Staff 73rd Bomb Wing, along as an observer. And Capt Edward Feathers in Z-49 led the fourth squadron.

The Super Dumbo, Z-45, was crowded on this mission with 13 men, including Col Kenneth Bergquist, Deputy Chief of Operations for the 73rd Wing.

Take-off was at 0500. Planes flew individually at 3000-3800 feet to the assembly point west of Kito Iwo Jima. There were two aborts. Z-53, Kangas crew, lost her #2 engine, and Z-36, Arbon crew, had trouble with her #3 engine, the cause of which was later found to be a split #6 cylinder head.

The usual traffic congestion at the assembly area was made worse by hovering P-51’s, one of which almost collided with a B-29. But assembly was completed in only 25 minutes and with a tail wind the formation arrived at the departure line way too early, which required them to make two full circles off the coast in order not to cross the line before the briefed time.

The weather to this point had been good but as the formation approached Osaka at bombing altitude of 21,500 feet they found the city totally covered by an undercast, so bombs had to be dropped by radar. At 1300 a total of 6,162 x M47 incendiaries and 34 x T4E4 frag clusters cascaded down from the 500th Group planes.

In his Group Commander’s Report, Col Dougherty says that “The fourth squadron was forced to make two runs as in the initial run bombs were not released to avoid the possibility of hitting another Group below.” This fairly unusual event, turning to make a second run, is not mentioned in any other document relating to this mission. Strangely, however, a very similar occurrence, also not supported in any other document, is noted in the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary for the previous mission, on 5 June. Is it possible that the two missions were confused in the records? And if so, on which mission did this event really occur? More information is needed.

Dougherty continues his report: "Flak was nil to meager and neither enemy fighters nor our friendly escort was encountered. Of the 38 planes airborne 35 dropped on the primary target, one on a target of opportunity, and two unknown [these were probably the two aborts]. All planes landed at base except two that landed at Iwo because of engine trouble. There were no personnel casualties and no battle damage to planes. The most dangerous part of the mission was the landing."

8 Jun 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"8 June
Capt. Hugh F. McNamer and his crew returned from Lead Crew School at Muroc, California."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"8 June: Meeting at Wing A-2 [Intel Section] on fighter reaction. Lt Grosse's crew went on rest leave. [This was originally Capt Eugene Mahoney's crew, #362. When Mahoney was reassigned to Wing, his copilot 1/Lt Ernest Dearborn briefly took over until 1/Lt William R. Grosse, former copilot on the Setterich crew, #346, was assigned as AC.] Mission postponed 24 hours."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:
“06/08/1945 Ate and went up to the line and cleaned the guns. The mission was postponed. We are supposed to have 5 missions in the next 10 days, one every other day. We should get to 30 missions by the end of this month and then finish up the other 5 by the middle of July. All replacements have to fly 35 missions as the latest word tells us, and that means we have 11 to go.”

9 Jun 45

As the war entered June 1945, the Groups of the 73rd Bomb Wing were looking ahead to a potentially critical problem. Most of their crews would soon complete the currently required 30 missions, and it was uncertain whether there were enough replacement crews in the pipeline to take their places. Alternatives had to be explored. One of these, certain to be unpopular with the crews but possibly necessary to continue the war effort, was to increase the required number of missions to 35.

In the 500th Bomb Group, Statistical Officer Capt A. K. Hatfield was put to work to come up with some figures showing the potential effects of both mission totals, 30 and 35.

Hatfield concluded that under either system, 30 or 35 missions, there would be shortages in June of some specialties, especially pilots (copilots) and radar operators. However, these shortages could be made up by using command and staff personnel. Basically, the problem would not be critical through June.

However, July was a different story. If the command continued with 30-mission tours, the 500th would require 22 replacement crews by the beginning of July. If the command upped the quota to 35, the 500th would require a few less but a still substantial 15 replacement crews.

Bear in mind also that no one knew at this point that the war was going to end in August. For all anyone knew, it could last for many more months, if not years.

The decision was complicated by the fact that a few hard-working crews -- some of whom had passed up rest leaves in order to complete their tours sooner -- had already completed 30 missions. You really couldn't recall them.

So what did the command decide? From what is known at this point, they compromised. Those crews which had completed 30 missions or were on the verge of doing so were allowed to go home after 30. Those which were farther away had their requirement raised to 35. Three examples: The Thompson crew, #117, of the 881st had completed their 30 missions on 31 May. The Hays crew, #228, of the 882nd, which as of this date, 9 June, had 28 missions completed, was allowed to stop at 30. The Farrell crew, #227, also of the 882nd, which as of 9 June had only 24 missions on the record, had to go to 35. Fair? You be the judge.

Through July and into early August, the number of missions flown did not appear to slacken, so this decision seemed to work out, at least for the 500th. Probably enough replacement crews arrived to take up any slack. And then, as we know, the war ended in mid-August, so it's impossible to tell if there would have been any long-term deleterious effects.

10 Jun 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing was sent to the Tokyo area on another daylight raid with dual contingency targets. The primary visual target was their old nemesis, Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory in Musashino. The primary radar (and secondary visual) target was the Hitachi Engine Works in Chiba. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 36 aircraft plus one spare. Two planes, Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock crew, and Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby crew, failed to take off for unknown reasons. Also, the spare plane, Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson crew, was not used for some reason, so 34 aircraft were airborne, organized into three combat squadrons as follows:

116 | P a g e
First (881st) squadron
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn/Reeve
Z-12, McNamer
Z-4, "Black Magic", Gieker
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bricker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Lewis
Z-6, "Breeze Hound", Althoff
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-14, Mather
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter

Second (883rd) squadron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Isham/McDowell
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Feathers
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-56, Gregg
Z-47, Adams
Z-43, Seale
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Adamson
Z-57, Kangas
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Clinkscales
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Standen
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Schultz

Third (882nd) squadron
Z-39, Holdridge/LaMarche
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-27, Sealy
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Coffman
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Arbon
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Reeves
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Gillert

Leading the force and the first squadron was Lt Col Ralph Reeve, CO 881st Squadron, riding in Z-9 with 1/Lt John Conn and crew. Leading the second squadron was Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, flying with 1/Lt Ray Isham and crew in Z-42. And leading the third squadron was Maj Austin LaMarche, 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, flying with Capt Curtis Holdridge and crew in Z-39.

Take-off was about 0250. Bomb load was 7 x M66 2000lb bombs. Ammo load was 500 rounds per gun. The 500th was the last Group in the Wing on this mission. Planes flew individually at 7000-8000 feet to the assembly point at Aoga Shima in the Izu Islands, about 180 miles south of Tokyo, where they formed into their combat squadrons. Forming up took 32 minutes, then the squadrons headed for the departure point, which they reached at 0952, 28 minutes late due to adverse winds.

There was one abort, Z-11, Wolter crew, due to a problem with the #3 engine. Upon later examination, metal parts were found on the sump plug.
The remaining 33 planes headed in column of squadrons toward the primary target, climbing to bombing altitudes by squadron of 19,000, 19,500 and 20,000 feet. However, the clouds underneath were impenetrable and it soon became clear that Target 357 could not be bombed visually, so the decision was made to divert to the secondary, the Hitachi engine works. The skies over the secondary were clear, permitting an excellent visual bomb run and drop. At 1037, the planes of the 500th unloaded 228 x M66 2000 lb bombs on the target. Later bomb damage assessment showed 96.8 percent of the plant's roof area destroyed.

Fighter opposition was practically nil and flak was light to moderate. Five B-29's, among them Z-6 and Z-14, suffered minor damage.

All planes returned safely, but due to the headwinds encountered on the route out and the extra distance to the secondary target, nine bombers ran low on fuel and had to land at Iwo. Most planes were back at Saipan by 1700.

11 Jun 45

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/11/1945  Day of rest. Z-19 [42-63435, "Sna Pe Fort"] is going back to the states in a couple of days and we are getting a new Z-19 [44-61692, "Sharon Sue"] directly from the factory with about 25 hours on it."

The Althoff crew did get a new Z-19 but not for about two weeks. In the meantime they had to fly other planes.

12 Jun 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"12 June:  Squadron furnished six crews for a formation in honor of General Arnold's visit at Service Center B at 1330.  Fighter reaction report submitted."

13 Jun 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"13 June:  Meeting at 0900 at Wing A-2 [Intel Section]. Lt Col McDowell [CO 883rd Squadron] had a meeting of all A/C [A/C with a slash generally meant Aircraft -- I think here they intended AC without a slash, which meant Airplane Commander] in S-2 Office.  Four crews selected for rotation upon completing 30 missions will be Capts Setterich, Clinkscales, Lt Schmidt and Major Adams.  S.O. 155, Hq, AAFPOA [Army Air Forces Pacific Ocean Area], 4 June 45 promoted Lts Cheney, Gregg, Ryan, Schmidt and Standen to Captain."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/13/1945  Ate and went up to the line and watched our [old] plane Z-19 take off and head stateside.  I sure wish we were taking it home."

Over time, the strain of many hours of flying with heavy loads, battle damage and/or accidents told on planes. When a B-29 was judged to be too unreliable to make the long flights to Japan or unable to carry the prescribed bomb load or was just spending too much time under maintenance, it was sent home as a “war weary”. This was evidently the fate of old Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", originally Z-3, "Snafu-perfort". This scarred and dented veteran of over 30 missions made it back to the States, where on 31 May 1946 she was ignominiously salvaged...
at an unknown location.

**14 Jun 45**

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"14 June: Lt Thompson [883rd Intel Officer] attended I and E Meeting at 1000 in Group Special Service. Warning order received on Yawata. Capt Landaker had meeting of all bombardiers at 1400. Lts Seal [Seale] and Schultz took off at 1000 to return to lead crew school at Muroc AAB for 120 days."

From the Hal Towner (Hays crew, 882nd) diary:

"14 June 45

Looks like those rumors were not unfounded. [Towner is referring to rumors that the quota of missions was going to be raised from 30 to 35.] I'm afraid we'll have to fly 35 missions. Those crews who are through now are going home now, but the rest of us must fly 35 times. I don't understand it at all. Somehow, it doesn't seem fair to me, but I'm afraid that's the way it's going to be. The only bright spot on today's horizon is the arrival of a couple replacement crews."

**15 Jun 45**

On this date the XXI Bomber Command directed a maximum-effort, daylight incendiary mission to strike the Osaka/Amagasaki urban area. The 500th Bomb Group put up 36 aircraft for this mission, organized into three combat squadrons, as follows:

**First (882nd) squadron**
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett/Dougherty
Z-39, Sasser
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", White (an 883rd plane and crew)
Z-27, Coffman
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Haas
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Gillert
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Sealy
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Cordray
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell

**Second (883rd) squadron**
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Feathers/Black
Z-47, Adams
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Barron
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Clinkscales
Z-56, Gregg
Z-57, Kangas
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Standen crew less Standen plus F. Parsons
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Shuffler

Third (881st) squadron
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn/Hatch
Z-12, McNamer
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bricker
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Mather
Z-4, "Black Magic", Sullivan
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Althoff
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Lewis
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock

Group CO Col John Dougherty would lead the Group and the first squadron, riding with Capt Cecil Tackett and crew in Z-24. Deputy leader would be Group Operations Officer Lt Col Freeman Parsons, flying with the Standen crew (but without Standen) in Z-53. Maj Vance Black, 883rd Squadron Operations Officer, would lead the second squadron in Z-49 with Capt Edward Feathers and crew. Maj Horace "Hod" Hatch, 881st Squadron Operations Officer, would lead the third squadron, flying with 1/Lt John Conn and crew in Z-9.

That was the plan anyway, but as anyone who has been in the military knows, no plan survives long in action.

Take-off was completed by about 0300, but there was trouble right from the outset. 1/Lt Willie Sasser, lifting off in the darkness in Z-39, struck a sand embankment with his landing gear still in the process of retracting. According to Sasser's radio operator, S/Sgt Rudolph Nelson, they also hit and tore out some of the lights at the end of the runway. The plane got airborne, but the landing gear was obviously damaged. It refused to retract any further, normally or manually. It also refused to lock in the down position. There was no choice but to abort, and Sasser salvoed the bomb load. They had to circle for a while until the Wing had completed its take-off, and Sasser, aware that the landing gear would almost certainly collapse upon touchdown, decided to wait until daylight provided better visibility. The young airplane commander gave his crew the option to bail out over Saipan or ride the plane in with him and the copilot. They all voted to take their chances with the plane.

Finally daylight came and Sasser received clearance from the tower to come in. They had the fire trucks and ambulances ready. The crew assumed their crash-landing positions. With the B-29 probably coming in on her belly, the men in the forward compartment would not be able to use their normal exit, the nose wheel hatch, nor their secondary exit, the forward bomb bay. They would have to go out the emergency exit windows, of which there were three, one each next to the AC and copilot and one at the flight engineer's position. The great fear of course was fire, so a rapid exit was critical.

Sure enough, as soon as the landing gear hit the runway it gave way. The plane flopped down on her belly and began skidding down the runway. The heat generated by the friction of the aluminum skin against the asphalt caused leaking hydraulic fluid and lubricants to begin smoking. According to Nelson, “The whole plane was filled with smoke,” which caused him to think it had caught fire. Miraculously, however, there was no fire, only smoke. It seemed to Nelson that it took forever for the big bomber to come to a stop. Finally it slid off the runway to the left and stopped just short of some ground crew tents. Nelson went head-first out the flight engineer’s window right after the flight engineer and “landed on my feet running as fast as I could, as I thought the plane was on fire and ready to blow.” All the other crew members got out safely too. The plane however was “washed out.” Z-39 serial number 44-61530 would never fly again.

While the Sasser crew were circling Saipan waiting for daylight, the planes of the main 500th formation were flying individually at 3,000-3,800 feet toward the assembly point, which was at Kita Iwo Jima, about 45 miles north of Iwo Jima. Once there, they began to form up according to plan, to the east of the island at altitudes of 7,000-8,000-9,000 feet (first-second-third squadrons), stacked high to the left. Z-24, with Col Dougherty aboard,
made it to the assembly point but with a bad oil leak in #2 engine could go no farther. Dougherty turned over command to Parsons in Z-53 and headed for home. Two more planes also aborted along the way. The #3 engine on Z-50, Shuffler crew, was running rough, and Z-33, Sealy crew, had what was later determined to be a blown cylinder head in the #1 engine. One of these two planes, unknown which, landed at Iwo, but the other made it back to Saipan.

In formation but now reduced to 32 planes, the Group headed toward the departure point and began the climb to briefed bombing altitudes of 19,000-20,000 feet. During the climb they ran into a weather front which completely broke up the formation. All 32 aircraft made it to the primary but alone or in small groups. They found complete cloud cover over the target and had to bomb by radar. At approximately 1045 a total of 1,066 x M17 incendiary clusters was dropped from altitudes ranging from 20,800 to 28,600 feet, except for Z-5, Althoff crew, which could only get up to 18,000 because they had had to feather their #2 engine. Results could not be observed.

No flak or fighter opposition was encountered.

All planes returned safely to base, except for three planes which had to land at Iwo Jima due to low fuel.

16 Jun 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"16 June Capt Miller, Group Radar Officer, returned from radar conference in Florida."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


From the Joseph Altott (881st) diary:

"06/16/1945 We slept late. At 1400 hours we had a formation at the 883 ball field and received 2 oak leaf clusters to go with our air medals."

17 Jun 45

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/17/1945 Ate at 0700 hours and went up to the line to slow time our #2 engine which had been changed and we landed at 1230 hours. ..."

You may recall that this crew, flying Z-5, had lost their #2 engine on the last mission, and they were flying the same plane on this mission. A new engine had to be tested and broken in by being taken up and flown low and slow for an hour or so. This was not without danger. You may remember that Z-6 crash-landed into the sea off Saipan while on a slow-timing flight on 23 Feb and three men in the nose drowned.

On this day the Tackett crew of the 882nd drew fighter escort duty in Z-37, “Belle Ruth”. This 14-hour mission involved leading fighters to Ie Shima near Okinawa. No other details are available.

On the night of 17-18 June the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out a raid against a target that many crews had bombed previously as a target of opportunity. But this time Hamamatsu was the primary target. The 500th Bomb Group
put up 35 aircraft for this mission. As usual on night missions, the planes flew to the target and bombed individually. The participating planes and crews, in order of scheduled take-off, were as follows:

Z-47, Adams  
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Feathers  
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", White  
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Black  
Z-4, "Black Magic", Sullivan  
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn  
Z-12, McNamee  
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bricker  
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Hays  
Z-27, Sasser  
Z-39, Holdridge  
Z-28, "Buckin' Bronc", Coffman  
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron  
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Sichel  
Z-48, McClanahan  
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt  
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby  
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Shuffler  
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan  
Z-56, Gregg  
Z-57, Kangas  
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Gieker  
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson  
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Althoff  
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell  
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock  
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Brandon (Group HQ)  
Z-14, Sealy (882nd crew flying an 881st plane)  
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson  
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Gillett  
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson  
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Robinson  
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas  
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell  
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Arbon  

Force leader on this mission was Lt Col Harry Brandon, Deputy Group Commander, in Z-11, "Lucky Eleven". Group Bombardier Maj Richard Hale came along on this mission, riding in Z-28 with 1/Lt John Coffman and crew. No less than five officers from the 73rd Wing and XXI Bomber Command also tagged along in various 500th planes.

The "Pilot's Hints" disseminated by the group staff contained a number of interesting instructions. Among other things, the crews were told to bomb "by fixed angle radar bombing" (slant range was 5.6 mm), to turn their lights "on and off 25 miles from coast", to desynchronize their props to "help confuse sonic detectors on searchlights", and on the return flight to keep to odd altitudes above 10,000 feet. Also given was the "Gunners target dial setting for position firing: Blister - 70', Tail - 75', Ring - 75' ".[Don't know what these settings indicate.]

Ammo load was what had become standard for night incendiary attacks – 200 rounds per gun in the tail and two aft turrets.

Take-off was at about 1900. Planes flew individually to the target at altitudes between 8000 and 8800 feet. There were two aborts due to mechanical trouble. Z-21, Gillett crew, was later found to have the "cannon plug to
normal motor of left gear burned out”. On Z-35, Arbon crew, a rear sump plug was found to have fallen out. This was a serious maintenance error, and you can bet somebody in the ground crew got his ass chewed out for it.

The remaining 33 planes all made it to Japan. IP was Irako Saki, at which the planes turned onto a course of 75 degrees to Hamamatsu. According to the Group Commander’s Report, the pathfinders -- probably the first 12 planes listed above -- bombed between 0159 and 0220, releasing from 8300 feet, while the following planes bombed between 0208 and 0239 and released from 8500 feet. A total of 5,940 x M47A2 incendiaries and 7 x M46 photo flash bombs was dropped on the target.

To quote the Group Commander's Report, "Air crews report excellent radar bombing with from [sic] small fires at beginning to general conflagration near end of period." According to Hal Towner, bombardier on Z-23, Hays crew, Hamamatsu was 75% destroyed.

There were no fighter attacks and only light, inaccurate flak. However, Bob Schurmann, right gunner on Z-48, McClanahan crew, noted that "[ring gunner Bill] Agee spotted Baca [sic] bomb along top of undercast."

No B-29’s were damaged on this mission and all planes returned safely to base.

18 Jun 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"18 June. Capt Earl G. Hunt of XXI Bomber Command is placed on DS [Detached Service] with this office. During his stay he will work with Capt Miller, Group Radar Officer, in planning and reporting radar aspects of future missions."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"18 June: ... Cleaned office in the afternoon and all Intelligence Personnel of the Group had picnic on Yellow Beach. Practice alert held."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"Landed at 0800 hours [from the previous night’s mission to Hamamatsu] and rested all day. Read and responded to cards and swam to relax."

19 Jun 45

With all of Japan's major cities devastated, the XXI Bomber Command now methodically went to work on medium-sized cities. On the night of 19-20 June the 73rd and 313th Wings were sent after Fukuoka in northern Kyushu. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 37 planes plus a Super Dumbo search and rescue plane for this mission, but three -- Z-21, Z-41 and Z-56 -- were scratched for unknown reasons, so 34 plus the Super Dumbo were airborne. The participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-50, "Fancy Detail", White
Z-57, Kangas
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Schmidt
Z-48, McClanahan
The Super Dumbo was Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", manned by the Bricker crew of the 881st. It is not known when it took off. Flight engineer Clifford Smith recorded that there were 13 men aboard for this mission, but he doesn't name names.

The Force Commander on this mission was Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, flying with 1/Lt Roy Isham and crew in Z-42. Also along for the ride from the Group staff were Maj Prescott Martin, Air Inspector, in Z-11; Maj John Van Trigt, Assistant Operations Officer, in Z-28; and 1/Lt Milton Pack, Radar Officer, in Z-42.

Take-off was about 1745. Planes flew individually to the target at altitudes between 7000 and 7800 feet. There were two aborts. Both Z-2 and Z-57 developed engine trouble, and in both cases it turned out to be split cylinders. Z-2 was able to drop her bombs on a target of opportunity, Chichi Jima, before heading for home.

This left 32 planes plus the Super Dumbo to reach Japan. After landfall, the planes climbed to their assigned bombing altitudes of between 9000 and 9800 feet, then at the IP turned onto course 003 degrees. A total of 1215 x E46 incendiaries and 40 x E36 bombs was dropped by radar beginning at 0125.

Group CO Col Dougherty reported the results as follows: "General conflagration was observed in the city with scattered fires on the outskirts. Fires were reported to be burning right to the waterfront. Two surface craft were observed to be on fire. Smoke was estimated to be up to 15,000 feet."

There was no fighter opposition and only light flak. No 500th planes were damaged, and all planes returned safely to base.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:
“19 June
   Capt. Norbert J. Oswald left for 30 day leave in the United States.”

20 Jun 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:


From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“20 June
   1st Lt. William H. Byerley returned from Electrical Systems School at Chanute Field, Ill. …”

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“20 June: ... Submitted fighter reaction report on mission #68. Lt. Stewart taken to Wing Hospital. Meeting at Group S-2 at 1400. Promotions on AAFPOA SO 162, 11 June 45. Lt Schmidt completed his tour of duty.”

From the Hal Towner (Hays crew, 882nd) diary:

“20 June 45

   Last night we set fire to Fukuoka on Kyushu. The big question in all our minds is -- can that possibly be our last mission? [Fukuoka was the Hays crew's 30th mission.]

   Hot damn! Hays just came in again, the bearer of stupendous good news! He says we're through, and that we're being put in for east bout [boat?] orders. However, poor old Mike [ring gunner Sgt August Michelsen] has to stay and sweat through 35. Burulia is already through and leaves tomorrow. [Radar operator Sgt Stanley Burulia had flown extra missions with other crews.] [Radioman Sgt Henry] Koert has 31 so he goes with us, but the rest of the enlisted men had to cut cards, and Mike lost. There was no other way to do it, and somebody had to be left because there are just enough vacancies minus one.

   Now to sweat out the orders. Doesn't seem possible that we've actually lived through this very rough combat tour and are going home. I'll not believe it till I see it. Pray for us, Diary.

   I guess we're greatly in debt to [882nd Squadron CO] Col. Brannock and Capt. Hays who have engineered the deal. At any rate, they'd already earned my everlasting gratitude.”

21 Jun 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“21 June
   Lt. Col. Ralph A. Reeve transferred to XXI Bomber Command Flight Control Center. Major Horace E. Hatch assumes command of the Squadron. …"
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"21 June: Capt. Clinkscales presented with DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] at Wing ceremony. ..."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/21/1945 We had a briefing at 2330 hours, two hours before take-off. Target is Kure Naval Base and Submarine Pens, a power plant and arsenal."

22 Jun 45

On this date the XXI Bomber Command sent the entire 73rd Bomb Wing and the 462nd and 468th Groups of the 58th Bomb Wing against the Kure Naval Arsenal in a daylight precision attack. The 500th Bomb Group put up 32 aircraft, including a Super Dumbo search and rescue plane (Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Bricker crew). The 31 bombing planes were organized into three combat squadrons. The 30 planes that are known to have participated are as follows:

First (883rd) squadron
Z-49, "Three Feathers II", Feathers/Dougherty
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Adams
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Adamson
Z-43, Barron
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Sichel
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Standen
Z-56, Gregg
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", White

Second (881st) squadron
Z-12, McNamer/Parsons
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-4, "Black Magic", Sullivan
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-14, Gieker
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Wolter
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Althoff

Third (882nd) squadron
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-28, "Buckin' Bronc", Sasser
Z-27, Coffman
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Sealy
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-36, “Lil’ Abner”, Pierce

The missing plane is unknown but almost certainly was one of the following two which were originally scheduled but did not make it to the primary target: Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson; or Z-57, Kangas.

The Force Commander on this mission and leading the first squadron was Group CO Col John Dougherty, flying with Capt Edward Feathers and crew in Z-49, "Three Feathers II". Leading the second squadron was Group Operations Officer Lt Col Freeman Parsons, riding with 1/Lt Hugh McNamer and crew in Z-12. Leading the third squadron was Capt Curtis Holdridge in Z-39.

On this mission the 500th was third in the Wing order, following the 498th and 499th Groups and ahead of the 497th. Take-off was supposed to be about 0220 but heavy rain squalls set everything back almost an hour, and the first 500th plane didn't get off until 0317. This delay meant that D Hour, the time when the lead Group, the 498th, crossed the departure point, also had to be changed, so radio messages were sent to all planes to that effect.

Planes flew individually at 7000-7800 feet to the assembly area, which was just off the southern coast of Shikoku. There were five aborts. Z-5, Althoff crew, had trouble with her #2 engine, which had to be feathered. Unable to climb to bombing altitude with only three engines, 2/Lt Althoff dropped his bombs on an island and returned home. Z-32, Gillert crew, had a prop governor failure on #2 engine. Z-33, Haas crew, suffered an exhaust valve failure on #4 engine. The other two aborts were by Z-15, Z-36 or Z-57, as noted above.

The skies at the assembly area were mostly clear. The Group Commander's Report called the flak “intense, accurate, and multi-colored.” (The Japanese Navy put different-colored dyes into their shells so that individual ships could distinguish their shell bursts and make corrections.)

Before bombs away, the lead ship, Z-49, with Col Dougherty on board, was struck heavily in the right wing and both #3 and #4 engines had to be feathered. At the same time, Capt Landaker, 883rd Squadron Bombardier, flying as lead bombardier on this mission, was wounded in the left foot. With only two engines left, the bomb load had to be salvaged immediately. Unfortunately, six other planes in the first squadron, watching to drop on the leader as briefed, took this as the regular drop and released their bombs at the same time. All fell well short. Only the squadron deputy lead, probably Maj Charles Adams in Z-42, and one other plane, unidentified, held their bombs until the proper release point. These two planes and the following two squadrons dropped accurately, achieving excellent results. The Naval Arsenal was hit by 104 x 2000 lb, 30 x 1000 lb and 72 x 500 lb bombs.

In addition to Z-49, twelve other 500th aircraft were struck by flak, but none as seriously. There was no fighter opposition. With her two good engines, Z-49 was able to make it to Iwo Jima, where she made an emergency landing. All other 500th planes made it safely back to Saipan.

Z-49, 44-69878, “Three Feathers II”, was later patched up enough on Iwo to be flown back to Saipan, where she would be fully repaired and put back into service by mid-July as the new Z-46, because in the meantime a replacement plane, 44-61668, had been given the designation Z-49.
Also landing at Iwo Jima but in accordance with instructions was the Super Dumbo, Z-45, with the Bricker crew.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 June: ... Major Adams completed his tour of duty with his 30th mission. Capt Feathers [Z-49, "Three Feathers II"] landed at Iwo Jima with two engines shot out by flak and Capt Landaker [883rd Squadron Bombardier] wounded in left foot."

23 Jun 45

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/23/1945 Guard duty all evening from 1730 hours until midnight. All we have to do is ride around the line in a jeep and watch the area."

24 Jun 45

This day was declared a holiday by the 73rd Wing. From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/24/1945 Day off. We went down to another group and watched a good baseball game in the afternoon. I played in a double ping-pong tournament with my radio man Muldoon at 1830 hours and we won two sets. The semi-finals are tonight."

But not everybody got a day off from the war. From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"24 June WRM 233 -- Lt Mayhugh flying Z-18 over Nagoya (24 0430Z) [24 June 1430 local] dropping a maximum load of T-3 [propaganda leaflets] bombs."

25 Jun 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"25 June: Submitted report to A-2 [Wing Intel Section] on Mission #69 [the mission against Fukuoka on 19 June]."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/25/1945 Went up to the line to check our guns and ship for tomorrow's mission."

26 Jun 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing was sent against the Osaka Arsenal in a daylight precision attack. The 500th Bomb Group put up 30 aircraft for this mission. The participating planes and crews, originally organized into three combat squadrons, were as follows:
First (881st) squadron
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn/Van Trigt
Z-12, McNamer
Z-7, Sullivan
Z-14, Pearson
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Althoff
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Mitchell

Second (882nd) squadron
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett/Sweeney
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Coffman
Z-28, "Buckin' Bronc", D. Jackson
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert
Z-39, Sealy
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-25, Haas
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Pierce
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson

Third (883rd) squadron
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Adamson
Z-56, Gregg
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron
Z-47, McClanahan
Z-42, "Supine Sue", White
Z-43, Sichel
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-55, "Janice E.", Shuffler
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Standen

Maj John R. Van Trigt, Assistant Group Operations Officer, was force leader on this mission, flying with 1/Lt John F. Conn and crew in Z-9, "Nina Ross". Riding as an observer in Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", with Capt Cecil Tackett and crew, was Col Walter Sweeney, Chief of Staff of the 73rd Bomb Wing.

On this mission the Haas crew flew Z-25, 42-24743, and they were a little uneasy about it. The reason was several fold. This plane had served first in the 881st Squadron as Z-8, flying at least seven missions. She was shot up badly, with four crew members wounded, on the 23 Jan Nagoya mission. After extensive repairs she was reassigned to the 883rd Squadron as Z-56, as which she flew at least another eight missions. After being shot up again on the 7 April Tokyo mission, 42-24743 was on the ground under repair for a long time. Now here she was, 80 days later, being put back into action with the 882nd Squadron as Z-25. (She was the only B-29 to see service in all three squadrons of the 500th.) And it was not only the history of the plane that was a concern. Z-25 was considered an unlucky number. The 882nd had lost two planes bearing that number early on, and no plane had carried it since the second Z-25 was lost with the Porter crew on 23 Jan. But there were only so many numbers available in the 882nd's assigned sequence (21-39), and the only alternative was an even unluckier number, Z-31, which had been borne by three unfortunate planes. So Z-25 it was.

This mission was plagued with bad weather from the start. Joseph Altott, right gunner on Z-5, Althoff crew, wrote, "We took off at 0350 hours in heavy rainfall/storm and got soaked loading our guns and checking the ship but spread blankets out in the ship and dried our clothes out on the way to the target."
Weather problems continued as the planes hit a storm front about 100 miles off the coast of Shikoku. This disrupted any attempt to form up, so all planes, excepting one abort (Z-32, Gillert crew, malfunctioning #2 prop governor), flew to the target and bombed individually. The storm clouds, estimated reaching up to 30,000 feet, caused heavy icing on some planes.

As Z-5 started her climb to altitude, to the frustration of the Althoff crew she once again had engine problems. This time it was #3, which had to be feathered. But the crew refused to give up and managed to reach the target and bomb from 17,500 feet.

The 29 planes which reached the target dropped a total of 207 x 2000 lb bombs by radar at 1040 from altitudes ranging from 18,000 to 26,900 feet. Results could not be observed.

There was no fighter opposition and only meager flak, which however damaged one B-29.

All planes, including Z-25 with the Haas crew, returned safely to Saipan except for two which landed at Iwo, probably due to low fuel.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"26 June
Ten of our planes raided Osaka, returned safely, slight damage.
While practicing wet ditching on Blue Beach 2d Lt. Lawrence Leary was caught in a current and drifted out to sea. He was picked up by a Navy boat and suffered no injury."

The correct name was Clarence W. “Bill” Leary, and he was navigator on the Post crew, #103A, a newly assigned replacement crew. As Bill recalled years many years later, “I was horrified because my one-man raft was only partially afloat and I was not a very good swimmer (only a dog-paddler). I was so thankful for the Navy taking me in to shore, I donated the life raft to them.”

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"26 June: Lt Dearborn's crew returned from rest leave. ... Lt Isham took off at 1940 on RSPM [Radar Scope Mission?] 12, Northern Kyushu."

27 Jun 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:


From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"27 June: Capt Black promoted to Major."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:
"06/27/1945  Got our new ship today [44-61692] and it is a beauty. Z-19 the second. Everyone is happy about it along with the ground crew who deserves a good ship with not many things wrong with it."

From the Don Weber (copilot, Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Wednesday, June 27

Rainy

The day after a mission and time for recuperation, you know. Slept well in or over a cool night last night. Got up at about 7:15 A.M. and ate breakfast coming back to read awhile and play bridge with Wool, Weir and Sharp. [Navigator 2/Lt Robert B. Wool and bombardier 2/Lt Frank W. Sharp were members of the Haas crew. 2/Lt Thomas D. Weir was navigator on the Coffman crew.] Then ate dinner and after talking awhile Lanshaw [2/Lt William C. Lanshaw was copilot on the Sasser crew] and I took a hike over to Kobler Field where we looked over P-47s and talked to some of the pilots who are on their way to Okinawa. And we looked at B-25s there as well as Navy TB-5s [next three-four lines illegible] but did not swim. Back by 5:00 P.M., cleaned up and ate supper.

28 Jun 45

Over the past few days the Hays crew of the 882nd had been sweating out their stateside rotation orders. They hadn't got them yet but today the signs were looking good. From the Hal Towner diary:

"28 June 45

It looks like our orders will go through as they haven't bounced yet. Ed Betts [the original copilot who had flown mostly with other crews] has his orders and has started to clear the field. He will return with us to the States in a war-weary. We're very elated!"

But other crews still had missions to fly. From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/28/1945  ... Got up at 0630 and ate and went to the ship and cleaned the guns and put the flak equipment in position for tonight's raid. We were briefed at 1500 hours and ate at 1600 hours and went up to the line at 1700 hours."

On the night of 28-29 June 1945 the 73rd Bomb Wing sent 145 B-29's in a night incendiary attack against the urban area of Sasebo in northwestern Kyushu. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 36 planes for this mission, of which 34 were airborne. The two aircraft which were scheduled but failed to take off were Z-3, "Ann Dee", and Z-9, "Nina Ross", crews unknown. The 34 participating planes and crews were as follows, in scheduled take-off order:

Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Adamson
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Coffman
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-28, “Buckin' Bronc”, Arbon
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-16, “Je Reviens”, Conn
Z-7, Sullivan
Z-10, “Punchin' Judy”, Mock
Z-15, “Fire Bug”, F. Parsons
Z-25, Pierce
Z-27, Sealy
Z-29, “Gravel Gertie”, Cordray
Z-32, “Fever from the South”, Gillert
Z-33, “Slick Dick”, Haas
Z-34, Frisco Nannie”, Farrell
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Gray
Z-37, “Belle Ruth”, Robinson
Z-42, “Supine Sue”, McClanahan
Z-43, “Ben's Raiders”, White
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-51, “Tail Wind”, Standen
Z-55, “Janice E.”, Gregg
Z-57, Kangas
Z-11, “Lucky Eleven”, Connell (an 882nd crew flying an 881st plane)
Z-19, “Sharon Sue”, Althoff
Z-2, “20th Century Limited”, Post
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Walker
Z-5, “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, Powers
Z-6, “Booze Hound”, Calhoun

Force Commander on this mission was Lt Col Freemond Parsons, Group Operations Officer, in Z-15. Maj Richard Hale, Group Bombardier, went along in Z-23 with the Coffman crew.

Take-off began at about 1800. Pathfinders, probably the first 12 planes scheduled, took off first, followed in order by the 882nd, 883rd and 881st. Bomb load was approximately 30 x E48 or E46 incendiaries. Ammo load was 200 rounds in each of the three rear turrets (upper aft, lower aft and tail), but the gunners were specifically directed not to test-fire their guns and not to fire unless fired upon. (Use of the rear turrets was to protect against nightfighters, which generally approached from the rear. The caution against firing first was to avoid giving away the plane's position by the muzzle flashes.)

As usual on night attacks, all planes flew individually to the target, this time at altitudes between 4,000 and 5,000 feet. At a point about 50 miles south of Kyushu the planes began their climb to their briefed bombing altitudes of between 10,000 and 11,000 feet. There were no aborts; all planes reached and bombed the primary target.

Thirty-one planes used fixed angle radar bombing as briefed; three planes with inoperative radars bombed by visual correction, probably meaning they dropped near existing fires. A total of 883 x E48 and 105 x E46 incendiary bombs were dropped on the target between 0146 and 0233. One plane, unidentified, experienced a rack malfunction, the ten bombs which hung up on the racks being jettisoned later. Crews reported a large conflagration along the water's edge extending toward the center of Sasebo.

Flak ranged from meager to moderate and there was no fighter opposition. No 500th planes were damaged. Z-19, Althoff crew, reported seeing a B-29 catch fire and explode over the target, but the 73rd Wing was the only outfit over Sasebo this night and they sustained no losses. Some crews reported very near misses from bombs bursting at bombing altitude. Possibly this is what the Althoff crew saw.

All planes returned safely to base.
29 Jun 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"29 June

Ten planes raid Sasebo [on the previous night], returned safely, no damage."

Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew, 882nd, described last night's mission in his diary:

"Friday, June 29

Cloudy

Well, another mission I did get in last night when we went on a long hop up to the northwest part of Kyushu to the naval port city of Sasebo. We took off at 6:05 P.M., our squadron being first off after the pathfinders of our group. We flew Z Square 33 “Slick Dick” and with its four practically new engines it flew very well. It took a long time, about eight hours, to get up to the target. We dropped at 0211 and there was ample small arms tracer, and some heavy flak and what appeared to be phosphorous fire bombs... [3-4 lines illegible] ...I ate and cleaned up, washing my flying suit. Received three very welcomed letters from Mother this morning. Went swimming this afternoon. I humbly thank God for His Great Mercy."

30 Jun 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 June
1st Lt. Owen L. Seaver was transferred to Oahu for rotation to the United States."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 June: At pay call, all squadron members [were] issued the photo "Bombs on Japan" and Asiatic-Pacific Theater Ribbon. Mission #73 [this would be Kumamoto] postponed. Capt Clinkscales received orders to return "war weary" B-29 to the States."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"06/30/1945  Pay day. Slept late and got paid at 1330 hours. Went and played in doubles ping-pong championship and WE WON. ..."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"30 June  Got paid today. Wrote letters. No gambling yet!"
From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Saturday, June 30

... I tried to sleep awhile after breakfast ... but it was too warm and so we played bridge for an hour and I cleaned up before going with the crew up to the line to have our picture taken by Z Square 28. Finally we got it made, I hope. Got paid when we got back and I drew $131.83 which makes a nice check with the $150.00 that is sent home. I went up to base finance after dinner and sent home $120.00. ..."

1 July 45

Effective 1 July 1945, new communications procedures were instituted in the XXI Bomber Command. This included changes of radio callsigns for all units. The 500th Bomb Group discarded the familiar "Pluto" that it had used for many months and would now be called "Wisdom". Individual planes would use this callsign with their number. For example, Z-47 would be "Wisdom-47".

The 497th Group was now "Shyster", the 498th "Waxwing" and the 499th "Nordic". The 3rd Photo Recon Squadron was "Hellhag", the 655th Weather Recon Squadron was "Baboon", and so on.

New callsigns were only part of the story. Crews were ordered to maintain radio silence except in genuine emergencies such as when in immediate distress or when approaching a friendly base with IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) out. Emergency frequencies were provided. Proper procedures for communicating with fighter escorts were delineated. And more.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 July: Capt Clinkscales left for rotation. Briefing for Mission #73, Target Kumamoto, at 1500. ... Capt Chapin [883rd Intel Officer] attended the 499th's briefing at 1430."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"07/01/1945 ... We got up at 0900 hours and played cards until 1130 hours and ate and then were briefed at 1500 hours and had chow at 1600 hours...."

On the night of 1-2 July the 73rd Bomb Wing put up 164 B-29's for an incendiary attack on Kumamoto, the fourth largest city on Kyushu. The 500th Bomb Group had 44 bombers airborne plus a Super Dumbo. The participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-57, Kangas
Z-49, "Three Feathers Ill", Black
Z-56, Rothrock (an 882nd crew flying an 883rd plane)
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Standen
Z-42, "Supine Sue", McDowell
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron
Z-55, "Janice E.", Sichel
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Shuffler
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", White
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Adamson
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Whitten
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-7, Sullivan
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Connell (an 882nd crew flying an 881st plane)
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Althoff
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Post
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Alexander
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-14, Gieker
Z-12, McNamer
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-28, "Buckin' Bronc", Sasser
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Sealy
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Arbon
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Coffman
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-25, Gerrity
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-30, D. Jackson
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Bruns
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson

The Super Dumbo was T-35 of the 498th Bomb Group, flown by the Gray crew of the 882nd/500th.

Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon was Force Leader on this mission, flying in Z-47 with 1/Lt Ernest Dearborn and crew. Several new replacement crews were going on their first mission, and several staff officers went along to provide some experience. These included Group Assistant Operations Officer Maj John Van Trigt, riding in Z-16 with 1/Lt Elmo Alexander and crew; Group Bombardier Maj Richard Hale, flying in Z-23 with 1/Lt John Coffman and crew; and Group Radar Officer Capt Arthur Miller in Z-56 with Capt Robert Rothrock and crew.

Take-off was at 1800. On this mission the 500th was the last Group off, following the 499th. Bomb load for most planes was 40 x E46 incendiary clusters. Seven planes carried 31 to 33 x E47 incendiaries and one carried 40 x E36 incendiaries. Six planes carried 1 x M46 photoflash bomb in addition to the incendiaries. To protect against nightfighters, 200 rounds of ammo per gun were loaded into the three rear turrets (upper aft, lower aft and tail).

As usual on night missions, all aircraft flew individually en route to the target. The 500th crews were briefed to fly at altitudes between 7,000 and 7,800 feet. There were three aborts. Z-15, Connell crew, had a problem with her #2 engine which was later found to be a loose prop governor head, a clear maintenance error. Z-34, Farrell crew, and Z-35, Bruns crew, both had exhaust valve failures, the former in #3 engine, the latter in #1.

At 68 miles out from the departure point, the remaining 41 aircraft began climbing to their briefed bombing altitudes of between 10,000 and 10,800 feet. Axis of attack was 48 degrees. The 500th planes arrived over the target beginning at 0142 and continuing to 0230. Charles Dickenson, ring gunner on the Post crew in Z-2 reported a "large red glow through clouds, smoke going above our altitude of 10,300 ft." Thirty-eight planes
dropped by radar as planned, while three had to drop visually when their radars failed. Glows from fires already burning could be seen through the undercast. A total of 1,576 incendiaries were dropped on the target.

There was no fighter opposition and only meager antiaircraft. One B-29 was slightly damaged by flak. The main danger came from other B-29's and the plane's own bombs. Robert Schurmann, right gunner on the McClanahan crew in Z-48, reported, "Planes came into target from all directions. Just missed colliding with three." Also, as had happened on the previous mission, many incendiary clusters burst prematurely at altitude, endangering the bombers dropping them.

After bombs away, exit from the target area was by a right climbing turn. Route back was at 15,000 feet. Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew in Z-33, recorded that his crew's biggest problem on this mission was staying awake on the way back.

For the Gray crew flying the Super Dumbo, this was a rocking chair mission but also a very meaningful one. Ring gunner John Norton noted later in his diary, "Capt. Gray and most of crew's last mission. [Norton and the other gunners had missed a couple of missions back during the March fire blitz when some gunners were left behind, so they still had a couple to go.] Sighted Life Guard Sub. Circled, shot the bull and came back."

All planes returned safely to base although Z-52, Whitten crew, had to stop at Iwo Jima, reason unknown.

2 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:


From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"07/02/1945 Muldoon and I won the semi-finals in the Wing [Ping-Pong] Doubles Championship and we will play the finals on Independence Day."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Monday, July 2
... Cleaned up, ate breakfast and slept awhile. We got a new crew, Queen's crew, in our hut today. We now have six new crews in our squadron. ..."

3 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"3 July
1st Lt. George H. Timson transferred to Oahu for rotation to the United States."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

George Hughes, hard-working airplane mechanic in the 881st, found time today to write a letter to his parents:

"July 3, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

I have received two letters from you this week. I am fine and don't seem to lose any weight in spite of the heat. We are having the hottest part of the year now. I must drink at least two gallons of water a day. . . .

I am sending a big picture of the plane I work on. It is in the foreground of the picture. It was taken on a raid over Japan. The plane number is 19. I thought that it was a very good shot.

Everything remains about the same here. I don't suppose tomorrow will be any different than any other day. Holidays don't have much meaning over here. . . .

Love
George"

The picture that Hughes refers to is the famous one of Z-19, "Sna Pe Fort", with other 881st planes in the background, dropping incendiaries on Yokohama on 29 May 1945. The photo was made into a propaganda leaflet that would be dropped over Japanese cities beginning in late July.

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Tuesday, July 3

. . . I was up for breakfast and then I spent some time at the library and also went up to base finance to send home $70.00. After returning I spent awhile longer at group intelligence and read the latest "Impact", a very interesting air forces magazine. Colonel Dougherty spoke to us officers at "officers call" at 11:00 A.M. concerning policies of the group, etc. There was a mission tonight but. . . [three lines illegible]. . . [The Haas crew did not go on this mission.]. . . It should have been an easy mission. I attended Bible Study Hour at 6:30 P.M. and the show "The Portrait of Dorien [sic] Grey" at 8:30 P.M. May God be with our men on the mission."

Some crews didn't have to worry about missions any more. From the Hal Towner (Hays crew, 882nd) diary:

"3 July 45

Believe it or not, we're on the way -- at least most of us are. [Copilot Ed] Betts took off yesterday in a war-weary with "Clink" [Capt Ray Clinkscales of the 883rd]. [AC] Hays, Wex [Navigator Weksler], Wally [Flight Engineer Wallower] and yours truly are on a troop transport -- a boat -- you know, they travel on the water, and we are just now passing Marpee Point -- and for the last time.

This is a good, fast ship [the S.S. Beckham, a medium class troop transport]. It shouldn't take more than ten days to get to Oahu.

We lost little or no time getting in our sacks, very comfortable, incidentally, and we are now wishing they'd pipe all hands to lay in to the chow hall."
On the night of 3-4 July the 73rd Bomb Wing struck the city of Kochi on Shikoku in an incendiary attack. The 500th Bomb Group sent 33 aircraft on this mission. The participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-7, Sullivan
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Wolter
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Althoff
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Post
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-12, McNamer
Z-14, Gieker
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Tackett
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-36, "L'il Abner", Arbon
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Coffman
Z-25, Farrell
Z-30, D. Jackson
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-57, Kangas
Z-49, "Three Feathers III", Feathers
Z-50, " Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Isham/McDowell
Z-48, Black
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron
Z-53(?), "The Ancient Mariner", Standen
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", Sichel
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Adamson
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Shuffler

[It is known that the Standen crew went on this mission but it is not certain which plane they flew. Most likely it was Z-53, but it could have been Z-56.]

Assistant Group Operations Officer Maj John Van Trigt was the Force Commander on this mission, flying with Maj Ivan Post and crew in Z-2, or as this mission's "Pilot Hints" sheet gave it, "Wisdom-2". With him in Z-2 was Maj Berry Thompson, Group Navigator. Other staff officers flying this mission included Maj Leroy English, Group Gunnery Officer, in Z-14 with 1/Lt John Gieker and crew; Maj Richard Hale, Group Bombardier, in Z-23 with 1/Lt John Coffman and crew; Maj Prescott Martin, Group Air Inspector, in Z-32 with 1/Lt George Gillert and crew; and Capt Charles McClintick, Group Training Officer, in Z-36 with 1/Lt Harold Arbon and crew. Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, also flew this mission in Z-42 with 1/Lt Roy Isham and crew. And 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd Squadron RCM Officer, flew in Z-27 with the Tackett crew.

Take-off was about 1945. Bomb load was 40 x E46 incendiary clusters for most planes; three planes carried 39 x E46 incendiaries and 1 x M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was 200 rounds per gun in each of the three rear turrets (upper aft, lower aft and tail). The 500th was third in the Wing order on this mission, following the 499th Group.
As standard on night missions, all planes flew to the target and bombed individually. En route altitude for the 500th and the 497th Groups was 5,000 to 5,800 feet. The 498th and 499th were to fly at 3,000 to 3,800 feet.

There was one abort. Z-5, Powers crew, lost her #3 engine, later determined to be due to a broken exhaust rocker arm.

At a point 84 miles from landfall, the 32 remaining planes began climbing to their assigned staggered bombing altitudes of between 10,000 and 10,800 feet. At landfall, they took a course of 301 degrees toward the target. When they arrived, they found the city already afire from previous bombing and smoke columns rising up to 20,000 feet.

There was no fighter opposition and only meager flak. No bombers were hit by enemy fire but severe turbulence in the rising smoke columns, through which the planes had to pass on the bomb run, slightly damaged four B-29's and injured three crew members. One of these was Sgt Houston Powers, tail gunner in the Feathers crew, Z-49, who suffered a wrenched back. The Post crew in Z-2 didn't suffer any physical injuries, but the radar operator, 2/Lt Dwight "Mouse" Baker, had his dignity wounded when he received a yellow shower courtesy of the toilet in his compartment.

Thirty aircraft dropped their bombs by radar. Two with malfunctioning radars dropped visually by the light of the flames. A total of 1,270 x E46 incendiaries fell onto the city below between 0311 and 0352 to stoke the existing flames.

Withdrawal from the target area was by a left climbing turn to a heading of 180 degrees and then up to 15,000 feet for the flight home.

All planes returned safely to base.

4 Jul 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"4 July: Work as usual. ... Lt Thompson [883rd Intel Officer] received orders transferring him to XXI BomCom."

A year ago Hal Towner (Hays crew, 882nd) had celebrated the 4th of July at the Officers Club at Walker Field. Today he and his officer crewmates were on a boat heading back home from Saipan. There was no liquor available on board, not even any milk, but at least the food was good. They had "a delicious breakfast of eggs and sausage", and later for holiday dinner -- turkey. They expected to arrive at Oahu by noon 13 July.

Back on Saipan, Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) did some groundskeeping around the living area in the morning, played some ball with the enlisted men in the afternoon, then got a vehicle and went over to the 497th Group to visit with friends. In the evening they went to a show.

Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) had a personal celebration on this holiday: "Made Staff Sgt on July 1 and got my promotion orders today."

5 Jul 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"5 July: Mission #75 [night incendiary attack on Akashi] postponed. Lt Thompson [former 883rd Intel Officer] left
for Iwo Jima at 1230. Briefing in Group S-2 at 1430 for training mission 6 July."

On this date the McClanahan crew of the 882nd, or most of it, flew Z-45 to Iwo Jima and left her there to serve as a Super Dumbo. Apparently by this point in the war the Super Dumbos were flying out of Iwo, which makes sense, as it put them 700 miles closer to Japan and greatly increased their loiter time off the Japanese coast during missions.

The McClanahan crew's ride home to Saipan was old Z-49, "Three Feathers II", which had been badly damaged on the 22 June mission to Kure and had had to make an emergency landing at Iwo on two engines. That plane had now been repaired enough to make it back to Saipan, or so it was hoped. They got her off the ground okay but almost immediately had a problem with the #3 engine, which had to be feathered. But they made it back to Saipan on the three remaining engines. According to a note in the 883rd Squadron crew lists, an examination of the plane determined that its right wing was "too badly damaged to continue service." Another note says that the plane was "cannibalized for spare parts and souvenirs". However, these both appear to be incorrect. Records show that this plane, 44-69878, was repaired and returned to service by 19 July in the 883rd Squadron as Z-46 and flew at least seven more combat missions.

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"5 July 1945


From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Thursday, July 5

Another day of non-flying and easy going for us. ... The exhibition of E-46 bombs going off by the shore here last night demonstrates well that most of the 'Christmas Tree Bombs' we have been seeing were our own bombs. These incendiaries do certainly throw around a lot of flaming jelly. [On the last few missions 'Christmas Tree flak' had been reported by many crews. There had also been reports of many bombs exploding prematurely in the air. As Weber concludes, the two events were linked.] I tried to sleep awhile this A.M., but found it too hot. Colonel Adamson [Lt Col Herbert Adamson, Group Exec Officer] came through this morning angry at the condition of our barracks. [Next three lines mostly illegible.] Lanshaw [copilot, Sasser crew, 882nd] [1-2 words illegible] to see his cousin on the USS Hector (AR 7) in the harbor. His cousin Bill Pearick and 'Spike' Yencer work in the photo lab. They have a pretty good deal getting ice cream & cokes as they want. Got back at 7:00 P.M. ..."

6 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"6 July  WRM[Weather Reconnaissance Mission]-291 - Lt Mayhugh flying Z-18 dropped a maximum load of T-3, leaflet bombs (06 0400Z) [6 July 1400 local] on Tokyo."

Capt Connell is relieved from flight control duty & becomes A/C in 882nd. Capt McClintic[k], Training Officer, assumes flight control duties."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:
"6 July
Capt. Ferd [that is the correct spelling] J. Curtis, 1st Lt. Fred C. Stevenson, 1st Lt. Ray S. Randolph and Capt. Walter S. Mather with the enlisted men of his crew returned from rest leave in Oahu."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"6 July: Briefing at 1500 for Mission #75, target Akashi U/A [urban area]. . . ."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"6 July 1945
Today a big day, I made T/Sgt! Staff last month & Tech this month."

A promotion a month is indeed pretty good. T/Sgt Greene must have been doing something right.

On the night of 6-7 July the 73rd Bomb Wing struck the city of Akashi, just west of Kobe on Honshu, in a night incendiary attack. The 500th Bomb Group put up 33 aircraft for this mission. The participating planes and crews, in order of bombing, were as follows:

Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Farrell
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Haas
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-49, "Three Feathers III", Feathers
Z-30, D. Jackson
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-56, Gregg
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", White
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-12, McNamer
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Kangas
Z-7, Post
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-25, Sealy
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Robinson
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Arbon
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell (Shuffler crew)
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Althoff
Z-48, Standen
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Adamson
Z-55, "Janice E.", Sichel
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter  
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers

Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon was Force Commander for this mission, flying in Z-9 with 1/Lt John Conn and crew. Other 500th staff officers flying this mission were Air Inspector Maj Prescott Martin in Z-49 with Capt Edward Feathers and crew; Assistant Operations Officer Maj John Van Trigt in Z-25 with 1/Lt Raymond Sealy and crew; and Radar Countermeasures Officer 1/Lt Milton Pack in Z-42 with 1/Lt John Kangas and crew.

Take-off was about 1815. Bomb load was 40 x E46 incendiary clusters, except for three aircraft (Z-49, Z-6 and Z-11) which carried 39 x E46 incendiaries and 1 x M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was again 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets. The 500th was second in the Wing order on this mission, following the 499th. Z-11, Wolter crew, had some sort of minor problem which delayed their take-off, but they got off at 1914.

All aircraft flew to the target and bombed individually. For the 499th and 500th, briefed altitude for the route out was 4,000 to 4,800 feet. The 497th and 498th flew at 7,000 to 7,800 feet. There were no aborts in the 500th.

About 150 miles from the target, the planes began climbing to their briefed bombing altitudes, staggered between 7,000 and 7,800 feet. At the IP the planes settled onto the bomb run heading of 038 degrees.

The radar bombing data and instructions provided for this mission were detailed and technical. Here is an excerpt:

"2. Approach --
   a. Reach altitude at 32-45, 135-31 [latitude and longitude]; take heading to departure point and make a wind run on Shiono-Misaki. CIAS - 200 mph. Give wind to bombardier.
   b. Turn when over dep pt to a heading to come in 5 miles left of IP. Extend axis of attack to rear of IP; start turn to heading to make good 038 when 1 1/2 nm short of this extension of axis.
   c. Parallel coast along shoreline and pass directly over IP.
   d. Check course along shoreline; pass directly over the control point.
   e. Home on target when visible, making double corrections for any change in bearing.
   f. Keep the ROAP [radar offset aiming point] in top third of scope but do not get below 10-mi range."

Thirty-two planes were able to bomb successfully by radar. One plane had to bomb visually due to radar malfunction. A total of 1,305 x E46 incendiaries were dropped on the target between 0124 and 0222. Due to rack malfunctions, nine bombs failed to drop and had to be jettisoned later. Two large fires were observed in the center of the business district, with several other smaller fires elsewhere.

There were no fighter attacks and only very light flak. There was no battle damage. Again, the main danger came from other B-29's. The Haas crew was flying Z-23, which copilot Don Weber described as "Captain Hays' ship [of course, Hays was now on a boat heading home] and a good new one". Weber had his nerves tested when several B-29's "came far too close indeed".

Exit instructions were very specific: "After bombs away turn while climbing to 22 degrees. Climb 5 minutes, turn to 287 degrees, climb 7 minutes. Turn 191 degrees and fly to land's end at that heading. At land's end take up course to Iwo. Return at 21000 feet."

All planes returned safely to base, although Z-2, Post crew, picked up some icing at 20,000 feet and had to descend to 14,000 to get rid of it.

This had been a special mission for some of the Althoff crew, 881st, and they were determined to mark it. According to right gunner Altott, "We landed at 0800 hours after we gave the field a very low buzz job because it was the pilot's, navigator's and radio operator's last mission." It was also the final mission for John Norton, formerly of the Gray crew, the non-gunners of which had completed their tours five days earlier. Norton
flew this mission as right gunner on Z-36, Arbon crew.

7 Jul 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"7 July: ... Enlisted Men's Day Room officially opened with a party in the evening."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"7 July 1945
... Went deep sea fishing yesterday."

8 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"8 July
S/Sgt. Sam C. Flowers and Sgt. Edmund J. Meyer transferred to Oahu for rotation to the United States."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Sunday, July 8
... Once again I cleaned up beginning at 9:00 A.M. and navigator Robert Wool, bombardier Frank Sharp and I attended morning Chapel services, Chaplain Davis conducting the service. ... After dinner I spent a little time in the library and had a good sleep this afternoon. I typed a letter to Dorothy this evening and saw the show "Rhapsody in Blue" with or by George Gershwin [Gershwin]. Not a bad show either. ..."

9 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"9 July
1st Lt. Joseph R. Mitchell and his crew left for rest leave at Oahu.
S/Sgt. Robert J. Bouchard [right gunner in the McNamer crew] transferred to the United States in order to attend O.C.S. [Officer Candidate School].
T/Sgt. Francis V. Henssler, M/Sgt. Eugene O. Bruce, M/Sgt. Orrick F. Johnson, and M/Sgt. Robert W. Raymond were granted an aeronautical rating of Aircraft Observer (Flight Engineer).
5 Officers promoted per Pars. 2 and 3, SO 190, Hq AAFPOA [Army Air Forces Pacific, Ocean Area], dated 9 July 1945...."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"9 July: Briefing for Mission #76, target Sakai U/A [urban area], at 1500 hours. ..."
From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"9 July 1945  Up early. Played ball. Going out on mission to Sakai south of Osaka. ..."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"[This morning] some of us officers played seven innings with the enlisted men. We got some pretty good exercise here and I know I certainly do need it myself. We have quite a number of men grounded and even in the hospital with cases of the strep throat which seemed to spread fast through the squadron. ... We are going to Sakai, a town just south of Osaka of about 190,000. We take off about 7:00 P.M. The squadron is sending about 12 crews. This may be a little rougher target. May God be with us."

On the night of 9-10 July the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out another incendiary attack, this time against the city of Sakai near Osaka. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 35 total aircraft for this mission. Thirty-three of these planes were assigned normal bombing roles. One, Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Barron crew, was assigned as a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane. Another, Z-42, "Supine Sue", Standen/Isham crew, was to serve as a special weather plane to precede the formation and radio back wind speed and direction data over the target. Z-42 also carried a load of bombs and was to bomb the target after completing its weather duties. A 73rd Bomb Wing staff officer, Maj Francis Johnson, who was probably a weather officer, was also aboard Z-42.

Two of the 33 scheduled bombing aircraft failed to take off, for reasons unknown. These were probably Z-23 and either Z-46 or Z-55, crews unknown. The 31 bombing planes and crews that made it airborne, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Kangas  
Z-47, Dearborn  
Z-49, "Three Feathers III", Adamson  
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden  
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Cordray  
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett  
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser  
Z-39, Holdridge  
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Calhoun  
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock  
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Wolter  
Z-12, McNamer  
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", White  
Z-48, Hoffman  
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell (Shuffler)  
Z-56, Bishop  
Z-57, Whitten  
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Alexander  
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker  
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers  
Z-7, Post  
Z-14, Mather  
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson  
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", H. Jackson  
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", F. Parsons  
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Sealy  
Z-30, D. Jackson
The 500th Bomb Group Day By Day – Part 3 - Victory

Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Bruns
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert

Force Commander on this mission was Lt Col Joseph "Toby" Brannock, 882nd Squadron CO, flying in Z-39 with Capt Curtis Holdridge and crew. Group Operations Officer Lt Col Freeman Parsons broke in a brand-new plane, Z-21 (2nd), on this mission, with a mixed crew including Group Bombardier Maj Richard Hale and Capt Herman Dorfman of the 73rd Wing. Other staff officers on this mission were Group Navigator Maj Berry Thompson, flying with 1/Lt Elmo Alexander and crew in Z-2; Capt Joseph Hamilton of the 73rd Wing, flying with 1/Lt Willie Sasser and crew in Z-28; Group Radar Officer Capt Arthur Miller and Capt Earl Hunt of the XXI Bomber Command, both in Z-6 with 1/Lt Patrick Calhoun and crew; and 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd Squadron RCM Officer, flying on this mission with the Walker crew of the 881st in Z-4.

Take-off was at about 1900. The 500th led the Wing on this mission, followed by the 497th, 498th and 499th in that order. The first 12 planes to take off acted as pathfinders to mark the target for the main body.

Bomb load was 182 to 184 M47A2 incendiary bombs per plane. Ammo load was 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets.

As usual on night attacks, all planes flew to the target and bombed individually. Briefed altitude for the route out was 5,000 to 5,800 feet for the 500th and 497th Groups and 8,000 to 8,800 feet for the 498th and 499th. There was one abort in the 500th when Z-5, Powers crew, lost her #1 engine. Another plane, Z-14, Mather crew, suffered a swallowed exhaust valve in #2 engine and could not make it to the primary. She bombed the city of Susaki on Shikoku as a target of opportunity.

About 200 miles out from the target, planes began climbing to their assigned staggered bombing altitudes between 10,000 and 10,800 feet. Forty-three miles from the target they crossed the IP and turned onto the bomb run heading of 068 degrees. On the way they passed another city south of Sakai already "burning fiercely", in the words of Don Weber, copilot on Z-33, Haas crew. This must have been Wakayama. Weber thought it had been hit by the 58th Wing, but he was mistaken on this point. The 58th struck Sendai in northern Japan this night. It was the 313th Wing that immolated Wakayama.

All this time, the radio operators were straining to pick up the weather data that was supposed to be broadcast by "Wisdom-42", that is, Z-42, the weather plane. Finally it came, but most planes were already between the IP and the target and received it "too late to set in data". They had to make their calculations from their own data.

Flak over the target was rated "generally meager" but there were 20-30 searchlights active which "did a good job of covering our planes". Two B-29's were slightly damaged by flak. Unusually, there were 4-5 nightfighter attacks on this mission, on three different bombers. Weber in Z-33 observed one of these. Fortunately, only one bomber, Z-24, Tackett crew, was hit, and not seriously.

Including the weather plane, 30 x 500th B-29's bombed the primary target. Excellent radar runs were reported. A total of 5,360 incendiaries were dropped on the target between 0233 and 0340. Five aircraft experienced partial rack malfunctions. Huge fires and explosions were observed in the city. Crews reported smoke rising to 17,000 feet and the glow from the fires visible from as far as 100 miles away.

Withdrawal after bombs away was by a right turn to avoid flak areas, then planes gradually climbed to 15,000 feet for the flight home. All aircraft returned safely to Saipan, except for one plane (unidentified) which stopped at Iwo Jima, reason unknown.

10 Jul 45
From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"10 July  WRM[Weather Reconnaissance Mission]-312 -- Lt Mayhugh flying Z-18 dropped leaflet bombs on 15 small cities on the way to Tokyo (10 0330Z) [10 July 1330 local]."

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 July
Capt. Linden O. Bricker [airplane commander, Crew #113] transferred to XXI Bomber Command Flight Control Center. ..."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 July: All crews returned safely [from last night's mission to Sakai] at approximately 0930. ... Received HUSAFOA GO [(Headquarters United States?) Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Area General Orders] #66, 30 June 45, designating 883 Bomb Sq as entitled to battle honors for participation in Western Pacific Campaign Marianas Area."

From the Joseph Altott (Althoff crew, 881st) diary:

"07/10/1945 Flew test flight on ship #23 [Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II"] from 1500-1800 hours."

11 Jul 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"11 July: Capt Standen [originally AC Crew #349A] awarded Silver Star on GO #132, XXI BomCom, 4 July 45. Recommendations for award of OLC to AM [Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal] submitted on 68 men."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"11 July 1945 Up early. Played 881st in ball. Wrote letters -- messed around"

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Wednesday, July 11
... I got a fair sleep all in all. The boys were talking until pretty late and lights on. Some were drinking more than they should have but that has happened plenty before. I didn't do much today. Simcock, Sharp, Weir and I talked for quite a while this morning about flying experiences, etc. [Lt's Marshall Simcox and Thomas Weir were copilot and navigator respectively on the Coffman crew. Lt Frank Sharp was bombardier on the Haas crew.] Simcock (sic) has flown 68 missions with the old (11th?) Bomb Group in ... [three lines illegible] ... afternoon and I received a letter from Mother this P.M. in which was an article from the paper at home telling of my interview after the [28-29 June] Sasebo mission, my 27th. Quite a deal."

12 Jul 45
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“12 July: Briefing at 1630 for Mission #77, target Ichinomiya U/A [urban area]. . . .”

Lt Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) spent part of the day cleaning up around his hut and watching Eugene E. Ryan, known as “E. E.” or “E Square”, navigator on the Robertson crew, plant flower seeds that he had brought back from the States. The Robertson crew had flown several missions with the 882nd in March and April before being selected for Lead Crew School at Muroc AFB, California. After completing their training, they had just returned to Saipan.

Weber also noted in his diary, “We have another night burn mission tonight to hit around Nagoya. Should not be too bad but could be. Take off at 7:45 P.M. May God again be with us on this trip. We need him badly.”

On the night of 12-13 July the 73rd Bomb Wing struck the industrial city of Ichinomiya, eight miles northwest of Nagoya, in an incendiary attack. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 33 bombing aircraft and a Super Dumbo for this mission, 34 planes total. The Super Dumbo was probably Z-45, “Mustn’t Touch”, with the Feathers crew. One of the bombing aircraft, probably Z-46, crew unknown, failed to take off, for reasons unknown. The 32 bombing planes and crews which made it airborne were as follows:

Z-2, ”20th Century Limited”, Alexander
Z-3, ”Ann Dee”, H. Jackson
Z-4, ”Black magic”, Walker
Z-7, Post
Z-10, ”Punchin’ Judy”, Mock
Z-11, ”Lucky Eleven”, Wolter
Z-12, Conn
Z-15, ”Fire Bug”, Pearson
Z-16, ”Je Reviens”, Gieker
Z-19, ”Sharon Sue”, Calhoun
Z-22, ”Silver Thunder”, Rothrock
Z-23, ”Ramblin Roscoe II”, Tackett
Z-27, ”The Cannuck”, Sealy
Z-28, ”Hog Wild”, Gerrity
Z-29, ”Gravel Gertie”, Cordray
Z-30, D. Jackson
Z-32, ”Fever from the South”, Gillert
Z-33, ”Slick Dick”, Haas
Z-34, ”Frisco Nannie”, Farrell
Z-35, ”Pacific Queen”, Shorey
Z-37, ”Belle Ruth”, Robinson
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-41, ”My Pride and Joye”, Barron
Z-43, ”Ben’s Raiders”, White
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-49, ”Three Feathers III”, Bishop
Z-50, ”Fancy Detail”, Petersburg
Z-52, ”20th Century Sweetheart”, Whitten
Z-53, ”The Ancient Mariner”, Connell
Z-55, ”Janice E.”, Sichel
Z-57, Kangas
Z-58, ”Marilyn Gay”, Adamson
Lt Col Joseph "Toby" Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, was originally assigned as Force Commander on this mission but he appears not to have made it to the target. Very likely he was on his favorite plane, Z-23, which only 30 minutes out lost throttle control of #3 engine and had to abort. Maj Horace "Hod" Hatch is listed as the actual Force Commander, but it is not known on which plane he flew. 500th Group staff officers flying this mission were Group Bombardier Maj Richard Hale on Z-57 with 1/Lt John Kangas and crew; Group Air Inspector Maj Prescott Martin on Z-28 with Capt Richard Gerrity and crew on their first mission; and Group Radar Countermeasures Officer 1/Lt Milton Pack on Z-58 with 1/Lt Norman Adamson and crew. Down at the Squadron level, 882nd RCM Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus flew this mission with the Farrell crew in Z-34.

Take-off was about 1945. Bomb load was approximately 182 x M47A2 incendiaries per plane, with eight aircraft also carrying an M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets. The 500th was last in the Wing order on this mission, following the 499th.

All planes flew to the target and bombed individually. The 497th and 498th Groups flew out at between 4,000 and 4,800 feet; the 499th and 500th flew at altitudes between 7,000 and 7,800 feet. There was one abort, Z-23, Tackett crew, as mentioned above.

About 50 miles from landfall, the 31 remaining bombing planes began climbing to their assigned bombing altitudes, which were staggered between 10,000 and 10,800 feet. This gave them time to make a radar wind run, a procedure which provided wind direction and speed data for the bombardier.

At about landfall, the planes hit a bad weather front which threw them around and put many planes off course.

As on the last mission, a special weather plane had been sent ahead by the lead Group, this time the 497th, to broadcast wind direction and speed over the target to the main force. Either the pilot or copilot on each crew was to listen on VHF for this coded broadcast from "Shyster-8", that is, A-8. This experiment had not worked well on the previous mission, and it was apparently not very successful on this mission either.

At the IP the planes were supposed to turn onto course 080 degrees for the bomb run, but due to the bad weather, faulty navigation, malfunctioning radars, or a combination thereof, many aircraft were off course. Actual axes of attack ranged from 45 to 104 degrees, a divergence which increased the danger of collisions.

As they flew through the dark clouds toward the target, the planes found no break in the "soup". Since bombing at night was done by radar anyway, the clouds shouldn't have made a difference, except that Ichinomiya was what was termed a "difficult" radar target. This meant that the city was hard to pick out from the background due to a lack of ground features that might show up distinctly on the radar scope.

Z-7, Post crew, lost its radar before landfall and had considerable trouble locating the target. Finally they did and bombed through the clouds, the last 500th plane to do so. Three other planes also had their radars go out and had to bomb by dead reckoning. The result was that of the 5,641 incendiaries which were dropped by the 500th Group between 0224 and 0345, most were off target. The other Groups apparently did no better. Ichinomiya would require a return visit.

There was no fighter opposition and most planes reported no flak whatsoever. No B-29's were damaged on this mission.

Route back to Saipan was at altitude of 15,000 feet. All planes returned safely.

13 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:
"13 July
10 planes raided Ichinomiya, returned safely, slight damage.
1st Lt. Leonard A. Kahn [navigator on the Althoff crew] transferred to Oahu for rotation to the United States."

The Ichinomiya mission had been the final one for the remainder of the Althoff crew. AC 1/Lt Robert Althoff, navigator 1/Lt Leonard Kahn and radio operator Sgt Andrew Muldoon had completed their tours on 7 July, but the rest of the crew had one more to go, and this was it. Right gunner Joseph Altott was relieved and exultant:

"07/13/1945  ... Our tour of duty is now completed and now we will just be waiting for our shipping orders. We are having a big party tonight!!!! The Good Lord was on my side. All those missions and not even a scratch.
How blessed can one man be?!"

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:


From the Robert Schurmann (McClanahan crew, 883rd) diary:

"Slow timed #41 [Z-41] for hour and a half of flying time."

14 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"14 July WRM-334 -- Lt Mayhugh, Z-18 dropped 24 T-3 leaflet bombs on multiple cities in Japan. (14 0400Z) [14 July 1400 local]

On this day the Haas crew of the 882nd got some unwelcome news. They had been rapidly closing in on the required 35 missions -- some crew members had as many as 31, others had 29 -- and had been eagerly looking forward to finishing their tours in the next ten days to two weeks. The light at the end of the tunnel was clearly visible. But the command had other ideas.

A bunch of new replacement crews had reported in and that was good. But these crews were green. They needed training and a breaking-in period. So somebody decided that the solution was to stretch out the time of the old crews and keep them around a while longer to help train the new crews while the latter flew most of the missions. This didn't sit well with the Haas crew, most of them anyway. Copilot Don Weber, who would later request to stay on Saipan past his normal rotation time, didn't seem to mind, but ring gunner Willie Greene probably expressed the feelings of most of the crew when he wrote in his diary the next day, "Our crew is f----d again -- checking out new crews."

Anyway, the Haas crew was scheduled to go "down to Wing Monday [16 July] for four days to check out Queen's crew [one of the new ones, apparently attending Wing Training School] ...." This likely meant no missions for the Haas crew next week.

In other activity this day, Weber "[h]elped awhile on the tennis court this morning & our crew attended a lecture on the $12,000 Higgins rescue boat carried by B-17s of ASR [air-sea rescue]. This afternoon Lanshaw [copilot on the Sasser crew] (who got out of the hospital today) and I went to see his cousin Bill Pearick [sp?] & 'Spike'
Yencer on the USS Hector. Ate a little ice cream & I left some film there. ... Gillert's & Sealy's crew[s] are going to rest camp [on Oahu]."

15 Jul 45

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Sunday, July 15

... Another Sunday and pretty well spent, too, I would say. Up for breakfast and then reading a little, some gin rummy with Rainey [copilot on the Queen crew] and then at 9:00 A.M. I got ready for church, shining all up. And Wool, Sharp [Wool and Sharp were navigator and bombardier, respectively, on the Haas crew], Rainey and I attended Chaplain Davis' chapel services. He was good as per usual. We had a good dinner with roast beef. And I got a fair nap after dinner. It rained considerable today, too. After supper several of us went down to the 497th and there saw 'This is the Army'. [1-2 words illegible] was a really good [two lines illegible]. ..."

16 Jul 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 July: Briefing at 1500 for Mission #78, target Oita U/A [urban area]. ... Capt Feathers' plane [Z-49, 44-61668] dedicated to Fourth Marine Division at ceremony at Service Center B by Gen O'Donnell. Lt Col McDowell relieved of command of 883 Bomb Sq and assigned as Deputy Commander of 500 Bomb Gp. [Former Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon had been transferred to Headquarters XXI Bomber Command on Guam.] Major John R. Van Trigt assigned as new squadron commander."

Two photos from the Z-49 dedication ceremony are attached.

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Monday, July 16

... This afternoon I read at the library awhile and then I went up to supply, got some wiring and put up a hot wire through the hut so that we can turn on the radio without having the lights on. A mission is going out now at 6:30 P.M. and we aren't on it. Neither is Sasser, Gillert, or Coffman."

The Haas, Sasser, Gillert and Coffman crews were all veterans of the 882nd. Looks like the policy of having the new crews fly most of the missions was being implemented.

On the night of 16-17 July the 73rd Bomb Wing hit the city of Oita in northeastern Kyushu in another incendiary attack. The 500th Bomb Group put up 33 aircraft plus a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane for this mission. The Super Dumbo was Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", flown by the Feathers crew. The bombing planes and crews were as follows:

Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Robertson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Robinson
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Rothrock
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Holdridge
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Force Commander for this mission was Maj Austin LaMarche, Operations Officer of the 882nd Squadron. It is not known in which plane he flew. Other staff officers flying this mission were Group Bombardier Maj Richard Hale in Z-57, Kangas crew; Group Air Inspector Maj Prescott Martin in Z-14, Mather crew; Group Navigator Maj Berry Thompson in Z-30, D. Jackson crew; Group Radar Countermeasures Officer 1/Lt Milton Pack in Z-51, Connell crew; and Wing Chief of Staff Col John Sutherland in Z-24, Tackett crew.

Take-off was at about 1830. One plane, unidentified, had a problem which caused it to take off late. Bomb load was an average of 182 x M47A2 incendiaries per plane. Ten aircraft also carried one M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was again 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets. The 500th was probably third in the Wing order on this mission, following the 499th Group as usual.

As normal on night missions, planes flew to the target and bombed individually. Briefed altitude for the 500th for the route out was 7,000 to 7,800 feet. There was one abort on this mission, Z-55, Sichel crew, which had to turn back due to #2 engine prop failure.

Crews were instructed to climb to the briefed bombing altitudes of 10,000 to 10,800 feet 50 miles before landfall in order to make a "radar wind run". However, they were also told to listen for a coded broadcast of wind direction and speed over the target from an assigned weather plane, "Shyster-8" (A-8 of the 497th Group). This broadcast attempt had apparently not been very successful on previous missions, but on this mission it seemed to work. The Group Commander’s Report notes, "Wind received from wind aircraft was very close to average wind found by navigators."

Briefed axis of attack for the bomb run was 246 degrees. Crews were cautioned to desynchronize their props in order to foil sonic-directed searchlights. Gunners were told not to test-fire their guns, and not to fire unless fired upon.

Thirty-one aircraft were able to bomb by radar, and both navigators and radar operators reported excellent runs on the target. One aircraft with an inoperative radar bombed visually.
A total of 5,800 x M47A2 incendiaries were dropped on Oita, most of them between 0144 and 0218. The aircraft which had taken off late dropped its bombs at 0238. Z-29, Cordray crew, had a rack malfunction which resulted in "18 M-47A-2 bombs loose in the bombay [sic]". These bombs dropped short.

The bombing pattern was "a little strung out", but large fires were seen in the target area and overall bombing results were considered good.

There were no fighter attacks and very little flak. There was no battle damage. However, some of the gunners on the Post crew in Z-7 must have mistaken another B-29 for a Japanese night-fighter, as ring gunner Charles Dickenson reported "Damn near shot down a B29." No further details available.

Withdrawal from the target area was by means of a left turn, with a climb to 17,000 feet for the return home. All planes returned safely to base.

17 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"17 July. Major Van Trigt is relieved of duty as assistant S-3 and assumes command of the 883rd Bombardment Squadron."

With Van Trigt replacing Lt Col McDowell in the 883rd and Maj Hatch having replaced Lt Col Reeve of the 881st on 21 June, there was only one original Squadron Commander left -- Lt Col Brannock of the 882nd.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"17 July: All planes returned safely from Mission #78 [Oita]. Bombed through 5/10 overcast; results from crew observations believed to be good. Cpl O'Brien transplanted flowers around office Quonset."

From the Joseph Altott (formerly Altott crew, 881st) diary:

"07/17/1945  Got up at 0700 hours and turned in all my quartermaster supply and equipment and packed up."

On this day the Haas crew, or part of it, was busy working with the new Queen crew. According to copilot Don Weber, who evidently was not needed for the training, the crews had briefed at 0830 for "another five hour practice session." While that was going on, Weber relaxed and did some chores, including washing his flying suit. He mused that last night's Oita mission, which he had missed, had been a "milk run". Then he wrote, "Bad rumors are really floating around now about our crews going down to wing to check out new crews which are supposed to really come in soon." Later on he went down to the harbor "and looked over these Coronados and PBMs which are really big old flying boats. ..."

Two other members of the Haas crew who had the day off were ring gunner Willie Greene and radio operator John Hoover. They actually got passes to go over to Tinian to visit some old friends. The Haas crew was one of 16 crews which had originally been assigned to the 505th Group of the 313th Bomb Wing in Harvard, Nebraska, but had been transferred in September 1944 to Pyote, Texas, for accelerated training and subsequent transfer to the 73rd Bomb Wing as badly needed replacement crews. The Haas crew arrived on Saipan on 17 Feb 45 and was assigned to the 882nd Squadron of the 500th Bomb Group. Now Greene and Hoover had a chance to catch up on things with their old buddies in the 505th.
When they got on the C-47 that would carry them on the short flight to Tinian, Greene and Hoover got an unexpected bonus. Their pilot turned out to be Tyrone Power, the movie star, who was a transport pilot in the Marine Corps.

On Tinian, the boys located the 505th and had a great visit with old friends "Goss" (Frederic P. Gosselink), Horton, Howe and others. Then Greene went over to the 504th to find out the story on his close friend John "Fatman" Ryan, who he had heard had been shot down. He got the (probably) good news that Ryan had bailed out and had been taken prisoner. Greene and Hoover stayed overnight.

18 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"18 July. The 500th in a shake down mission bombed the Marcus airstrip. Visual bombing from 10,000 [feet] was accomplished, each plane of the 11 A/C Squadron dropping 10 ton[s] of 500 lb G.P.s [general purpose high explosive].

Lt. Mayhugh on WRM [Weather Reconnaissance Mission] dropping leaflets on 4 cities on way to Tokyo."

The "shake down mission" was a practice mission for the benefit of newly arrived crews. A complete list of participating planes and crews is not available, and few details are known. Four of the planes were from the 881st Squadron. One of those was Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", with Capt Ferd Curtis on board. Another was Z-14, flown by Maj Horace "Hod" Hatch, now 881st Squadron CO. The 883rd supplied several crews, including the Hinderks crew, but it is not known which plane they flew. The 883rd Squadron War Diary reported only that all aircraft returned safely but "one or two planes suffered minor battle damage."

On this date there was a taxiing accident involving Z-30 and Z-35 of the 882nd. No details are available in the records, only a photograph, but from that it appears that Z-30 got the worst of it. The right side of her nose was smashed in and she did not fly another mission for the rest of the war. Z-35 was less damaged and was back in the air by 24 July.

Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd), who was always trying to keep busy, started a new project today. He and his friend 2/Lt Arthur Sternhagen [probably a ground officer, not listed in air crew] began "tearing down the porch from Shupe's tent." Capt Eldon Shupe had been the 882nd Squadron Bombardier but had apparently moved elsewhere, and Weber had the idea of moving the porch to the rear of his own quonset, so he got permission from 882nd Squadron Executive Officer Maj Robert Wolcott and went to work. With the aid of a truck, Weber and Sternhagen got the porch loose and moved it over. Meanwhile, Weber noted that "Queen's crew & ours flew the 3rd practice mission today." It is not clear if this was the Marcus mission.

Greene and Hoover came back from Tinian today, this time on a boat, and they had another great treat, "... dinner with the Seabees -- fresh tomatoes, lettuce, steak, french fries, ice cream, etc. -- we thought we had gone to heaven!!! At the 500th we had dried potatoes, powdered milk and lemonade, mutton -- the only time we got fresh eggs & bacon was when we got up early to fly a mission!!"

19 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"19 July. Capt Hunt returns to Guam after completing assignment with the Group Radar Officer."
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"19 July: Briefing at 1500 on Mission #79, Hitachi U/A [urban area]. ..."

Excerpts from a letter from George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st:

"July 19, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

I received your letter with the clippings from the Journal. A V-mail letter and the package came yesterday. The shoes are nice but are a little big. I can wear them all right though. I put some paper in the toes. The shorts were very nice. Thanks for everything. ...

Everything is just about the same. There have been a few good movies lately and a couple of stage shows. The "This is the Army" show was here, it was very good. There was also the "Gene Autry" show which wasn't so good. ...

The food [here] hasn't been very good lately. It runs in streaks.

The way the Navy is shelling Honshu I wouldn't be surprised to see them invade. [The Navy had recently raided Japan, even coming close enough for surface bombardment.] If that will end the war I hope they do it in a hurry. ...

Love
George"

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"19 July 1945  Wrote letters. Messed around -- played ball. Boys going out to Hitachi."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Thursday, July 19

... [A]nother mission has gone out to Japan, but I am remaining on the ground. We may be allowed to fly the next mission, however. At any rate, they are finishing up Jackson tonight & soon Robinson, Shorey and Farrell [these were all veteran 882nd crews] will be through. Sealy is at rest camp & Gillert [two more veteran crews] will go before long. [In order to get more room and privacy,] I moved down to the east north corner of the hut where 'Pinky' Ryalls [2/Lt William Ryalls, flight engineer, lost with the Hughes crew on the night of 23-24 May 45] used to stay and MacDonald [probably F/O Thomas McDonald, bombardier on the W. Parsons crew] before he went to rest camp. ..."

On the night of 19-20 July the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out its eighth straight night incendiary mission. The target this time was the city of Hitachi, on the coast of Honshu 80 miles northeast of Tokyo. The 500th Bomb Group put up 33 bombing aircraft plus a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane for this mission. The participating planes and crews were as follows:
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Alexander
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Powers
Z-7, Post
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", McNamer
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Mock
Z-14, Mather
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Booze
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Robertson
Z-23, "Rambin Roscoe II", Bruns
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Potter
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Gillert
Z-28, "Hog Wild", D. Jackson
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Sawyer
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Shorey
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-39, Holdridge
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Isham
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", White
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Feathers (Super Dumbo)
Z-46, Hinderks
Z-48, Hoffman
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Dearborn
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Petersburg
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Whitten
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-57, Kangas

The Force Commander on this mission was Maj Horace "Hod" Hatch, CO 881st Bomb Squadron. 500th staff officers along on this mission were Group Bombardier Maj Richard Hale in Z-57 with the Kangas crew and Group Radar Officer Capt Arthur Miller in Z-39 with the Holdridge crew. At the Squadron level, 882nd RCM Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus flew with the Potter crew in Z-24.

Take-off was about 1745. Bomb load was 20 x M17 incendiaries and from 86 to 92 M47 incendiaries per plane, with ten planes also carrying one M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets.

Planes flew to the target and bombed individually. Briefed altitude for the route out was 8,000 to 8,800 feet. There was one abort, Z-43, White crew, due to inoperative cowl flaps on #4 engine.

About 200 miles out from the target, the 32 remaining planes began climbing to their assigned bombing altitudes, staggered between 12,000 and 12,800 feet. As they headed toward the IP, the crews were to listen for an encoded weather message providing wind speed and direction sent by a special weather plane, "Shyster-8", which was A-8 of the 497th Group. At the IP, planes turned onto course 012 degrees and headed straight for the target, 41 miles away.

Twenty-nine aircraft were able to bomb by radar as planned; three planes had radar malfunctions and bombed visually. A total of 2,884 x M47 incendiaries, 640 x M17 incendiaries and 9 x M46 photoflash bombs were
dropped on Hitachi between 0039 and 0137. Charles Dickenson, ring gunner on the Post crew in Z-7, reported bombing from 13,450 feet, much higher than the briefed altitude. Due to a solid undercast, no results were directly observed, but large fires were seen in the target area and the glow could be seen from more than 75 miles away.

There was no fighter opposition and only light, inaccurate flak. No planes were damaged.

Withdrawal from the target area was by means of a right turn and climb to 17,000 feet for the flight home. On the way back Z-7 picked up a distress signal from a plane from another Group that had a runaway prop, but they thought he was able to make it to Iwo. All 500th planes returned safely to base.

20 Jul 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"20 July: All crews returned safely from mission [to Hitachi] at approximately 0800. New Marianas Flight Control used for first time on this mission. ... Received 500 Bomb Gp SO #, dd 29 June 45, awarding AAF Technician Badges to 251 men of this squadron."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"20 July 1945
    Nice raid [meaning Hitachi] -- all the fellows got back. Mize, Norton, Whitey & Levi finished -- 35 missions."

Frank Mize was tail gunner on the Arbon crew. John Norton, Francis "Whitey" Kindseth and Levi Zimmer were all gunners on the Gray crew. All four men lived in Quonset Hut B with Greene.

Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew, got some help in the morning with his porch project: "Queen's crew, Rainey, Harwood & Sherrill all helped a lot plus Sharp and Wool. We came along further than I expected. [Robert Rainey, Eugene Harwood and Marion Sherrill were respectively copilot, navigator and bombardier on the Queen crew. Frank Sharp and Robert Wool were respectively bombardier and navigator on the Haas crew.] Then in the afternoon "I rested awhile and got a typhoid & small pox stimulant shot at the Group Dispensary at 3:00 P.M. Read awhile at intelligence and went up to QM Salvage Repair at 4:15 P.M. with Sternhagen to get some awning but were too late. ..."

21 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Jiournal:

"21 July. WRM[Weather Reconnaissance Mission]-374. Lt Mayhugh flying Z-18 dropped leaflets on Tokyo (22 0400Z) [22 July 1400 local]."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"21 July 1945


Over in officer country, Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew, continued working on his porch project. He and friend Bob Wool got a jeep and went back to Quartermaster Salvage, where "we managed to pick up a couple fly tents, pup tents & an old Lister Bag which we want to use for our porch awnings. Then we got some lumber though not enough and began arranging & constructing for our front porch." Weber also commented hopefully that his crew was "through flying with Queen and we may get to fly on the next mission."

22 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"22 July. Capt Miller & Major Hale [Group Radar Officer and Group Bombardier, respectively] appointed Assistant Group Operations Officers."

These appointments were to replace former Asst Opns Officer Maj John Van Trigt, recently advanced to command of the 883rd Bomb Squadron.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 July

M/Sgt Dooley H. Rogers left for rest leave on Oahu."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 July: Routine Sunday. Mission #80 [to Osaka Arsenal/Kuwana] postponed."

Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew went to church in the morning, then in the afternoon "I managed to get a vehicle from Lt Lackman at the motor pool and Lanshaw [William Lanshaw, copilot on the Sasser crew] and I drove over to the 2nd Marines taking Hoover [probably radio operator John Hoover] & a marine friend of his back. Was very slippery coming back, and I about slid off the road once. But we made it O.K. ..."

23 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"23 July. 11 A/C of this Group were dispatched from this Group on a training mission against Marcus Island. A maximum load of 500 lb. G.P.'s [General Purpose High Explosive] were dropped visually with excellent results, only 3 bombs missing the target. Major English [Group Gunnery Officer] and Capt Merrehew [Group Weather Officer Donald Merrihew] participated. Capt Landaker, 883rd Bombardier, assumes duty as Group Bombardier."
A list of the planes and crews which went on the training mission is not available. All that can be determined is that four came from the 881st Squadron, four from the 882nd and three from the 883rd. One of the four from the 881st was Z-4, "Black Magic", with Capt Ferd Curtis on board.

In the Haas crew of the 882nd, ring gunner Willie Greene spent most of the morning "messing around", then went down to the line and cleaned the guns for tomorrow's mission to Osaka. Copilot Don Weber put in some time up at the Wing School flying the Link trainer. He thought it was "sort of fun to fly it all again." Then he came back and got a haircut from the Squadron barber. Weber was happy to learn that he and his crew were going on tomorrow's mission. They were scheduled to fly Z Square 33. As he always did, Weber closed his daily entry with a religious thought: "We may have a rough mission tomorrow and my prayers go sincerely to a righteous and loving God."

Just a small observation. The "square" symbol representing the 73rd Bomb Wing had been removed from the aircraft way back in April, but Weber and all the other crewmen continued to use it when referring to their planes. Habits die hard.

24 Jul 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing planned to hit the Osaka Arsenal again in a daylight precision attack. The first visit to this target on 26 June had been disrupted by bad weather. If the weather again interfered to prevent visual bombing of the Arsenal, the secondary visual target was the Tokyo Bearing Company Dojima Plant, and the primary radar target was the city of Kuwana near Nagoya. The 73rd Bomb Wing put up 173 aircraft for this maximum-effort mission, of which the 500th Bomb Group contributed 46 bombing planes plus a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane. The Super Dumbo was Z-45, Feathers crew. One of the bombing planes, Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett crew, was also assigned to precede the formation as a weather plane to provide weather conditions over the target. On board Z-24 was 882nd Squadron RCM Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, so it is a good bet that some radar jamming was also conducted. The remaining 45 bombing planes were formed into four combat squadrons, as follows:

First (883rd) squadron
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Petersburg/Dougherty
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Barron/Van Trigt
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-48, McClanahan
Z-46, Hinderks
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Hoffman
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Whitten
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", White
Z-47, Dearborn

Second (881st) squadron
Z-7, McNamer/Hatch
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Booze
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-14, Mather
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Orenstein/F. Parsons
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-12, Taylor
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Fox

Third (882nd) squadron
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Conn
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-39, Rothrock
Z-36, "L'il Abner", Shorey
Z-25, Gerrity
Z-26, Collins
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Cordray
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Queen
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Bruns

Fourth (composite) squadron
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Coffman
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Robertson
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Robinson
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Sawyer
Z-56, Bishop
Z-57, Kangas
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Isham
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Sichel
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Alexander
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall

Group CO Col John Dougherty was the Force Commander on this mission and also led the first squadron, in Z-58 with 1/Lt Eugene Petersburg and crew. Deputy Lead was 883rd Squadron CO Maj John Van Trigt, riding in Z-41 with Capt Delbert Barron and crew. 881st Squadron CO Lt Col Horace Hatch led the second squadron in Z-7 with Capt Hugh McNamer and crew. Capt Willie Sasser in Z-28 led the third squadron. Capt John Coffman in Z-23 led the fourth squadron.

Other command and staff personnel on this mission were Group Operations Officer Lt Col Freeman Parsons, flying in Z-9 with a scratch crew including Group Gunnery Officer Maj Leroy English, Group Flight Engineer Capt Arthur Rand, and two officers from the 73rd Bomb Wing. Also, Group Asst Operations Officer Maj Richard Hale flew in Z-23 with Capt Coffman and crew, and Group Air Inspector Maj Prescott Martin rode in Z-14 with Capt Walter Mather and crew.

Take-off was completed by 0400. Bomb load was 7 x 2000 lb M66 General Purpose bombs, except for two planes which carried only 6 x 2000 lb bombs. Ammo carried for this daylight mission was a full load of 500 rounds per gun.

Briefed altitude for the route out was 5000 to 5800 feet. There were two aborts. One of them was the lead aircraft carrying Col Dougherty, Z-58, which lost her #2 engine due to what later was determined to be a blown #10 cylinder head. Dougherty turned over command to Maj Van Trigt in Z-41 and turned back. The other abort was Z-42, Isham crew, with a #2 engine carburetor failure.

Assembly was accomplished at a point west of Kita Iwo Jima. This required about 35 minutes. One hour after arrival of the first aircraft, the formation headed for Japan. About 250 miles from the target, the squadrons began the climb to bombing altitude of 20,000 to 21,500 feet. The departure point was passed at 1125 "in a good 4 squadron group formation," or so stated Col Dougherty in his official report. However, other records show that en route or during assembly the squadron formations had become shuffled and some planes had
become separated.

The original second (881st) squadron had somehow moved into the lead. This squadron had maintained its formation perfectly, with all 11 planes in their assigned positions and Z-7, McNamer crew, still in the lead.

The original third (882nd) squadron was now in second place. The original leader of this squadron, Z-28, Sasser crew, had dropped out for some reason. Z-8, Conn crew, the original No. 2, had taken over the lead, and Z-33, Haas crew, had moved up into the No. 2 position. Z-25, Gerrity crew, had become separated and joined up with a formation from the 498th Group. On the plus side, a straggler from the 497th Group, A-41, had joined this squadron, giving it a total of 11 planes.

The original first (883rd) squadron was now in third place. When Col Dougherty in Z-58 had aborted, Maj Van Trigt in Z-41 had taken over the lead. Z-48, McClanahan crew, had then moved from No. 4 position, leading the second element, into the No. 2 position on Van Trigt's right wing. Maj Wardell Hinderks in Z-46 had replaced Z-48 as second element lead. There were now 10 aircraft in this squadron.

The original fourth (composite) squadron was still in last place, and still led by Z-23, Coffman crew. Z-42, Isham crew, had aborted, but she had fortuitously been replaced by another straggler from the 497th, A-19, which kept the number of planes in the squadron at 11.

As the Group approached Osaka, the clouds below thickened to 8/10 cover. The command had learned from the 22 June mission to Kure, in which they had been surprised by the intense and accurate fire from naval vessels in the harbor, and the lead plane, Z-49, "Three Feathers II", had been badly damaged. The "Pilot's Hints" for this mission warned in big capital letters, "DO NOT FLY OVER NAVAL VESSELS ENROUTE." However, the undercast worked both ways, so today the planes did not have to worry much about naval flak.

As the B-29's came in on the bomb run on course 043 degrees, the bombardiers opened their bomb bay doors and prepared to drop on their squadron leader. But none of the lead bombardiers in the first three squadrons could get a visual on the primary target, so the decision was made to divert to the radar target, Kuwana, which was 15-20 minutes away. Bomb bay doors were closed. Unfortunately, the bombardier on the Queen crew in Z-27, on his first mission, had apparently been distracted by something and looked up just in time to see the bomb bay doors on the other planes close. In an instant of panic, he thought he'd somehow missed bombs away, so he hit the release and the B-29 lurched upward as 14,000 pounds of bombs headed downward. The seven 2,000-pounders were seen to hit in the southern part of Osaka.

The fourth squadron, led by Capt Coffman in Z-23, had better luck. His bombardier was able to pick up the Arsenal and the squadron dropped visually on the primary at 1144, with reportedly good to excellent results. Only one plane had a problem here. When Z-32, Sawyer crew, opened their bomb bay doors, three of their seven bombs dropped prematurely and fell well short.

Meanwhile, the first three squadrons continued to Kuwana and at 1202-03 successfully dropped through complete cloud cover by radar, except for Z-12, Taylor crew, which got only three bombs away. The other four hung up on the racks and had to be jettisoned later. Results on Kuwana were unobserved.

In summary, 11 planes bombed the primary visual target, the Osaka Arsenal, dropping 71 x 2000 lb bombs, while 32 planes, including the weather plane, bombed the primary radar target, the city of Kuwana, dropping 213 x 2000 lb bombs.

There was no fighter opposition. Flak was rated meager to moderate, and over Osaka and Kyoto fairly accurate. Nine B-29's, including Z-8 and Z-33, sustained flak damage and one man, 1/Lt Milton Boomhower, navigator on the Conn crew in Z-8, was wounded by shrapnel in the right shoulder, neck and face.

Exit from the target area was by a right turn. Once clear of Japan, planes were to gradually descend to 17,000 feet for the flight home. Pilots were strongly instructed to "Return to base in elements. This means
EVERYONE." (There appears to have been an unofficial competition among the crews to see who could get back to Saipan first. But it was safer to fly back with friends.)

All planes got back safely, although seven had to stop at Iwo Jima, and two of those had to stay there for an engine change.

The 24 July mission against Osaka Arsenal/Kuwana was the 35th and final mission for 1/Lt James R. Farrell. This young airplane commander from San Francisco had compiled a very commendable record and had developed a reputation for getting through to the target. Since his first mission on 24 December 1944 Farrell had had only two aborts and had hit the primary target on 34 of his 35 credited missions. In addition, he had flown one mission against Iwo Jima (which didn't count toward the 35-mission quota). Despite this fine performance, Farrell was still only a lieutenant in July 1945. The reason was that off-duty he had a tendency to push the limits. One of his latest escapades involved coming back from a drunken party somewhere on Saipan and speeding through the front gate of the strictly off-limits Chamorro camp in a borrowed (from the Squadron Executive Officer) jeep and then straight on out the back, where there was no gate, dragging a hundred feet of barbed wire fence behind the jeep all the way back to his Squadron area, with several MP jeeps in hot pursuit. His chain of command protected Farrell from court-martial on that one, but promotion was out of the question, at least for a while.

Now that Farrell had finished his combat tour, Group CO Col Dougherty asked him to stick around until he could be promoted to captain. Farrell did so, making himself useful in pilot instruction, test flights, etc., and in due course his captaincy came through.

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 July

These men were probably being sent back for lead crew training.

25 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"25 July
    Capt. Patrick Calhoun left for temporary duty at Muroc, California.
    1st Lt. Joseph R. Mitchell and his crew returned from rest leave on Oahu. ..."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"25 July: Lt Gunnarson and crew reported to Squadron."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"25 July 1945
    Messed around. Wrote letters. Went down for Jam Handy [a gunnery simulator]. Saw a show."
From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Wednesday, July 25

... Last night I really enjoyed a good night's sleep I must say. Flying all day is bound to make one tired and I didn't get much of any rest.... I hope our plane [the Haas crew had been flying Z-33 regularly] functions as well on future missions as it has been doing. Good new engines really do help, I mean. Ate breakfast and came back to play gin with Rainey [copilot on Queen crew] after talking to La Marche [Maj Austin LaMarche, Squadron Operations Officer] and asking him not to send my name in for rotation as I want to stay over here for awhile longer. Not many fellows do, I suppose, but I'm in no big hurry to get back and am quite [several words illegible] own crew. ..."

Most men couldn't wait to finish up their tours and get back home, but Don Weber was a different kind of fellow with different priorities.

26 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"26 July. WRM[Weather Reconnaissance Mission]-394. Lt Mayhugh flying Z-14 dropped a max load of T-3 leaflet bombs on seven towns on route to Tokyo (260400Z) [26 July 1400 local].

RSPM[Radar Scope Picture Mission]-23. [1/Lt] Isham flying Z-43 on a Radar Search mission over target Kakai [sp?] Naval Arsenal (26 0300Z) [26 July 1300]."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"26 July: Gave one hour of target study on Matsuyama. Briefing for Mission #81, target Matsuyama, at 1500. ..."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Thursday, July 26

... There is a mission tonight, and luckily enough our crew is going to Matsuyama getting another mission in we hope. Shouldn't be too bad though it could be, too. ... I guess the crew goes down to wing again next week. But I shouldn't have too much trouble getting the rest of my missions in. May God be with us on all these trips as we need Him so very much."

On the night of 26-27 July the 73rd Bomb Wing sent 132 B-29's to strike the city of Matsuyama in northwestern Shikoku in an incendiary attack, with 33 of the bombers coming from the 500th Bomb Group. The participating planes and crews, in order of bombing, were as follows:

Z-39, Bruns
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Robertson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Rothrock
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Alexander
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Mitchell
Z-7, Mather
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Gerrity
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Fox/Dougherty
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Barron
Z-56, Bishop
Z-1, Hinderks (an 883rd crew flying an 881st plane)
Z-12, Taylor
Z-57, White
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Brannock
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Shorey
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Collins
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Conn
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Whitten
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Queen
Z-46, Ryan
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sawyer
Z-26, Sichel (an 883rd crew flying an 882nd plane)
Z-48, Hoffman
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Petersburg

500th Bomb Group CO Col John "Black Jack" Dougherty was Force Commander on this mission, riding in Z-6 with 1/Lt Sidney Fox and crew. Other Group staff officers flying this mission included new Assistant Operations Officer Maj Richard Hale, also in Z-6 with Col Dougherty; Air Inspector Maj Prescott Martin in Z-7 with 1/Lt Walton Mather and crew; and Navigator Maj Berry Thompson in Z-1 with Maj Wardell Hinderks and crew. Also taking part in this mission was 882nd Squadron CO Lt Col Joseph "Toby" Brannock, flying Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Jim Farrell's old plane, probably with some of Farrell's gunners on board finishing up their tours. And the 882nd RCM Officer, 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, went on this mission in Z-24 with the Sawyer crew.

Take-off was completed by 1822. Bomb load was 20 x E46 and 86-92 x M47 incendiaries for most planes. Three planes -- Z-12, Z-9 and Z-51 -- carried 20 x M17 and 91-92 x M47 incendiaries. Ten planes also carried 1 x M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load is unrecorded for this mission but was probably what had become standard for night missions, 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets.

The route to target was as briefed. Copilot Don Weber in Z-33, Haas crew, noted passing near a US Navy task force north of Iwo Jima. One plane, Z-58, Petersburg crew, aborted due to #1 engine failure.

The remaining 32 aircraft reached and bombed the target between 0107 and 0218 at altitudes between 10,900 and 12,100 feet. Excellent radar bomb runs were reported by most crews, but the radar went out on Z-16, requiring the Gieker crew to bomb visually. A total of 580 x E46, 2,966 x M47 and 60 x M17 incendiaries and 10 x M46 photoflash bombs were dropped on Matsuyama by the 500th. Large fires were observed in the city, with smoke rising up to 18,000 feet.

Several crews on this mission reported severe shaking caused by thermal updrafts. One of those crews was the Fox crew in Z-6, with Col Dougherty on board. This plane hit a thermal right in the middle of dropping its bombs. The bomber was flung first up, then down, while the crew were thrown all around inside, especially Maj Hale and the regular copilot Russell C. "Pete" Ashbaugh, who were not belted in. Ashbaugh had come along on this mission even though the Group CO had commandeered his seat. With two passengers, the front compartment was very crowded, and now those passengers had become dangerous flying objects. Bombardier Horance "Buddy" Davis instantly hit the salvo switch to get rid of the rest of the bombs, even as both Dougherty and Hale shouted "Salvo the damned bombs!" Davis was able to immediately shout back, "The damned bombs are
salvoed!" Soon the plane emerged from the smoky blackness over Matsuyama, carrying a little debris but otherwise in good enough shape to carry the shaken, literally and figuratively, crew all the way home.

There was no fighter opposition on this mission and only light flak, which slightly damaged one plane.

All planes returned safely, although one had to stop at Iwo for unknown reasons.

27 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"27 July. In a new policy to forewarn the Japanese of our bombing intentions against their cities, 2 A/C of this Group dropped leaflets on Aomori, Nagaoka, Koriyama and Hakodate. Leaflet mission #1."

An example of the leaflet probably dropped on this mission is attached. It is based on a photograph of Z-19 of the 881st squadron dropping her bomb load over Yokohama on 29 May 1945. The characters in circles on the front are the names of Japanese cities. On the rear is Japanese text warning that these cities will be bombed and urging the population to evacuate.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"27 July: All crews returned safely from Mission #81 [Matsuyama] at approximately 0830. Bombing excellent through CAVU [clear and visibility unlimited] conditions. Staff and Department head meeting in S-2 at 1300 called by [Squadron CO] Major Van Trigt."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Friday, July 27

I am very happy to write again after having flown the number 33rd mission against Japan.... I guess our crew goes down to wing Monday [to train new crews]. I wrote home tonight. Gafford [T/Sgt John P. Gafford, flight engineer on the Haas crew] made FO [Flight Officer] today. …"

28 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"28 July

1 plane raided Japan (propaganda mission) -- returned safely, no damage."

This probably refers to the leaflet mission flown the evening before.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"28 July: Presentation ceremony held on Hanson Field at 0900 hours. Inspection of Squadron Area held by Lt Col Adamson [Group Executive Officer]. 113 officers and enlisted men were presented DFCs and AMs [Distinguished Flying Crosses and Air Medals]. Briefing for Mission #82 at 1500, target Ichinomiya U/A [urban area]. …"
From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

“Saturday, July 28
... Sharp and Wool [bombardier and navigator, respectively, on the Haas crew] and others of the fellows got the AM (air medal) this morning at 8:15 A.M. Gafford [flight engineer on the Haas crew] moved over here from his barracks this morning since he is now a F/O [flight officer] and can’t live with the enlisted men. He and I finished stretching up our front porch tent roof this morning. ... We go to Ichinomiya tonight and it shouldn’t be too bad a trip, I guess. May God be with us on this and all succeeding trips. ...”

On the night of 28-29 July the 73rd Bomb Wing made a return visit to the city of Ichinomiya near Nagoya. The first raid on 12-13 July had not been successful. For this night's incendiary mission, the Wing put up 136 bombers, of which the 500th Bomb Group supplied 33. The participating planes and crews, in order of bombing, were as follows:

Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Rothrock
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", F. Parsons
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Queen
Z-56, Bishop
Z-7, Post
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-1, H. Jackson
Z-12, Taylor
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Bruns
Z-2, "20th Century Sweetheart", Alexander
Z-57, Miller
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", White
Z-46, Hinderks
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Ryan
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell
Z-48, Hoffman
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", LaMarche
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sawyer
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Mitchell
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Petersburg
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Fox
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Whitten
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Powers
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Gerrity
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Pierce
Z-26, Collins
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Sichel

Force Commander on this mission was Group Operations Officer Lt Col Freeman Parsons flying Z-29.

Take-off was completed by 1759. This take-off, like that of the previous mission, was unusual in that it was to the
west. Usually, take-offs at Isley Field were to the east and out over Magicienne Bay. (The change was probably necessary due to a shift in wind direction.) Because the pilots had become used to using the 200-foot height of the cliff at the east end of the runway to drop down nearly to sea level and gain badly needed air speed, the command felt it necessary to remind them this time, "After takeoff do not drop below runway level."

Bomb load was 20 x E46 and 86-92 x M47 incendiaries for most planes. Z-51 carried 20 x M17 and 92 x M47 incendiaries. Eleven planes also carried one M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was 200 rounds per gun in each of the three rear turrets.

As normal on night raids, planes flew to the target and bombed individually. Briefed altitudes for the route out were between 6000 and 6800 feet. Pilots were cautioned to leave altitudes between 4000 and 5000 feet free for aborting planes. But there were no aborts for the 500th on this mission. Don Weber, copilot on the Haas crew in Z-33, noted that "the engines ran very well and we had a good trip each way."

About 230 miles out from the target the planes began their climb to briefed bombing altitudes, which were staggered between 14,000 and 15,400 feet. The weather was excellent. The approach to the target was to be completely by radar, and the instructions for the radar operators and navigators were extremely detailed. Here is an excerpt:

"2. Approach --
   a. Reach bombing alt just prior to landfall; make wind run between landfall & dep pt [departure point]. USE, HOWEVER, THE RADIOED WIND FOR TARGET NAVIGATION AND BOMBING [this probably refers to the wind data transmitted by a weather plane sent over the target ahead of the main formation].
   b. Start turn to IP when 5 nm north of shoreline; plan to come in 7 nm left of IP. Start turn to IP when 1-1/2 nm south of IP and go over IP on course [specified elsewhere as 099 degrees true].
   d. Proceed down the valley and pass 2 nm south of Ogaki.
   e. With BRL [bomb release line] on 13 nm, find city -- BRL will hit east edge of Biwa on lower side and sweep through Ichi on upper side.
   f. Pass down the hypotenuse of the Ogaki-Gifu-Ichi triangle.
   g. Pick up river and bridges midway between Gifu and Ichi. Target is 3 nm to east of river and about 4 nm SSW of bridges.
   h. When target is positively identified, keep in top third of scope down to not more than 10nm range. Cut down Gain to bring in bright city return.
   i. Careful scope interpretation is mandatory."

The planes of the 500th passed over the target between 0104 and 0148, dropping a total of 636 x E46, 20 x M17 and 2,971 x M47 incendiaries and 11 x M46 photoflash bombs on Ichinomiya. Most planes had excellent radar runs. Five aircraft -- Z-23, Z-28, Z-57, Z-4 and Z-22 -- made radar runs with visual corrections, and one, Z-48, had to make a completely visual run when her radar went out.

Charles Dickenson, ring gunner on the Post crew in Z-7, noted being "picked up by approximately 15 searchlights over target. Were in them approximately 4 minutes." They were luckily not hit during this time.

Flak was light and ineffective, but there was more fighter opposition over the target tonight than the 500th had experienced in some time. Eleven fighter attacks were reported and four B-29's were hit, though none seriously. In his official report, Group CO Col John Dougherty speculated that the increased fighter opposition was probably due to what he termed the "LeMay Early Warning Radio Set". This may be a reference to the weather messages broadcast to the bombing force by the weather plane sent ahead to the target for that
purpose.

In addition, the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal notes that Ichinomiya was one of the cities "which had received 'warning' through leaflets dropped yesterday." Col Dougherty was not the only one concerned about the Japanese being warned. Willie Greene, ring gunner in the Haas crew, flying Z-33 on this mission, recorded later in his diary, "They warned the Japs we were coming -- Had me scared!!" But Z-33 luckily did not run into any fighters.

Fires burning in the target area were visible for more than 150 miles away and smoke rose as high as 18,000 feet.

The unlucky Fox crew in Z-6 again hit a thermal on this mission. After another terrifying ride, they came out into the clear and breathed a sigh of relief, but it turned out they breathed too soon. There were incendiary clusters hung up in the forward bomb bay, thanks to a shackle twisted from the violent movements in the thermal. The bombardier, Horance "Buddy" Davis, went into the bomb bay, and on the narrow ledge 12,000 feet above the burning city, without a parachute, successfully defused the bombs but could not get the shackle to let go. Later, out over the ocean, Davis went back out with muscular copilot Pete Ashbaugh, who hacked at the thick bomb lugs with a hatchet until they gave way, and finally out went the clusters.

All planes returned safely to base. Z-33, which had been the sixth plane to bomb, made good time on the way back and was the first to touch down at Isley. Getting back first meant first to be debriefed (no waiting) and then first to the pharmacy, where you got your "relaxing medication for sleeping", meaning a shot of liquor. According to Willie Greene, he and AC Otto Haas rarely missed their medication.

29 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"29 July

30 Jul 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 July
Capt. Kelvin B. Parker left for rest leave on Oahu.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 July: Gave orientation talks on security and censorship to two new crews that reported to the Squadron today."
From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"30 July 1945  Went to church yesterday. Norton, Zimmer, Kinset & Betencourt left today. [John Norton, Levi Zimmer and Whitey Kindseth were all gunners on the Gray crew; Manuel Bettencourt was the radar operator on the Donald Jackson crew. All four men lived in Greene's quonset.]

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Monday, July 30
   It really rained last night, and I enjoyed the night of sleep I could get. Got up for breakfast and returned to have a good rest again. Then I played gin [rummy] with Rainey [copilot on Queen crew], who seems to beat me consistently enough. I am very glad that I do not play cards for money. This afternoon we pilots had a meeting at Group S-2 [Intel] with the communications officer who gave us some poop on shackel code [?] and so forth. Afterward I spent some time talking with James Benson [copilot on the White crew of the 883rd] who has in 21 missions. White [AC Ben White of the 883rd] is now assistant operations officer. I came back and built a big old solid chair. Received several papers and a 'Post' & 'Lutheran Standard' this P.M. Saw the show this evening. God be thanked for His great mercy."

31 Jul 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"31st July. Leaflet mission #2. This Group dispatched 2 A/C with prewarning leaflets on the cities of Otsu, Toyama, Nagano and Maebashi."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"31 July: Holiday on the line for all crews with their planes in commission. Submitted recommendations for Air Medals."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"31 July 1945  Got paid today -- $1.76 -- lost $36 in cards -- $150 soldier deposit."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Tuesday, July 31
   ... Ate breakfast and then played Rainey in some gin. Came out about even this time, too. We were paid this morning, and I got $117.70 here... not including $21.00 for meals & $6.50 insurance. As a single 1st Lt. I get about $296.00 each month. After dinner I went up to finance and sent home $110.00 in addition to the $150.00 allotment already taken out & sent home as per usual. ... Attended Bible Study Hour tonight and saw the show. ..."

1 Aug 45
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 Aug: Squadron Staff meeting held at 1230. Two new crews were given indoctrination talk by Major Van Trigt, Black and Johnson [respectively CO, Ops Off and Exec Off]. Briefing for mission 83 held at 1600, target Toyama U/A [urban area]. Two hours target study given crews on mission. ..."

Over in the 882nd, T/Sgt William Greene, ring gunner on the Haas crew, was assigned an additional duty today: "I'm new barracks chief." But Greene was more focused on tonight: "Going out tonite. This time -- a long trip on the other side of Kyushu." Actually, Greene got his islands mixed up. The mission was to Toyama, on the far side of Honshu.

Today was a day of relaxation for copilot Don Weber of the same crew: "Today was also spent quite leisurely as I didn't have anything special to do. Did play Rainey [copilot on the Queen crew] gin again, beating him definitely for once too. Received no mail today, either. This afternoon after dinner I was reading in the library when who should walk up but 'Westy' George Westenberger. It had been since a year ago June that I had seen Westy. His crew stopped here for some parts I believe. He is on Guam with the 3rd Photo Recon outfit and we spent until 3:30 P.M. talking over old times. He has only eight missions in as yet. We had briefing at 4:00 P.M. for a maximum effort against Toyama. With God on our side, who can lose?"

On the night of 1-2 August the 73rd Bomb Wing sent 184 B-29's in a maximum-effort incendiary attack against the city of Toyama on the west coast of Honshu. The city had been warned by leaflets dropped the day before that it was on the list of possible targets. The 500th Bomb Group put up 42 aircraft for this mission. The participating planes and crews were as follows:

Z-2, "20th Century Sweetheart", Alexander
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Fox
Z-7, McNamer
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Covington
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall
Z-12, Taylor
Z-14, Rogers
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Bowers
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Post
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Pierce
Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Robertson
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Brannock
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sawyer
Z-26, Rothrock
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Queen
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Mock (an 881st crew flying an 882nd plane)
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Gerrity
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Bruns
Z-36, "Li'l Abner", Alderman
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Collins
Z-39, Coffman
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Van Trigt
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", Smith
Z-46, Hinderks
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-48, Hoffman
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Black
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", F. Parsons
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Whitten
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Sichel
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell
Z-55, "Janice E.", Ryan
Z-56, Bishop
Z-57, Miller
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Adamson

Group CO Col John Dougherty was Force Commander for this mission, riding in Z-14 with 1/Lt Carlton Rogers and crew, who were flying their first mission. Deputy Force Commander was Group Operations Officer Lt Col Freeman Parsons, piloting Z-50 with a scratch crew including Assistant Group Operations Officer Capt Arthur Miller and Group Flight Engineer Capt Arthur Rand. The other Assistant Group Operations Officer, Maj Richard Hale, went on this mission in Z-39 with Capt John Coffman and crew. And Group Gunnery Officer Maj Leroy English flew with 883rd CO Maj Van Trigt in Z-41. Van Trigt and English were probably flying with the brand-new Thomas J. Milam crew.

Other Squadron command and staff flying this mission were 882nd CO Lt Col Joseph Brannock in his favorite plane, Z-23, and 883rd Operations Officer Maj Vance Black in Z-49. And riding along with Brannock in Z-23 was 882nd RCM Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus.

Take-off was completed by 1950, in order by Squadron 883rd-881st-882nd. Pilots were cautioned to be careful when taxiing and specifically to watch out for several ditches at the west end of Runway B along the taxi strip, and also in front of the tower.

The Haas crew in Z-33 had a little trouble starting #4 engine, and they kept a wary eye on it as they began their take-off. Although it backfired once a short distance down the runway, they got off okay and the engine settled down just fine for the rest of the trip.

Bomb load was 20 x M17 or E46, and 83 to 91 x M47 incendiaries per plane, plus 1 each M46A2 WP (white phosphorous) bomb. Ammo load was what had become standard for night missions, 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets.

As normal on night missions, planes flew to the target and bombed individually. Briefed altitudes for the route out were 8000 to 8800 feet. One plane, probably Z-57, Miller crew (they were not on the mission credit list), was forced to abort due to unspecified mechanical difficulties. At some point prior to landfall, aircraft began climbing to their bombing altitudes, staggered between 12000 and 12800 feet. Z-6, Fox crew, lost an engine at landfall but continued to the target.

The skies were crowded tonight with about 800 B-29's, and the crews had to be alert. Charles Dickenson, ring gunner on the Post crew in Z-19 recorded being "nearly rammed three separate times by B29's." Dickenson also recorded clear weather over the target with a partial moon. Toyama was burning well with smoke up to 18,000 ft, and there were thermals over the target. Z-19 was flung about out of control at one point, and the crew thought they might have lost their rudder or an engine. But they came out of it. Then something scarier happened. Dickenson wrote: "A B29 200 ft. higher than us at 2 o'clock damn near dropped his bombs on us. We turned into bombs, then at the last minute turned away. They fell on all four sides of us. God was with us for it was very close."

Having been tossed around by thermals on the last two missions, the Fox crew in Z-6 was anxious not to repeat
the experience, especially since they were flying on only three engines this time, so on his bomb run bombardier Buddy Davis made sure they passed sufficiently to the right of the smoke cloud.

The 41 planes of the 500th that reached the target dropped a total of 579 x M17, 3690 x M47 and 240 x E46 incendiaries, plus presumably the M46A2 white phosphorous bombs, by radar between 0206 and 0315. Ground winds swept the flames across the city, creating a general conflagration. Willie Greene, ring gunner on Z-33, Haas crew, described it as "really a nice fire". Smoke rose above 15,000 feet. According to bomb damage assessment, 99.4 percent of the city was destroyed.

There was no fighter opposition and only light flak. One plane sustained minor flak damage.

All planes returned safely to base, except for the plane which lost an engine at landfall, Z-6. That required a landing at Iwo Jima for an engine change.

2 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"2 August. All line personnel given a holiday."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 Aug: All crews returned from mission [to Toyama] with crews reporting excellent observed results. Capt Ryan completed his 35 missions. Gave orientation talk to two new crews." [One of these was probably the John Herndon crew, which is known to have arrived on Saipan this day. - JEB]

Over in the Haas crew of the 882nd, ring gunner Willie Greene noted in his diary that he had developed a painful fungus growth, a common malady in the tropics, in his left ear. Copilot Don Weber was enjoying the feeling of relief at having completed his 35th mission last night. Weber, a very religious man, assigned all the credit to God.

3 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"3 August Wing Holiday.
   Lt Mayhugh [in] Z-28 ["Hog Wild"] dropped leaflets on 7 towns on route to Tokyo."

A battle damage report shows that Z-28 suffered some minor flak damage to a ring cowl on this mission. Even dropping leaflets at this stage of the war was not without danger.

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Friday, August 3
Fair [weather]
   I should now feel fully relaxed I know after having finished my missions, but because I am not sure of what to expect in the way of a future deal I still can not feel really at ease, you know. I got up this morning with the
intention of seeing Colonel Brannock and discussing the situation with him. However, he was not in his office and about 10:00 A.M. Otto [AC Raymond Otto Haas] came over and asked me if I would fly with Alderman's crew for him. [Alderman's was a new crew in the 882nd, flying their first mission on 1-2 Aug.] This I was glad to do as Otto was not feeling so very well. So we took off at about twelve noon in Z Square 36 and flew formation to Pagan [a still Japanese-held island about 200 miles north of Saipan] dropping live bombs before coming back for some gunnery and landed at 4:40 P.M. I received a most welcomed letter from Mother today and a 'News and Views'. Saw the Al Pierce show this evening with the boys and had a mild party in Lanshaw's [copilot on the Sasser crew] hut."

4 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"4 August. 12 A/C this Group participated in Training Mission to Truk. Each dropped 40 x 500 pounders visually (1645K). Radar Search mission Hando [sp?], Japan."

There's not much in the official records about this training mission but one of the participating crews was the Sasser crew of the 882nd. Radio operator Rudy Nelson kept some mission notes. He recorded that they bombed from 19,000 feet and the mission lasted seven hours. Nelson added, "No credit received on this mission but there was plenty flack."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


On this day the Ware crew, a replacement crew, arrived on Saipan, were assigned to the 500th Bomb Group, and were further assigned to the 882nd Squadron as Crew #241A.

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Big argument over guns being cleaned. Wrote letters. I'm Barracks Chief now. Lot of new men in (sqd?)."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Saturday, August 4

Showers

This is definitely the rainy season on Saipan, I would say. I had a good night's sleep last night after having flown for five hours with Alderman's crew yesterday afternoon and riding over to see the Al Pierce show yesterday evening. I managed to talk to Colonel Brannock this morning about whether I might stay and the kind of job I would get. He told me I would hear from him in a day or so. He flew with Sasser on a practice mission to Truk with several other ships. Captain Jackson [probably Donald Jackson, AC Crew #236] had me working for him this afternoon taking [three lines illegible]. I received my rating on orders for [MOS] 1093 [Pilot, Very Heavy Bomber] today from group...."

It is important to put Don Weber's offer to stay beyond his 35 missions in proper context. Bear in mind that this serious and dedicated young man had no idea that the war would end in a few days. He no doubt expected like practically everyone else that a bloody invasion of Japan would be necessary, in which case the B-29 outfits
would be fully engaged and in harm's way. He could have taken the easy way out and just rotated home, but he felt the obligation to do more, even at the risk of his life.

5 Aug 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"5 Aug: Cpl O'Brien left on 3 day pass to Guam. Briefing for Mission 84, target Nishinomiya at 1600. ..."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"5 August 1945 Up early & cleaned guns -- missed church. We are going out tonite. We are radar jamming plane -- circle target for 1 hour & half."

From the Don Weber (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"Sunday, August 5

Fair

A mighty nice Sunday, all in all. Up for eggs for breakfast and then cleaning all up for church. Sharp, Wool, Rainey, Custador and myself went to Chapel services at 10:30 A.M. [The first three names are familiar quonset mates of Weber's. Custador was probably James A. Cusator, copilot on the Burnham crew, newly arrived in the 882nd.] Holy Communion was served today and an offering taken for foreign missionary work. We had a fair dinner with chicken today. I received two most welcomed letters from Mother this A.M. and one from Aunt Gertie W. Major Jackson it is now. [Weber was working with Maj Donald Jackson, an AC in the 882nd, at this time.] He is an old West Point man who came over as a captain. I saw the game [probably baseball] between 73rd and 313th wings this afternoon. Mighty good game it was, too. ..."

On the night of 5-6 August the 73rd and 314th Bomb Wings struck the city of Nishinomiya, located on Honshu between Osaka and Kobe, in another incendiary attack. The 500th Bomb Group put up 35 aircraft for this mission.

As the lead Group on this raid, the 500th supplied the "wind run" aircraft, meaning a plane sent ahead to determine and radio back wind speed and direction over the target. Assigned to this duty was Z-16, "Je Reviens", McNamer crew, which also carried a full load of bombs to drop on the target after they completed their initial mission.

The 500th was also tasked with supplying two radar jamming aircraft. These planes, carrying slightly reduced bomb loads, were to precede the formation by 30 minutes, bomb the target, then climb to about 17,000 feet and circle the target area for an hour and a half operating their radar jamming equipment. Two veteran planes and crews were selected for this duty -- Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas crew, and Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell crew.

Of the remaining 32 planes, 12 were to act as pathfinders, taking off first and marking the target area. The pathfinder planes and crews were as follows:

Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Alexander
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Pearson
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Post
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Rothrock
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-39, Coffman
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Gillert
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Bishop
Z-46, McDowell
Z-47, Dearborn
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay", Adamson

The planes and crews in the main body were as follows:

Z-4, "Black Magic", Walker
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Powers
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Mitchell
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Covington
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall
Z-12, Taylor
Z-14, Rogers
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Sealy
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sawyer
Z-25, Alderman
Z-26, Bruns
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Gerrity
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Collins
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", Smith
Z-48, Hoffman
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Sichel
Z-57, Queen (an 882nd crew flying an 883rd plane)
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Miller
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", White
Z-3, "Ann Dee", Fox

Force Commander for this mission was Deputy Group Commander Lt Col William McDowell, flying in Z-46 with the Hinderks crew, less Maj Hinderks. The listed Deputy Force Commander was 882nd Squadron CO Lt Col Joseph Brannock, but it is not known in which plane he flew. Group Radar Countermeasures Officer 1/Lt Milton Pack flew with one of the jamming aircraft, Z-53. Flying with the other jamming plane, Z-33, were 882nd Squadron RCM Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus and Lt Col Thomas McNeal from the 73rd Bomb Wing, probably also a radar officer.

Take-off was completed by 1914. As mentioned, the 500th was the lead Group on this mission. Within the Group, take-off was by squadron, 881st-882nd-883rd. Lt Don Weber, who had already finished his 35 missions with the Haas crew of the 882nd, came down to the runway to get some pictures and stood with Chaplain Davis to wave his friends off.

Bomb load varied considerably by plane and specific mission. Most planes carried 38 or 39 x E46 incendiaries plus 1 x T4E4 fragmentation cluster. Ten of these planes additionally carried an M46 photoflash bomb. Three planes -- Z-10, Z-15 and Z-19 -- carried 39 x M17 incendiaries plus 1 x T4E4 frag cluster. One plane, Z-3, carried a mix of 19 x E46 and 20 x M17 incendiaries. The two radar jamming planes, Z-33 and Z-53, carried 27 x E46 incendiaries and 1 x T4E4 frag cluster. Finally, two of the pathfinder aircraft, Z-39 and Z-58, carried M64 500 lb General Purpose bombs (34 in Z-39 and 33 in Z-58), apparently to be used against the railway junction that the formation would use as the Aiming Point.

Ammo load was the usual for night missions, 200 rounds per gun in the three rear turrets.

As standard on night missions, planes flew to the target and bombed individually. Briefed altitudes for the route...
out were between 8000 and 8800 feet. Pilots were cautioned not to fly below 5000 feet unless aborting, but there were no aborts for the 500th on this mission.

As the planes approached Japan they climbed to their briefed bombing altitudes, which were staggered between 14,000 and 14,800 feet. As they neared the target, they received the data broadcast by the wind run aircraft. Wind direction and speed over the target were reported as 119 degrees and 23 knots. At the IP the bombing planes turned to course 029 degrees and settled in on the bomb run.

As they passed over the target from 0129 to 0206, the planes of the 500th dropped over 280 tons of bombs on the city. Most planes were able to make a full radar run. Six planes dropped by radar with visual corrections. And the radar failed on Z-29, which then had to make a visual drop. Fortunately, the weather was good and there was some light from the fires that had been started below. The final planes of the Group reported the beginnings of a general conflagration.

Flak was light and ineffective. There were four reported fighter attacks and one fighter was claimed damaged by B-29 gunners. No B-29's were damaged on this mission.

All planes returned safely, although four had to stop at Iwo on the way back.

6 Aug 45

On this day at 0815 the B-29 "Enola Gay" of the 509th Composite Group based on Tinian dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima in southern Honshu, completely destroying the city and killing an estimated 80,000 people.

On Saipan, it must have taken some time for this news to get around. Nothing of this incident was recorded in the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal or the 883rd Squadron War Diary. Also, neither Willie Greene nor Don Weber of the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron noted anything about it in their diaries for this date.

Greene was probably recovering from last night's mission to Nishinomiya, which was the last one for his crewmates navigator Robert Wool and radio operator John Hoover. Greene now had only one more to go himself.

Weber was very busy all day, first helping out Maj Jackson in the 882nd orderly room, then flying as an instructor pilot for the new Armstrong crew, and finally getting a chance to practice approaches and landings and LORAN navigation. He didn't have time to write his daily diary entry until just before midnight.

In less earth-shattering news, Z-29 of the 882nd suffered a taxiing accident today when somebody misjudged a turn and ran her right wheel off the hard surface into a ditch or pothole. From a photograph of the incident it appears that the right gear collapsed, with consequent damage to the right wing, propellers and engines. Z-29 would fly no more missions in the war.

7 Aug 45

On this date the 20th Air Force sent 131 bombers from four of its Wings, including the 73rd, to bomb the Toyokawa Naval Arsenal, southeast of Nagoya, in a precision daylight attack. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 11 aircraft plus one Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane for this mission. The Super Dumbo was T-35, borrowed from the 498th Bomb Group, and it was flown by the Mitchell crew of the 881st Squadron. The 11 scheduled bombing planes and crews were as follows:

Z-39, Coffman
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Rothrock
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Sawyer  
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Post  
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Taylor  
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Alexander  
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Alderman  
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Adamson  
Z-57, Connell  
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", Smith  
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Bishop  
Z-37 and Z-8 had unspecified problems prior to take-off and were scratched, leaving nine planes to make it airborne.

Capt John Coffman in Z-39 led this squadron-sized formation on this mission.

Take-off was completed by 0425. Bomb load was 28 to 30 x M64 500 lb GP bombs per plane. The planes carried a full ammo load of 6000 rounds, 500 rounds per gun.

Planes flew individually at altitudes between 7000 and 7800 feet to the Assembly Point south of Kita Iwo Jima, where they formed into their single combat squadron. Assembly was accomplished in approximately 30 minutes. The 500th planes then followed in trail behind the squadrons from the 498th and 499th Groups to the climb point. The 73rd Wing was first in the Force order, followed by the 58th, 313th and 314th Wings.

There was one abort when somewhere along the way Z-19, Post crew, lost her #2 engine, later determined to be due to a blown cylinder head.

At the climb point, the remaining eight planes began ascending to the briefed bombing altitude of 16,000 feet, which they were to reach 50 miles from landfall. The Departure Point was passed at 1119. From the DP on to the target the formation was escorted by approximately 25 friendly fighters.

There was a Wind Run aircraft, probably from the 498th Group, which preceded the formation and broadcast wind data back to the main body every three minutes.

Weather was clear and the formation was able to make a good visual run on the target on heading 059 degrees true. Somewhere along the way, T-58 of the 498th Group had joined the 500th formation and bombed with them at 1131. The 500th planes dropped 227 x M64 500 lb General Purpose bombs on the target, with excellent results.

Flak was heavy caliber but meager and inaccurate. There was no fighter opposition. No battle damage was sustained.

All planes returned safely to base.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"7 Aug: ... [W]ent to Guam to observe 76 [must be typo for 16] Bomb Group, 315 Bomb Wing briefing rooms with [Group Operations Officer] Lt Col Parsons. Returned at approximately 1630. All crews returned from the mission safely; results unobserved."

Both Willie Greene and Don Weber of the Haas crew, 882nd Squadron, heard today about the atomic bomb strike on Hiroshima yesterday morning and mentioned it in their diaries, though details were confused and scanty. Nobody had ever heard of an atomic bomb.
After noting that today's mission to Toyokawa -- he had not been on it -- had reportedly been easy, Greene wrote: "New bomb has come out -- atomical. 1 bomb destroyed 4 miles of one city, 60%. Terrible."

Weber spent the morning helping out in the orderly room again, then went out to the USS Hector with his buddy Lanshaw, copilot on the Sasser crew, to retrieve a couple of rolls of film that he had left on 14 July for Spike Yencer to develop. Weber was pleased at how the negatives looked but now had to find some way to get pictures printed. In the final sentence in his diary, Weber wrote, "A new atom smasher bomb is supposed to really hit Japan now."

8 Aug 45

On 15 June 1944, 47 planes of the 58th Bomb Wing had made the first B-29 strike against the Japanese homeland when they hit the steel-producing center of Yawata on northwestern Kyushu. Results at that time had been very disappointing. Today, fourteen months later, the 58th came back to Yawata, but as part of an armada of more than 300 B-29's from four Wings in a daylight incendiary attack -- and this time the results would not be disappointing. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 28 aircraft for this mission, organized into three combat squadrons, and all planes made it airborne. The participating planes are listed below. Unfortunately, most crew assignments for this mission are unknown.

First squadron
Z-7, McNamer
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy"
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Post
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque"
Z-4, "Black Magic"
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall
Z-15, "Fire Bug"
Z-12
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", White/Whitten?
Z-3, "Ann Dee'"

Second squadron
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Sasser
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II"
Z-26
Z-25, Sealy
Z-22, "Silver Thunder"
Z-35, "Pacific Queen"
Z-37, "Belle Ruth"
Z-27, "The Cannuck"
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees"

Third squadron
Z-56, Van Trigt
Z-36, "Li'l Abner"
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-58, "Marylyn Gay"
Z-48, Hoffman?
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye"
Z-14
Z-55, "Janice E."
Z-47, Dearborn
Group CO Col John "Black Jack" Dougherty was the Force Commander for this mission, but it is not known on which plane he flew. Capt Hugh McNamer led the first combat squadron in Z-7; Capt Willie Sasser led the second squadron in Z-21; and Maj John Van Trigt led the third squadron in Z-56.

Take-off was completed by 0335. Bomb load was from 23 to 28 x M17 incendiaries per plane. Ammo load was a full 6,000 rounds, or 500 rounds per gun.

Planes flew individually at altitudes from 6000 to 6800 feet to the assembly area, which was east of Kita Iwo Jima. There were two aborts. Z-24 had a problem with her #3 engine, later determined to be a nose section reduction gear failure, and Z-47, Dearborn crew, aborted for reasons unknown.

Assembly was accomplished in 30 minutes at 9000, 9800 and 9200 feet for the 883rd, 881st and 882nd Squadrons, respectively. The 500th squadrons then moved off to the climb point following the 499th Group.

Fighter escort on this mission was provided by P-47's from Okinawa.

Charles Dickenson, ring gunner on the Post crew in Z-16, who were flying deputy lead position in their squadron, noted that this was the first daylight mission they had been on.

At the climb point, the 26 remaining planes began ascending to the briefed bombing altitudes of 21,000 to 22,000 feet. The 500th passed the departure point on time at 1030, with its three squadrons stacked high to the left. Accurate wind data was received from the "wind run" aircraft already over the target. The planes settled in on the bomb run on a heading of 029 degrees true.

The first and second squadrons dropped their bombs at 1135 and the third squadron was right behind at 1136. A total of 654 x M17 incendiaries fell on Yawata. All bombs were seen to hit in the target area, adding to the fires already raging there. Smoke rose up to 25,000 feet. A very large portion of the city was destroyed.

Five B-29’s were hit by flak, which was moderate and reasonably accurate, but no planes were seriously damaged. There was no fighter opposition.

Altitude for the route back was 14,000 feet. Planes were encouraged to return in elements.

All aircraft returned safely, although four landed at Iwo Jima. The Post crew in Z-16 landed just in time to avoid a "terrific rain storm."

Five members of the Haas crew, including airplane commander Ray Haas and ring gunner Willie Greene, still needed one more mission to complete their tours, but they had disappointingly not been scheduled for the Yawata mission today.

From the William Greene diary:

"8 August 1945 Boys went out again -- this time to Yawata -- it wasn't too bad. They saw 24's, 47's, 51's, 25's [B-24's, P-47's, P-51's, B-25's] & others up there. My [infected] ear still hurts."

Copilot Don Weber had finished his 35 missions back on 2 Aug, but he wasn’t just sitting around. This morning he helped out in the orderly room again, then was sent to assist in training a new crew: "[A]t 10:00 A.M. I found out I was going to have to fly in Lt. Farrell's place with Lt. Wood's crew. So we flew in Z Square 33 for 5-1/2 hours until 5:45 P.M. doing a little formation and some radar bombing. Everything went plenty well enough, however."
At 1101 today the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki by “Bockscar”, a B-29 of the 509th Composite Group based on Tinian. The explosion destroyed much of the city and killed at least 60,000 people. But word of this second nuclear attack took some time to arrive on Saipan. Today the men of the 500th Bomb Group were focused on other matters.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"9 Aug. Russia declares war on Japan."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"9 August 1945 Russia wars on Japan. Messed around. Wrote letters. Mize [Frank Mize, tail gunner on the Arbon crew (#234)] went home. We are the only crew (old) left in quonset 'B'."

Don Weber also mentioned Russia's declaration of war in his diary. This news seemed as significant, if not more so, to the B-29 men than the atomic bomb drop on Hiroshima three days ago. Weber helped out again today with training the Wood crew, this time in Z-28. They flew a practice mission to still Japanese-held Rota Island down near Guam but weren't able to drop any bombs due to heavy cloud cover. Now that the end of the war appeared imminent, Weber had reconsidered his decision about staying on at Saipan: "I put in for rotation this morning and may get to go home before long, I hope. Little point in staying around now."

10 Aug 45

Today the men of the 500th Bomb Group on Saipan got the best news they'd had since they arrived.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 Aug: Office radio gave out, at approximately 2300, a news report that Domei [a Japanese news agency] had announced Japan had agreed to the terms laid down at Potsdam. Mission 87 [to Osaka] postponed."

From the William Greene (Haas crew, 882nd) diary:

"10 August 1945 The crew that flew [Z-33] last didn't clean guns. P.O.-ed!! Cleaned until 6 P.M. [In some crews it was SOP to clean the guns after every mission, whether they had been fired or not. Other crews were not so dedicated. Obviously, this could sometimes lead to friction.] Bed early. Going to Osaka -- mission called off -- Japan asks for peace!!"

Don Weber must have completed his diary entry for the day and gone to bed fairly early, because he didn't mention anything about the Japanese peace statement. Earlier this morning he had checked at Group HQ on his rotation orders and was told he could expect them sometime next week. Weber also learned that next week
he was scheduled "to fly as AC or pilot-instructor for a new crew going through wing school," which was fine with him.

11 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"11 Aug, Mission to Nagoya called off to-night pending word of our answer to the Japanese offer to surrender. Wing holiday declared."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"11 Aug: Many men up until 0300 listening to news reports in S-2 Office. Collected all side arms of combat crew men. [The command probably remembered what had happened on New Years Eve when there was much drunken celebration and indiscriminate firing of weapons.] Target Study for 1 hour. Group meeting at Surfside [the 500th Group open-air theater] at 1230. Mission postponed at 2330. Holiday."

The daily diary entry of Don Weber, formerly copilot of the Haas crew of the 882nd, provides a good feel for what the men of the 500th were going through at this time. The hope of peace was being held tantalizingly in front of them, but it could be snatched away at any time.

"Saturday, August 11
Very Warm
    Last night at about 10:00 P.M. we heard some most historical news which said Japan had offered to surrender, accepting the terms of the Potsdam, Germany, conference, providing they could keep the Emperor in his full ruling position. Now all day we have been anxiously awaiting word from the Big Four; U.S., Britain, China and Russia, as to whether the terms have been accepted. It is hard to say, but they may or may not be accepted. ... The mission was called off last night, but one is scheduled to leave early in the morning and hasn't yet been called off at 9:15 P.M. ..."

12 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"12 Aug. Mission to Osaka called off pending news of surrender."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"12 Aug: News report that Allies had replied to Japan's request with a counterproposal. Activities presently at a standstill awaiting definite word."

Over in the 882nd, Willie Greene was still waiting to get in his last mission:

"Mission called off again last nite! Japs want to keep Emperor -- Truman says no -- Went to church today."

Don Weber also wrote in his diary about the suspense they were being kept in by the back-and-forth public peace negotiations, and he closed with a heartfelt prayer: "God give our leaders the wisdom to make just and
lasting decisions."

13 Aug 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"13 Aug: Word is expectantly awaited on Japan's decision to accept Allied ultimatum. Warning order received and briefing held at 1800 on Osaka Arsenal."

Everyone was becoming frustrated with Japan's failure to respond unequivocally to the Allied terms of surrender. Missions had already been postponed twice, but patience was wearing thin. The command had decided that unless Japan answered, the next mission would go ahead, and it would be a big one.

In his diary, Don Weber of the 882nd expressed the hope that the mission would not have to go out. He and his friend Robert Wool turned in their flying gear this morning. Weber took a nap in the afternoon, then played some softball. Finally in the evening he went to see the movie "Salty O'Rourke".

On this day the Wareing crew was transferred from the 497th Bomb Group to the 500th, and behind that lies a story. The Wareing crew was a replacement crew recently (29 Jul) arrived on Saipan via ATC. They were originally assigned to the 497th Group, but William Wareing was good friends with Edward Ware, who was AC of a replacement crew also recently arrived but which had been assigned to the 500th. Ware urged his friend to request a transfer to the 500th, and he had a trump card to play. Ware's brother was a staff officer at 20th Air Force Headquarters. So some strings were pulled and the Wareing crew moved over to the 500th. But not everything went according to plan. The 500th assigned the two crews to different Squadrons, the Ware crew to the 882nd and the Wareing crew to the 883rd. And then the 883rd immediately slated the Wareing crew to fly tomorrow's mission.

14 Aug 45

Patience with Japan's government had worn out. This morning the 20th Air Force sent 443 B-29's from the 58th, 73rd and 313th Wings to remind Japan that the war was still on. (This was not the last B-29 combat mission, however. Tonight, 366 more B-29's from various Wings would go out to lay mines and bomb more Japanese cities.) The 73rd Bomb Wing drew the Osaka Army Arsenal as target and put up 165 planes. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 43 bombers plus a Super Dumbo comms and rescue plane for this mission. The Super Dumbo was Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", but it is not known which crew flew it. Of the bombing planes, Z-47, Dearborn crew, was scratched for unknown reasons, making 42 airborne, organized into four combat squadrons as follows:

First (882nd) squadron
- Z-39, Coffman/Dougherty
- Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Robertson
- Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Bruns
- Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Sealy
- Z-33, "Slick Dick", Haas
- Z-32, "Fever from the South", Queen
- Z-3, "Ann Dee", Kangles/Brannock (an 882nd crew flying an 881st plane)
- Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Gillert
- Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Collins
- Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Sawyer
- Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Marshall
The 500th Bomb Group Day By Day – Part 3 - Victory

Second (883rd) squadron
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Adamson
Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Schultz
Z-48, Hoffman
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders", Smith
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Leo
Z-46, Miller
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", White
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Gunnarson
Z-55, "Janice E.", Sichel
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Wareing

Third (881st) squadron
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Mock
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", McNamer
Z-16, "Je Reviens", Gieker
Z-9, "Little Fellow", Covington
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Walker (an 881st crew flying an 882nd plane)
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Clanton
Z-7, McLarty/Hatch
Z-12, Taylor
Z-6, "Booze Hound", Fox

Fourth (Composite) squadron
Z-28, "Hog Wild", Sasser
Z-56, Seale
Z-36, "L'il Abner", Gerrity
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Powers
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Mayhugh
Z-14, Rogers
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Alderman
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Connell
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Jennings/Van Trigt
Z-25, Jenkinson
Z-26, Wood/LaMarche

The Force Commander on this mission, and also leading the first squadron, was Group CO Col John Dougherty, flying in Z-39 with 1/Lt John Coffman and crew. Leading the second squadron was Capt Norman Adamson in Z-58; leading the third squadron was Capt Ernest Mock in Z-10; and leading the fourth squadron was Capt Willie Sasser in Z-28. The three Squadron commanders were along on this mission, all flying with new crews. 881st CO Maj Horace Hatch was with the McLarty crew in Z-7; 882nd Squadron CO Lt Col Joseph Brannock was with the Kangles crew in Z-3; and 883rd Squadron CO Maj John Van Trigt accompanied the Jennings crew in Z-50. Lt Col Brannock was also the Deputy Force Commander. Maj Austin LaMarche, 882nd Operations Officer, and Maj Curtis Holdridge, another experienced pilot, also flew with new crews, LaMarche with the Wood crew in Z-26 and Holdridge with the Jenkinson crew in Z-25. Finally, 882nd RCM Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus went on this mission with the Haas crew in Z-33.

Take-off was in squadron order as above and was completed by 0713. The 500th was third in the Wing order, right behind the 499th Group. Bomb load was 4 x M66 2000 lb and 2 x M65 1000 lb bombs per plane. Ammunition load was a full 6,000 rounds, 500 rounds per gun.

Planes flew individually at altitudes between 8000 and 8800 feet to the assembly point, which was west of Iwo Jima. There were six aborts, reasons unknown -- Z-36, Gerrity crew; Z-48, Hoffman crew; Z-21, Sealy crew; Z-
55, Sichel crew; Z-14, Rogers crew; and Z-49, Schultz crew. One of these planes, unknown which, had a serious enough problem that the crew had to land at Iwo Jima.

At the assembly point, the planes took 40 minutes to form up into their squadrons, stacked high to the right at altitude intervals of 750 feet. Then it was on to the departure point, climbing to the briefed bombing altitudes of 22,000, 22,500, 23,000 and 23,500 feet by squadron. At the DP the formation was to pick up its fighter escort, which was supposed to stay with them on through the target area. However, there was some sort of foul-up and the rendezvous with the fighters never took place.

The 500th passed the DP on time, although Col Dougherty thought the formation was “not up to par.” Z-24 and one other plane, unidentified, became separated from the formation and bombed alone. As usual, there was a “weather wind run plane” over the target broadcasting wind direction and speed, which was successfully received.

At the IP the planes turned onto a heading of 043 degrees for the bomb run. From 1451 to 1452 the 36 planes of the 500th which reached the target dropped 143 x M66 and 68 x M65 bombs visually with what were termed good results. A few bombs which missed the Arsenal landed in the Osaka Castle area. Four bombs hung up on the racks and one plane had to salvo its bombs over the target.

There were no fighter attacks. Flak ranged from meager to moderate. From his ring seat in Z-33, which was leading the second element of the first squadron, Willie Greene thought the flak was “accurate as everything!” He saw Z-35, flying No. 3 position in the lead element, get hit and thought for a moment that she was going to go down, but she recovered. Overall, 11 planes sustained damage but all made it home.

For the flight back home, the planes descended to 16,000 feet. All returned safely, although one had to stop at Iwo Jima. The last plane landed at Isley at 2211.

No one knew it for sure at the time, but this was the last combat mission for the 500th Bomb Group... as a Group. But there was one 500th plane and crew for which the war was not over.

There must have been a lot of aborts in the 73rd Wing this morning, and somebody with stars on his shoulders – either O'Donnell at Wing or LeMay at 20th Air Force – decided that those abortive planes, the ones that could be easily repaired anyway, could be quickly turned around for another mission tonight. So it was that 14 planes and crews of the 73rd Wing, including Z-36, Gerrity crew, and Z-48, Dearborn crew, of the 500th Group, found themselves on a hastily compiled list for an incendiary mission to Isesaki, in support of the 314th Wing, which would be hitting nearby Kumagaya. Sometime during the day Z-48 was dropped from the list, probably because the plane could not be repaired in time, so from the 500th only Z-36 and the Gerrity crew would go tonight.

The participating planes and crews, in scheduled take-off order, were as follows:

A-7 (Wilczynski)  
A-21 (Stuart)  
A-31 (Stitt)  
A-32 (Johnson)  
A-42 (Simonds)  
A-45 (Steele)  
A-14 (Biddulph)  
A-28 (Conway)  
A-34 (Davis)  
T-14 (Christensen)  
V-31 (Would)  
V-34 (Kersey)  
Z-36 (Gerrity), “Li'l Abner”

Since most of the planes were from the 497th Group, they assumed responsibility for the mission. Take-off was
scheduled for 1815. As it turned out, three planes (A-14, A-28 and V-31) were scratched just before take-off and didn’t get off the ground, so only ten planes were airborne.

Bomb load for most planes was 20 x E46 incendiary clusters and 92 x M47A2 incendiaries. A-21, T-14 and Z-36 carried the same number of E46’s but six fewer M47A2’s to make room for an M46 photoflash bomb. Ammo load was the standard for night attacks, 200 rounds per gun in the two aft turrets and tail.

As usual on night missions, each plane flew to to the target and bombed individually. Assigned altitudes for the route out were 8,000 to 8,800 feet. Along the way, another 497th plane, A-32 (Johnson), had to abort when its #3 engine caught fire. As they approached Japan, the nine planes that were left began to climb to their assigned bombing altitudes of 15,000 to 15,800 feet.

Z-36 reached and bombed the primary target of Isesaki along with seven other planes – A-7, A-21, A-42, A-45, A-31, A-34 and V-34. T-14 of the 498th Group bombed Koizumi in error “through misinterpretation of radar.” There was little flak and no fighter opposition. All planes reported good bomb runs, except for Z-36. When she dropped her bombs at 0155, 22 of the M47’s in the rear bomb bay hung up on the racks. Still, if the bombing data report is correct, Z-36 was the last of the nine planes to bomb, and therefore the last plane of the 73rd Bomb Wing to drop bombs on Japan.

In all, the eight 73rd planes dropped 160 x E46 and 703 x M47 incendiaries and 2 x M46 photoflash bombs on Isesaki from altitudes ranging from 15,500 to 16,500 feet. Results could not be observed due to cloud cover, but several crews reported a glow under the clouds.

On the way home the Gerrity crew managed to shake 3 of the hung-up incendiaries loose but the other 19 just wouldn't go and Z-36 had to land with them still on board, giving AC Capt Richard Gerrity an additional incentive to make a smooth landing, which he obviously did.

And that's how Z-36 and the Gerrity crew logged the last combat mission of the 500th Bomb Group and the 73rd Bomb Wing.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"14 Aug: ... Domei news agency broadcast at approximately 1600 that the Japanese Government had accepted the terms of the Potsdam Conference."

In the 882nd Squadron, the five members of the Haas crew who had completed their 35th mission this morning – AC Ray Haas, radar operator Paul Grove, flight engineer John Gafford, right gunner Harry Ruch and ring gunner Willie Greene – were busy celebrating. They were going home whether the war ended today or not. Meanwhile, two members who had completed their tours earlier, copilot Don Weber and navigator Bob Wool, spent the day clearing post and packing bags and footlockers in preparation for an expected departure for home in a few days. And everybody was waiting to hear the official US response to the Japanese surrender offer.

15 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"15 Aug. 1945. The president announced this morning the Japanese have accepted our terms of surrender. Wing holiday in the afternoon. E.M. of this office go on beach party."
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"15 Aug: President Truman broadcast officially that the Japanese had surrendered. Announcement was made at approximately 0900 K [local]. Holiday announced for today and tomorrow."

From the William Greene diary:

"15 August 1945 At 9:08 A.M. Truman announces Japs excepted [accepted]. The war is over for everyone now."

From the Don Weber diary:

"Wednesday, August 15

PRAISE TO GOD! War's End ... This is V.J. (Victory - Japan) Day for us and in humility and gratefulness we bow to God and thank Him for His great mercy in granting us this so longed for and worked for and prayed for peace. President Truman announced Japan's acceptance of our ultimatum at about 9:00 A.M. this morning. A wing holiday was declared till Friday morning, and so our orders probably won't be out till Friday at the earliest. This afternoon Wool and I got the Chaplain's jeep and we took a good number of pictures on the line and around elsewhere. ... Chaplain Davis conducted a service of Thanksgiving for peace at 0700. ..."

George Hughes, airplane mechanic and ground crewman for Z-19, "Sharon Sue", 881st Squadron, was moved to write a letter home on this momentous day:

"August 15, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

Well at last we have received the official word that the war has ended. The past week has been one I will long remember. There were rumors of peace every few minutes. I am glad an invasion was not necessary. A good many lives were saved. At last it has been proved that air power can bring a nation to its knees.

Now everyone is speculating on the date of our arrival in the States. We probably won't be told anything for some time. It will be all shine and polish from now on in. The general opinion is that we will be home for Christmas. I don't know for sure but don't bother to send any packages from now on. ...

I wish that you would cash my next check and mail me a money order for it. I have some money to pay back and I want to be sure [of] having a little nest egg on me in case of a surprise shipment.

We have a couple of days rest before we get our ships all fixed up for whatever use they may put them to. ...

Love
George"

16 Aug 45

Today was a Wing holiday on Saipan, but not everybody had the day off. From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"16 Aug. ... Lt Armstrong in Z-38 flies to northern Honshu on weather recon."
Of course, those who had a holiday did not waste it, and as always some overdid it, as Don Weber confirms in his diary: "The fellows in the hut got a bit drunk last night, and I suppose they regretted it enough, too." But to the abstemious Weber "it seemed much like a Sunday...." He got some extra sleep, played gin, watched a baseball game between the 73rd and 58th Wings, and took a few Kodachrome pictures.

17 Aug 45

This was a slow day on Saipan, not much going on. Don Weber and his friend and crewmate Bob Wool had an interview scheduled, "as all 35 mission men do," with Brigadier General Emmett "Rosie" O'Donnell, CO of the 73rd Bomb Wing, so they put on their dress uniforms this morning and got all ready. But then somebody from Wing called to say that Gen O'Donnell was on Guam today, so the interview was postponed till tomorrow. Weber and Wool then went back to their hut and "turned in all our QM equipment and bed clothes, getting all checked out on our clearance sheets." Still no orders, however. Word was that a lack of transportation was holding things up.

18 Aug 45

In the 500th Bomb Group on Saipan, things were getting back to a semblance of regular military routine after the celebration of VJ day.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


The men were now thinking about only one thing -- how quickly they could get home. In the 882nd, Willie Greene wrote in his diary with anticipation, "Cleared post today. Now all we have to do is wait!" Don Weber and a few others finally had their meeting this morning with Gen "Rosie" O'Donnell at the 73rd Bomb Wing A-3 [Operations Section]. "'Rosy' told us we must have patience, and they will get us out and home as soon as possible since we've finished our missions." Weber then rather anticlimactically came back to his hut, played some bridge with friends, then washed some clothes, but then "It rained at noon & broke the clothes line so I had to wash all over again."

But Weber's day wasn't over: "We met at the group briefing room this P.M. and I got 3 clusters for the Air Medal. I should have a couple more coming in. [An Air Medal was awarded for approximately every 100 flying hours.] Wool's [navigator Robert Wool] and my orders came in and we have them at group now. [Radio operator John] Hoover is going back on a war-weary B-29 tomorrow, which is a good deal indeed."

19 Aug 45

From the 883rd Bomb Group War Diary:

"19 Aug: Thanksgiving service held on runways for all three faiths at 0700. Submitted DFCs [Distinguished Flying Crosses] and Air Medals. Jap envoys landed at Ie Shima enroute to Manila."

Both Willie Greene and Don Weber of the 882nd Squadron attended the thanksgiving services this morning. Weber thought it was "a fine service" which reminded them "that our victory hasn't been without loss of friends."
After the services, Weber and his friend Bob Wool picked up their orders and signed out of Group. Weber mentioned that he got a DFC and another Oak Leaf Cluster to the Air Medal. Finally, “Wool & I turned in our clearances and signed out at wing this P.M. So we are ready to leave at any time.”

**20 Aug 45**

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

“20 Aug. Lt Armstrong again flies #38 on weather recon flight to Honshu.”

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“20 Aug: The Air Inspector made an inspection of S-2. Recommended locks on all doors, otherwise excellent.”

Things were moving back toward peacetime normality all over. Willie Greene of the 882nd was on a “honey run”, i.e., garbage, detail today.

Don Weber and his friend Bob Wool took the final steps today to cut themselves loose from their unit and be ready to leave for home on a moment's notice. They borrowed Lt Col Brannock's jeep and took their footlockers to the base post office to mail home. Weber's weighed 64 pounds and cost him $7.29, a princely amount in those days. Weber would have liked to travel home on a "war weary" B-29 [a plane declared no longer fit for combat and sent home for training or other purposes], but there appeared to be no chance for that now. Instead, he and Wool were sent this afternoon to what was called the WPBC, which stood for Western Pacific Base Command. It was located at the north end of the island and it took them an hour to get there by truck. This organization was a holding unit for officers and men rotating back to the States. Weber and Wool processed in and then settled down to wait. Weber hoped they might be able to get out of there within a week.

**21 Aug 45**

On Saipan, transition from a combat toward a garrison environment continued. From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"21 Aug. 1945 Major Thompson, Group Navigator, is relieved of duty and assumes duty as Club Officer of the 500th Bombardment Group Officers Club. Capt Hopper, 883rd Squadron Navigator, becomes Group Navigator."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"21 Aug: Cpls Williams and O'Brien started compilation and assembly of the squadron history. [What happened to it? Sure would like to find it.] Completed recommendations for Air Medal, and submitted DFCs [Distinguished Flying Crosses]. New rotation plan creating considerable discussion among officers.”

Over in the 882nd, T/Sgt Willie Greene found himself Sergeant of the Guard today. And while he was at it, he got a DFC and an Oak Leaf Cluster to the Air Medal.

Up at the north end of the island in the WPBC (Western Pacific Base Command) rotation pool, Don Weber was a little disturbed by the large number of men awaiting shipment home. It might take a while. Weber found the waiting around "mighty boring ... but it must be taken, I guess.” The officers had to report in at 0800 and 1300
each day to find out if they were on a shipment list, or to receive other information. Some were put to work supervising work details, but Weber managed to avoid that today due to having to turn in "some censor material". This apparently caused him to come into contact with the WPBC censor officer, who was "a quite rugged individual so far as getting much through is concerned." This caused Weber to worry that his diary might be confiscated. He knew that keeping a diary was against regulations, but he didn't understand why they were being so strict about it now that the war was over. In any case, he had "kept one too long to let the war interfere," so he temporarily hid the diary, even though it meant he might not be able to access it daily.

**22 Aug 45**

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 Aug: Training mission being flown by new crews. Worked on Bronze Star Medals for Crew Chiefs. New barber shop in the area being built."

It seems strange that with the war over new facilities were still being built on Saipan, but 1) it had probably been planned for some time and 2) it gave a few men something to do.

Over in the 881st, George Hughes wrote his parents today:

"August 22, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

... Everything is about the same here as always.

I saw a pretty good ball game a few days ago. The field was a little wet and the infield was pretty slow. I am inclosing a program of the game. Tex Hughson was the winning pitcher. [Cecil Carlton "Tex" Hughson was a starting pitcher for the Boston Red Sox (1941-44, 1946-49). During the war many professional baseball players were in the service, and the best unit teams had a "ringer" or two. In fact, looking at the program, it seems the 58th Wing team had more than its share. Enos Slaughter, Joe Gordon, Birdie Tebbets and Billy Hitchcock are all well known names. Despite the large number of major leaguers, the 58th "Wingmen" had not compiled a very good record in the schedule, while the 73rd "Saipan Bombers" were unbeaten at 5-0.]

Those nuts you sent in the last package arrived in good shape. I don't know if I will be here for this Christmas or not. We haven't been told anything yet. Of course there are ample rumors pro and con. I certainly hope that I am back in the States this year. Now that the war has drawn to a close this place is really turned garrison. I would rather spend my time working than playing soldier. ...

Love
George"

Willie Greene in the 882nd had decided to have his B-10 flight jacket decorated. You could have your missions commemorated on the back by a painted bomb symbol with the name of the city on it. So he turned the jacket over today to have that done, although he doesn't say to whom or how much it cost.

Up at the WPBC (Western Pacific Base Command) on northern Saipan, Don Weber did not write in his diary today for fear of being discovered, but later he would write that this was "a typical 'wait' day at WPBC". However, he and his friend Bob Wool had the good fortune to be invited to dinner by a Capt Hamlin of the 494th Engineers, who sent his jeep to pick them up at 4:00 P.M. So they had a nice meal, watched a softball
game, and as an unexpected bonus were able to stop over at their old outfit, the 882nd Bomb Squadron, to pick up their accumulated mail, which luckily the mail clerk had not yet returned. So all in all Weber had a very good day.

23 Aug 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


The release program was a system used to determine which men would be discharged from service first. You received so many points for time in service, time overseas, wounds received, medals awarded, etc. The men with the most points went home first.

In the 882nd, Willie Greene was on a detail today, but whatever it was, it must not have been much, as Greene failed to note its nature. More importantly, Greene got his painted B-10 jacket back today... and he still has it to this day.

At the rotation pool at the WPBC, Don Weber and his friend Bob Wool were invited to dinner again with Capt "Ham" Hamlin and his engineers. After dinner, they watched and umpired a softball game and saw a movie, then later in the evening "we had a real snack with toasted cheese sandwiches at the engineer's depot where Ham's well known."

24 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"24 Aug. 45 Lt Armstrong flies weather recon to Honshu in Z-38."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 Aug: Submitted recommendations for Bronze Star Medals for crew chiefs. Word (Unofficial) received that Lt Col Brandon killed in crash on Guam. Training mission flown."

Lt Col Harry Brandon had been Deputy Commander of the 500th Bomb Group until being transferred in mid-July to 20th Air Force HQ on Guam as Assistant A-2 (Intel). He was well liked and many men in the 500th mourned his loss. On 23 August Brandon had been checking out Col James Garcia, the 20th AF A-2 (Intel), on touch-and-go landings when something went wrong. The left wing dipped and hit a tree, and the plane cartwheeled into a building near the runway. Four of the five men on board, including Brandon and Garcia, were killed, as well as one man in the building. Training could be as deadly as combat.

25 Aug 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"25 Aug: Finished submitting recommendations for awards. Completed to date. Officer call after inspection of area by Col Dougherty. Further explanation of release."
From the William Greene (882nd) diary:

"Had big inspection -- easy -- got a weapons carrier -- went up to see Wool & Weber."

Curiously, Don Weber neglected to mention Greene's visit in his diary. Maybe he was still hiding his diary somewhere and forgot to note it later. In any case, the continual waiting at the WPBC was starting to weigh on Weber: "I find myself laying in the sack a great part of the day as well as night and the more a person sleeps it seems the more he wants to sleep." Weber had drawn only one detail so far, and that was to supervise five enlisted men with machetes chopping down a few weeds around the mess hall, while Weber himself just sat down and read a book. Then it was back to waiting.

26 Aug 45

On this date Willie Greene of the 882nd Bomb Squadron wrote in his diary that his former airplane commander Otto Haas had decided to stay in the Army and that he had gone to Iwo Jima. Greene also noted that his good friend John Hoover had left for the States on the 23rd. Tonight Greene was scheduled for guard duty.

Today being a Sunday, Don Weber attended religious services. But then there was the rest of the day to fill up. With nothing exciting to write, Weber filled this page of his diary with some information about the daily routine at the WPBC (Western Pacific Base Command) holding area: "We eat in a large mess hall where we are brought our trays. Hours are 7:00-7:30, 12:00-12:30 and 5:45-6:15. Not doing anything does not call for much nourishment, and the meals aren't too much to brag about, really. There is an open air theater across from our officers quarters called the San Juan where we can see a movie at about 7:15 P.M. Will be nice to someday sit in a real theater."

27 Aug 45

Today the 500th Bomb Group received a new mission. Along with all the other Groups of the 20th Air Force, they would begin dropping food, medical and other supplies to Allied prisoners and internees at Japanese POW camps located throughout Japan and its former occupied territories. Everyone pitched in enthusiastically to help get these badly needed supplies to the starving and sick prisoners. Many ground personnel were eager to help and also get a chance to see Japan or other Asian countries for the first time, and since these were not combat missions, they were permitted to go along in limited numbers.

Group and Squadron briefings were held today for POW Mission #1. (The 500th called it POW Mission #1 but it was officially POW Mission #5 for the 20th Air Force.) Each plane would be allowed to take an average of two passengers, mostly from the maintenance crews. However, later in the day the mission was postponed until tomorrow.

In the 882nd Squadron, Willie Greene was recovering from guard duty last night. Later in the day he washed clothes.

Up at the WPBC on the north end of Saipan today, Don Weber observed his surroundings and thought about what had happened there over a year before. The WPBC was situated "below some large cliffs which are seared black by our flame throwers and pocked by hits from large naval guns. When a battleship shoots one of these large shells it lobs out the equivalent cost of a new Buick, and many must have landed on this rock."

28 Aug 45
On this day the 500th Bomb Group participated in its first POW Supply mission, which was POW Supply Mission #5 for the 20th Air Force. The objective was to drop by parachute badly needed food, clothing and medical supplies to Allied prisoners and internees in Japanese prison camps located in Japan and its former occupied territories. A total of 46 B-29's from the 500th Group took part in this first mission. The flights were split over two days, with 30 planes taking off today and the rest tomorrow. The planes which took part are known but not the crews, except in a few instances. The 30 planes which took off this day are listed below in chronological order of dropping, along with the target camp.

Z-22, "Silver Thunder", Fukuoka #12
Z-1, Fukuoka #12
Z-21, "Barbara Ann", Sealy, Fukuoka #12
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tokyo #5
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Tokyo #5
Z-8, "Duke of Albuquerque", Fukuoka #12
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Fukuoka #12
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Fukuoka #12
Z-55, "Janice E.", Tokyo #5
Z-46, Tokyo #5
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", Koishoho #2
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Nagasaki
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Kanagawa #2
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Taiwan #1
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Aichi
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Hakodate #2
Z-26, Tokyo #15
Z-47, Hakodate #4
Z-57, Fukuoka #8
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Hakodate #2
Z-9, "Little Fellow", Hakodate #1
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Hakodate #1
Z-25, Hq Kako Camp
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Taiwan #1, Wareing crew
Z-54, Hq Kako Camp
Z-4, "Black Magic", Hq Kako Camp
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Tokyo #17, could not locate camp
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Tokyo #14, could not locate camp
Z-12, Taiwan #4, abort
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Hall, Chosen #1 Branch Camp, abort

Details are scanty on the POW supply missions. Most of the missions were flown to camps in Japan, but some went to Taiwan (Formosa) and Korea (called Chosen in the records). According to the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary entry for this date, "All planes took off from approximately 0700 at 15 minutes interval...." Planes apparently staged through Iwo Jima, where they refueled. Two planes aborted, as noted; two others were unable to locate their target camp and presumably brought their loads back. The 883rd War Diary says that on the return Isley was closed in, so all planes were ordered to land at Iwo.

One PW mission for which we have some detail, thanks to nice letters written by Capt James Warmbrod, navigator on the Wareing crew, is the flight by Z-52 to "Taiwan #1", or Taihoku (Taipei). According to Warmbrod, they took off early in the morning, stopped at Iwo Jima to top off their tanks, then flew on to Formosa. They found their designated target camp on the northern end of the large island and successfully dropped their supplies, which contained food, clothing and toiletries. Warmbrod wrote to his family, "The prisoners sure seem[ed] glad to see us. We were real low when we went over the camp & they were outside waving at us and running after the supplies we dropped."

On the long return flight, the crew landed at Clark Field in the Philippines, where they stayed overnight. There were no facilities available at Clark, so most of the crew slept outside under the plane. Warmbrod elected to
sleep inside the plane. They also had to supply their own meals, but they had brought along sufficient “canned meats, fruit & fruit juices & bread”.

The crew took off from Clark Field about 1100 and arrived safely back on Saipan at about 1930.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

“28 Aug. 45  ... Lt Armstrong flies weather recon to Tokyo in #38.”

On this day amid a pouring rain Willie Greene of the 882nd Squadron, along with his buddies and crewmates Harry Ruch and Paul Grove, signed out of the Squadron, leaving the quonset they had lived in for seven months and relocating to the north end of the island to what Greene called the “casual pool”. This was evidently the same place, the WPBC (Western Pacific Base Command), where crewmates Don Weber and Bob Wool had been cooling their heels for over a week. Now they could all wait for transportation home together, except that officers and enlisted lived in separate areas. Weber and Wool weren’t the only people Greene knew at the WPBC. He had a pleasant reunion when he ran into some old friends from his Central Fire Control class at Lowery Field in Denver. Oh, and before Greene left the 882nd, he was given a Distinguished Flying Cross.

29 Aug 45

Early this morning the 500th Bomb Group sent out another 16 planes to complete its portion of POW Supply Mission #5. Today most of the planes were going to Korea (Chosen) and Taiwan. Again, the planes probably staged through Iwo Jima, where they topped off their tanks. The participating planes, in order of supply drop time, and their targeted camps were as follows:

Z-49, “Fourth Marine Division”, Hakodate #1
Z-45, “Mustn’t Touch”, Hakodate #3
Z-43, “Ben’s Raiders”, Taiwan #4
Z-56, Hq Chosen
Z-33, “Slick Dick”, Chosen #1
Z-6, “Booze Hound”, Chosen #1
Z-48, Chosen #1
Z-3, “Ann Dee”, Chosen #1
Z-7, Chosen #1
Z-36, “Li’l Abner”, Taiwan #1
Z-39, Taiwan #1
Z-14, Hq Chosen
Z-32, “Fever from the South”, Hq Chosen
Z-28, “Hog Wild”, Chosen #1 Branch Camp
Z-34, “Frisco Nannie”, Tokyo #3
Z-35, “Pacific Queen”, Tokyo #3

All the planes apparently located their camps and dropped their loads, except for one. Something unusual happened to that plane and crew, and for that reason we have an unusually detailed account of the mission.

At 2100 on 28 August the Joseph Queen crew of the 882nd Squadron was called to Squadron S-2 for a briefing on a PW supply flight to Hamhung, also known as Kanko, also known as Chosen #1 Branch Camp, Korea. According to Queen, “Our instructions were to land at Iwo Jima and refuel, then continue on to the PW camp, drop our supplies and return to Saipan by way of Iwo Jima.” The Queen crew may have been assigned to this mission only because Z-11, which had been assigned the same target on the previous day, had aborted. If so, it was their bad luck.
The Queen crew took off from Saipan at about 0300 today in Z-28, "Hog Wild". The full crew was not on board for this mission, right gunner Clifford McGee being replaced by the Squadron Gunnery Officer, 1/Lt Lucius Weeks, who apparently wanted to get some flight time and see a little bit of Asia. Also on board were two passengers -- Squadron Flight Engineer Capt Robert Campbell and Squadron Engineering Officer 1/Lt John Grant. These three officers probably later wished they had picked another day or another plane to fly.

The full complement of Z-28 on this mission was as follows:

- **AC** 1/Lt Joseph W. Queen
- **CP** 2/Lt Robert S. Rainey
- **B** F/O Marion J. Sherrill
- **N** 2/Lt Eugene R. Harwood
- **FE** S/Sgt Jessee H. Owens
- **Radio** S/Sgt Arthur S. Strilky
- **Ring G** S/Sgt Joseph Rinaldo
- **RG** 1/Lt Lucius W. Weeks
- **LG** S/Sgt Cyril Bernacki
- **Radar** Sgt Douglas E. Arthur
- **TG** Sgt Richard H. Turner
- **Pass** Capt Robert W. Campbell
- **Pass** 1/Lt John B. Grant

As instructed, the plane stopped at Iwo Jima to refuel. While that was going on, the crew got a bite to eat, then took off at about 0810 headed for Korea. When they arrived in what was supposed to be the area of the prison camp at about 1430, they had difficulty identifying it. After they circled for a few minutes, two Russian Yak fighters appeared on the bomber's wings. The Russians seemed to be friendly, waving and motioning for the B-29 to follow them. Thinking they might be leading the Americans to the prison camp, Queen followed. However, the fighters led the B-29 to an airfield near the coast about ten miles away and indicated to the crew by hand signals that they should land. Queen looked the field over and estimated it was about 3500 feet long, which was short for a B-29. Even if he could land successfully, getting off again, especially with a full load of supplies, would be quite another thing. So Queen turned away and returned to the PW camp area to try again to identify the camp and drop his supplies.

At this point one of the Russian fighters, which had followed them, fired a burst in front of the B-29 and signaled again for it to land. That was enough for Queen. "As our instructions were if we met any trouble whatever to forget about dropping the supplies and return to Iwo, I decided to return to base and took up a heading for Iwo." He hoped that once the Russians saw they were leaving the area, they would let the American plane go. But the Russians had other ideas.

Queen got only about 10-15 miles out to sea when one of the fighters suddenly dropped back and made a firing pass from the rear. Machine gun bullets tore through the fuselage and left wing and a 20mm shell exploded in the #1 engine, which immediately burst into flame. Queen ordered his crew not to return fire and turned back toward the airfield. He was able to feather #1, but efforts to extinguish the fire were unsuccessful and it began to burn more intensely. Soon flames extended all the way back past the tail. At only 2,000 feet above the sea, Queen wasn't sure he could make the airfield and he was afraid the engine might explode and take the wing with it, so he ordered the crew to bail out while they still had sufficient altitude. Six men did bail out -- Harwood, Campbell, Sherrill and Owen from the nose wheel hatch and Weeks and Arthur from the rear door. The radioman, Strilky, was preparing to follow the others out through the nose wheel hatch when Queen noticed that the fire in the engine had died down, so he canceled the bail-out order over the interphone. Strilky of course no longer had his earphones on, but Rainey was able to catch his attention and stop him before he jumped, then motioned to Strilky to sit in the vacant flight engineer's seat and prepare for a crash landing. At the same time, back in the rear, Grant was on the verge of jumping from the rear door when someone shouted "Brace for ditching!"
Grant and the three remaining gunners -- Rinaldo, Bernacki and Turner -- took up ditching positions in the rear unpressurized compartment, braced against the bulkhead. The tail of the plane was pitched down and hit with a jolt, and Grant expected water to come pouring in. But it didn't. When the plane stopped its forward movement, Bernacki was the first to start climbing out through the emergency escape hatch, which was behind and above the auxiliary power unit, or putt-putt. But he suddenly stopped halfway out the hatch and shouted back down in surprise, "Hey, we're on land!"

The B-29 had made the airfield and Queen had been able to set the big bomber down, even though the left aileron was shot out, the left tire was punctured and the #1 engine was still burning. It was a rough landing, with the tail skid dragging and the #4 propeller hitting the runway, but they made it, and as soon as the plane came to a stop, the seven men remaining on board tumbled out to put distance between the burning plane and themselves.

The B-29 crewmen were soon surrounded by armed Russians, who frisked them for weapons -- they had none -- put them under guard and escorted them to a nearby building. In the meantime, some Russian soldiers put out the fire in #1 engine by the simple expedient of throwing sand on it.

Queen was very concerned for his men who had bailed out over the water and tried to communicate this to the Russians but none of them spoke English and none of the Americans spoke Russian. After about two hours a Col Barteslav, the airfield commander, showed up with an interpreter, a Maj Kruglov. Queen was told that boats were out looking for his men, although this was apparently not true. The Russians seemed more concerned with finding out what the B-29 was doing in the area and why the crew did not land as directed. Queen explained about the PW supplies and that the field was too small for a B-29. The Russians seemed to become less hostile when they were told about the PW mission but were still skeptical about the field being too small.

The Russians promised to deliver the supplies to the POW camp, so Queen and one other man were allowed to go to the plane to release the heavy metal drums containing the supplies from the bomb bay. However, Queen was denied permission to use the radio to inform Saipan about their situation. When the airplane commander got inside the plane, he noticed that all manuals, documents and briefcases, as well as the K-20 camera, had been removed. He was unable to release the supply drums, but he did retrieve some personal equipment such as clothing and canteens.

When Queen returned to the building, he asked Grant, the Squadron Engineering Officer, to see if he could get the supplies out, so Grant went to the plane with Cpl Turner, the tail gunner, and Maj Kruglov, the Russian interpreter. After entering the plane, it became obvious to Grant from Maj Kruglov's actions and comments that the Russian was already very familiar with the internal layout and systems of the B-29. Grant found out later that Kruglov had been involved in the study of some B-29's which had landed in Russian territory during the war and had been interned. There was no power in the plane, so Grant went to the rear unpressurized compartment to try to start the putt-putt. He found the compartment "covered with all sorts of equipment from the big kit and the life rafts, and parachutes. The plane was a shambles as if torn into by someone looking in desperation for something." Finally, Grant was able to get the bomb bay doors open and release the supply drums the hard way by borrowing a screwdriver and "turning the trip screw on each release." While this was going on, Grant saw that the Russians were draining the fuel out of the plane's tanks into a couple of fuel trucks. A large amount of fuel from this transfer had leaked onto the ground underneath the plane, and Grant was concerned that the metal supply drums might strike against one another as they dropped from the bomb bay, create a spark and set the whole plane on fire. But all the drums dropped safely. Their task accomplished, Grant and Turner rejoined the rest of the crew back in the building.

By this time, about 2000, the Russians had become more friendly, but the Americans were still kept under guard. The Russian commander apologized for the shootdown and invited the Americans to supper. The meal was a simple one of "greasy pork and dry rice" but in typical Russian fashion it was accompanied by ample supplies of alcohol, in this case a full bottle of captured Japanese whiskey per man. Many toasts to Truman, Stalin, etc., were made, and things were going along quite merrily when two British officers and two Australian enlisted men from the nearby PW camp unexpectedly showed up. Queen learned that Lt Weeks, one of the men who had bailed out, had somehow made it to the camp and had asked the senior officers there to see if
they could find out anything about the fate of the B-29 and the rest of the crew. The Russians did not seem happy with the intrusion and the party broke up at this point. The Americans were told that they would be transferred to the PW camp tomorrow. They spent the night at the airfield, still under guard.

Meanwhile, the six men who had bailed out over the sea had not been having as pleasant a time. Luckily, all six men were rescued, though by Korean fishing boats and not by any boats sent out by the Russians. In fact, the Russians seemed not to want the men to be saved. Sgt Arthur reported being strafed in the water, and Lt Weeks not far away confirmed the firing. This of course made the men very wary of the Russians.

After some time in the water, Weeks was picked up by a fishing boat and was brought directly to local police headquarters, where he was put in telephone contact with the PW camp about seven miles away. Transportation was provided by the local authorities and Weeks was soon at the PW camp, where he was picked up by a fishing boat and brought to a fishing village, where they were treated with great hospitality. After about four hours, three Russian officers led by a Colonel appeared and took them to the PW camp, where they were reunited with Weeks.

Still unaccounted for at this time was the bombardier, Sherrill. They could only hope that he would show up.

So ended a very long and trying day for the Queen crew. They all felt lucky to be alive, especially the men who had bailed out, because none of them had a life raft, and if not picked up by those fishing boats before dark, it is unlikely they would have survived the night in the cold water. But while literally out of the water, they were figuratively not out of the woods yet, and no one knew what the morrow would bring.

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"29 Aug. Queen piloting Z-28 on POW mission to Chosen. For reasons unknown the ship landed in Korea."

So the 500th Group knew on the same day that the Queen crew in Z-28 had landed in Korea, although they had no details. How did they know? In their later debriefing statements, neither airplane commander Queen nor radio operator Strilky nor any other crew member mentions anything about sending a distress call prior to the emergency landing. Furthermore, Queen says they weren't able to notify Saipan of their status until 1 September, when the Russians finally allowed them to use their plane radio. So did the Russians send a brief, perhaps deliberately vague message to the US embassy or military attache in Vladivostok, or to some other American station? Cold War researcher and author Bill Streifer has information that the Allied prisoners at the PW camp had access to the radio in the Japanese commandant's office and that they may have sent a message about Z-28. We don't know for sure.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"29 Aug: Planes returned to Isely at approximately 1300. [This must refer to the planes which had departed on the 28th and had to land at Iwo Jima on the way back due to bad weather at Saipan.] On the whole, most of the camps were located and supplies dropped."

Up at the WPBC, Willie Greene, Harry Ruch and Paul Grove processed in today. Ruch and Grove were assigned to a different company than Greene because they were going to different separation centers in the States.

While his three enlisted crewmates were moving in, Don Weber was finally moving out. It didn't look that way at
first. Nothing was doing in the morning, and Weber passed the time playing cribbage and learning casino, but in a classic military case of "hurry up and wait", at the 1300 check-in Weber suddenly was told he was leaving at 1430. He quickly threw his stuff together, dropped a letter home and said some quick goodbyes. Then they actually didn't leave the WPBC until 1500, and with a band to see them off, no less! "Great feeling this was," Weber wrote later. But when they got down to the harbor, Weber had some anxious minutes. There was a long wait for the boat to take the men out to their assigned ships, then when it finally picked them up it stopped first at two other ships to drop men off. Finally, the boat pulled up to the SS Bowdoin Victory and Weber, five other officers, and six enlisted men climbed onto their ride home. They had made it.

The Bowdoin Victory weighed anchor and moved out shortly after the men were on board. Weber was pleased with the accommodations. "We six O. sleep in a six bunk compartment, eat at officers mess and have mighty good food. It was a little warm sleeping ... but not too bad." How could it be bad? He was on his way home.

30 Aug 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"30 Aug. Major English, Group Gunnery Officer, is placed on special duty to Wing for 90 days. Lt Mattheson leaves this office and becomes administrative officer at maintenance control."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 Aug: POW Mission #2 scheduled and briefed but takeoff cancelled as no 'chutes available. Crews not flying packed 'chutes all evening."

Some distance south and east of Saipan, Don Weber awoke today to the rolling of the ship that was carrying him closer to home. He spent part of the day walking around the Bowdoin Victory. He learned that she was carrying incendiary bombs back to Pearl Harbor and that would take about eight days to get there. It was unclear where the ship would go from there, so Weber wasn't sure if he would have to transfer to another means of transportation to get to the West Coast. He then thought of his friend Bob Wool and the others still back on Saipan and hoped that they would be leaving soon.

Eighteen hundred miles north of Saipan near Hamhung, Korea, the Queen crew weren't thinking about the West Coast. They'd have been quite happy just getting back to Saipan. But it looked like that wasn't going to happen for a while. This morning there were no guards around the building in which Queen and his men had stayed the night, but when he and some of the other men started walking toward the plane, a Russian officer stopped them and made clear by tapping the pistol on his hip that this was not allowed.

At about 0900 a truck carrying PW supplies came by to pick the men up and take them to the nearby PW camp. A Russian captain was in the cab with the driver and an armed guard was in the back. The Americans climbed aboard and after some time spent driving to various points in Hamhung, they arrived at the PW camp at about 1300. Here the supplies were unloaded and Queen and his group were reunited with the five men of the crew already at the camp. The Americans were welcomed effusively by the British and Australians in the camp. The only damper on the enthusiasm was the fact that F/O Sherrill was still missing.

31 Aug 45

On this date the 500th Bomb Group flew its second POW supply mission, which was POW Mission #6 for the 20th Air Force. A total of 21 aircraft were sent to drop supplies to camps in Japan. The participating aircraft are
listed below with their target camps where known. Only one participating crew, the Sealy crew in Z-37, is known.

Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Fukuoka #1
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Mizuri
Z-7, Fukuoka #1
Z-11, "Lucky Eleven", Fukuoka #1
Z-12, Fukuoka #1
Z-15, "Fire Bug", Fukuoka #1
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", Fukuoka #1
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Fukuoka #1
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Furogure
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Fukuoka #17
Z-37, "Belle Ruth", Sealy, Mizuri
Z-41, "My Pride and Joye", Furogure
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", Fukuoka #17
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Fukuoka #4
Z-55, "Janice E.", Mizuri
Z-58, "Marilyn Gay", Fukuoka #4
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Maisuri
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Fukuoka #4
Z-43, "Ben's Raiders"
Z-48
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Fukuoka

Seven planes -- Z-7, Z-37, Z-41, Z-55, Z-5, Z-43 and Z-48 -- could not locate their targets and returned with their supplies.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"31 Aug: Crews took off from 0100 on throughout the morning until 1100. All our crews returned safely. One camp at Maizura [Maisuri?] not located so cargo brought back to base."

On this day the 882nd Squadron lost its commander, Lt Col Joseph F. "Toby" Brannock, although at the time it was thought to be a temporary absence. A special B-29 flight had been arranged to fly from Saipan to Iwo Jima to meet a B-17 which would be arriving in from Japan with newsreel footage of the landing of the first American troops in Japan. The B-29 would then fly non-stop back to the States and then on to Washington, DC, to deliver this special cargo to the Pentagon. Someone had chosen Brannock to command this flight.

The crew would be a composite representing every Group in the 73rd Wing plus Wing HQ, and the plane they would fly was Z-16, 44-70101, of the 500th Bomb Group. There would be no need for gunners or a bombardier, so none was taken, but the other six crew positions were doubled so that every man could have a relief on this very long flight. Brannock probably selected the plane, and he must have been allowed a degree of latitude in choosing the crew, because four other men of the 882nd were included. One of them was the Squadron Radar Officer 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, who had arrived on Saipan with the Ground Echelon in September 1944 and therefore had been there longer than any other of the flight crew. One of the pilots on this flight was Maj Charles Phillips, a veteran of the 498th Bomb Group, who may have been selected because his wife back in the States was scheduled to give birth soon. Phillips had just returned at 1700 from a long PW supply mission to Japan and was handed his copy of the orders as he climbed out of the plane. He then had to rush over to Z-16's hardstand in the 500th Group area, where the rest of the composite crew was waiting for him. Fortunately for Phillips, a friend had already packed his bags and even managed to draw his pay for him on this payday.

Z-16 took off this evening, arriving at Iwo about midnight. Now they just had to wait for the B-17 to arrive from
Japan with the newsreels.

Up at the WPBC on the north end of Saipan this evening, Willie Greene was feeling a little lonely. His buddies Harry Ruch and Paul Grove had left today in a big shipment, but Greene's name was not on the list. Greene noted somewhat woefully that there were only a few men left in the rotation pool.

Don Weber was now well on his way home on the SS Bowdoin Victory. Today he found out that the ship was going to stop at Eniwetok before heading on to Pearl Harbor. He also learned that the ship had a crew of about 60 including the gun crew. He spent the day shooting the breeze with some of the other officers, then did some calisthenics to keep in shape, and then laid out in the sun for a while to get a tan.

Far to the north in Korea, the Queen crew had a joyous moment this morning when their missing bombardier, F/O Marion Sherrill, showed up at the PW camp near Hamhung. When the shouts and back-slapping had died down, Sherrill told his story.

Like the other men who bailed out, Sherrill had been rescued from the water on the 29th by a Korean fishing boat but had been brought to a different village about 30 miles away. There he had been taken in for the night and treated kindly by a Korean doctor. The next day at about 1730 he and the doctor managed to get on a Russian troop train going to Hamhung. However, the presence of a lone American raised suspicions, and at the station in Hamhung he was taken aside for interrogation. The Russian questioners did not appear to know about the B-29 incident of the day before, and Sherrill was reluctant to provide too much detail, not wanting to say that Russians shot them down. Finally, the Russians told Sherrill that he must wait overnight and take the next train to Seoul, which was in the American occupation zone. They then assigned a guard to stay with him and his friend the Korean doctor.

But Sherrill did not want to go to Seoul. He wanted to go to the airfield and try to find the rest of his crew. So he and the good doctor, presumably with the guard in tow, went to the local Communist Party Headquarters to see if they knew anything about the whereabouts of his crew. The officials there did know about the B-29 but erroneously told Sherrill that the crew was staying at a hotel in town. Eventually, Sherrill was taken to see Col Barteslav, the airfield commander, with his interpreter Maj Kruglov, and General of Aviation Preobrazhensky, who all seemed very happy to see him.

By this time it was the morning of the 31st. The general told Sherrill he would be taken to the PW camp to his crew, but he first invited the American flyer to breakfast. While eating, Sherrill noticed a K-20 camera in the room with "500th Bomb Group" clearly stenciled on it. He asked the general if it was from the B-29. The Russian lied and said it had come from lend-lease. Sherrill did not pursue the matter, but after breakfast he asked to be allowed to enter the B-29, which was still on the runway. The Russians seemed reluctant, but finally Maj Kruglov took him out to the plane. Once inside, Sherrill could see that everything he had left behind was gone. He asked Kruglov about his belongings but got no answer. Eventually, some of the bombing equipment was returned, but Sherrill never did get back his winter flying jacket or stop watch. Sherrill also discovered that in the radar compartment "they had tore [sic] open every life raft and emergency kit." In addition, the Russians were still, two days later, draining fuel from the plane.

When finished in the plane, Sherrill returned to the headquarters building and Gen Preobrazhensky and Col Barteslav took him in an old Japanese car to the PW camp, where they arrived at about 1030.

At this time the Russian general had a long talk with Lt Queen, apologizing for the shootdown and offering to do anything to help. He was even willing to fly the crew to Vladivostok, where there was an American embassy. Most importantly, he finally gave Queen permission to use the radio in the plane to contact Saipan. The general promised that a truck would come in the morning to take the Americans to the airfield.
Things were looking up for the Queen crew.

1 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"1 Sept. 1945  Lt Armstrong in Z-38 flies weather recon to Osaka."

Airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron wrote his parents today:

"Sept. 1, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

I received your letter of the 20th of August and also an old letter from July on the same day. I got a couple of Journals yesterday. The mail will probably be slow for a while until things get straightened around in Japan. I imagine most of the cargo planes are being used to carry prisoners out of Japan.

I don't imagine that they will stop censoring until a while after V-J Day.

We haven't been told anything about the future. The planes have been flying supplies up to the P.W. camps in Japan. I guess the prisoners are happy to get a decent meal.

The fellows with 85 points are getting ready to leave and also the men over 38 years old. The majority of the outfit is just waiting to see what will happen. It would be wonderful if I can be home this year. Now that the war is over I don't see any need for an outfit like ours to stay over here. Of course you can never tell what is going to happen in the Army.

... There isn't much to go on yet but rumors.

Love
George"

Up at the WPBC (Western Pacific Base Command) at the north end of the island, Willie Greene, formerly of the 882nd Bomb Squadron, had a personal goal today, and he was working hard at it. "Sitting around trying to miss K.P. and other details."

On Iwo Jima, Toby Brannock and his composite crew in Z-16 did not have to wait long for the B-17 coming from Japan with newsreels of the landing of the first American troops in Japan. It arrived shortly after daybreak. The cans of film were quickly transferred to the B-29, along with an additional precious and poignant cargo -- the first bags of mail from recently liberated American prisoners of war. Then, filled to the brim with fuel, including extra bomb bay tanks, Z-16 took off for North America at about 0700, taking the Great Circle Route across the North Pacific, a distance of about 5,000 miles. If all went well, they should see Vancouver Island below in less than 24 hours. As it turned out, they did not get the tail winds they had hoped for, but they still set down in Spokane, Washington, in early afternoon of the following day, which due to crossing the International Date Line and gaining a day was still 1 September. Their recorded distance and time from Iwo Jima were 5,490 miles in 23 hours and 33 minutes, nearly all of it over water. After a few hours layover for refueling, a good meal and phone calls home, the crew were back on the plane and in the air that same evening. Next stop -- Washington, DC.
On the other side of the world in Korea, the Queen crew had a much shorter distance to travel today. A Russian truck showed up at the PW camp this morning as promised and took Queen, Campbell, Grant, Strilky and possibly others of the crew to the plane at the airfield. After getting the putt-putt started and repairing shorts in the wiring, the men were finally able to power up the radio and contact Saipan. After being informed of the crew's situation, Saipan told them that a C-46 would be sent with spare parts and a team to repair the plane and pick them up. Estimated date of arrival was 4 September.

The Russians offered to let the American crew stay at the airfield, but they preferred to stay at the POW camp, where they were getting along famously with the Brits and Aussies.

2 Sep 45

On this day the formal surrender of Japan took place on board the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. A mass flyover of B-29's was part of the ceremony but strangely there is no mention of this in any of the 500th Bomb Group documents.

On Saipan on this day the 500th Bomb Group sent eight aircraft to drop PW supplies as part of POWM #7. All missions today were to Japan. The participating planes and their target camps were as follows:

Z-49, "Fourth Marine Division", Yokkaichi 
Z-46, [Camp] #292 
Z-27, "The Cannuck", Himeji 
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe II", [Camp] #285 
Z-15, "Fire Bug", [Camp] #284 
Z-19, "Sharon Sue", [Camp] #285 
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Himeji 
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Himeji

Only one crew is known. Lt Col Freeman Parsons, Group Operations Officer, flew Z-15 with a crew made up mostly of staff officers, including Assistant Group Operations Officer Maj Richard Hale, Group Flight Engineer Capt Arthur Rand and 881st Squadron Navigator Lt Norman Ek.

All planes located their assigned camps and dropped successfully.

Ten time zones away, Z-16 with Lt Col Brannock and his composite crew from Saipan landed at Washington National Airport at about 0600. It was the Sunday of Labor Day weekend and no government offices were open, so the exhausted men found a hotel downtown and collapsed into bed for a good, long sleep. For most of them, it was the first real bed they had slept in in a long, long time.

3 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

Sgt William Eilers, assistant crew chief on Z-14 of the 881st Squadron, penned a curt entry in his diary today about something that obviously rankled him: “Sergeants pull K.P.” The Squadron must have been getting short of privates and corporals, so putting sergeants on KP may have been necessary, but it must have stung for men such as Eilers, who had been on Saipan for nearly a year, longer than any of the air crews, and had busted their butts to keep the planes flying. Furthermore, Eilers was an assistant crew chief.

Up at the WPBC rotation pool on Saipan, Willie Greene was spending most of his days playing bridge. He noted that there were only eight men left there in Company C.

Far away in Washington, DC, Lt Col Brannock and his crew delivered their cargo of newsreels and mail to the Officer of the Day at the Pentagon, which was deserted on this first peacetime Labor Day in four years. Then they went out to find a good restaurant, after which they slept some more.

Later Maj Phillips received a phone call from someone at Washington National Airport asking politely if they could please come and move their big bomber to a military base. Phillips pulled together a minimum crew from members who were still around and they drove to National “for the shortest flight we had ever made in a B-29. We took off and circled enough to get ourselves lined up with the appropriate runway at nearby Andrews Army Air Field (now Andrews Air Force Base). We put the B-29 down on the Andrews runway and then got permission to park it on an unused portion of their ramp.” And that’s where they left old Z-16, veteran of 28 combat missions.

A couple of days later Brannock and his men would meet Lt Gen Ira Eaker, Deputy Commander of the Army Air Forces. Eaker thanked them for delivering their cargo so expeditiously, then asked if there was anything he could do for the men. Brannock seized the opportunity. He asked if Eaker could change their orders so that they would not have to report back to Saipan. Eaker smiled and ordered an aide to have it done. So the twelve men received new orders to report to military installations near their homes, where they were given leaves. They had seen the last of Saipan, and the 882nd Bomb Squadron had seen the last of its commander.

4 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"4 Sept. At 0200K this morning 8 A/C were dispatched on POWM #8. Pfc. Johnson, a clerk of this office, went in Z-11."

One of the crews flying POW missions today was the Wareing crew of the 883rd, but it is not known in which plane. According to navigator James Warmbrod, they took off at about 0100, stopped at Iwo Jima to top off tanks, then flew on to Shanghai, which they reached about noon. They had difficulty finding their designated camp – according to Warmbrod, there were “about four camps in the city” – so finally they dropped on another camp. On the way back, they were diverted to Okinawa to “pick up a Major from a plane that had landed there on the way out with engine trouble.” About two hours after leaving Okinawa, they received a message to divert to Iwo because of bad weather at Saipan. They complied and landed at Iwo at about 0100 on the 5th.

Meanwhile, back in Hamhung, Korea, the Queen crew had been in daily contact via the radio in their damaged B-29 with their headquarters at Saipan since 1 Sep. Today was the day the C-46 with repair parts was supposed to show up, so the whole crew went out to the field from the PW camp where they had been staying. However, when they contacted Saipan, they learned that the flight had been delayed and was rescheduled for the 6th, weather permitting.

5 Sep 45

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From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"5 Sept. This Group dispatched 9 A/C to China, POWM 9. Two A/C drop supplies in Japan in accordance with POWM 11. Lt Armstrong in Z-38 flies weather recon to northern Honshu."

The Wareing crew of the 883rd, after flying to Shanghai and Okinawa, then spending the night on Iwo Jima on cots set up inside tents, finally got home to Saipan today, arriving at about 1400. Navigator James Warmbrod noted that they had logged about 4500 miles on this trip, adding understatedly that “there is a lot of water out here.”

6 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"6 Sept. Lt Sales of the 883rd Squadron appointed Group Gunnery Officer in the absence of Major English. Capt Oswald is appointed Group Operations Officer during absence of Col Parsons. Z-1 departed for California on a flight to obtain athletic equipment. Numbered among the crew were Lt Col McDowell, PC [Plane Commander], Lt Col Parsons, P [Pilot], and Capt Hopper, N [Navigator]. This trip will take approximately 12 days."

These days the thoughts of airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st were focused almost entirely on getting home. Today he passed on the latest information on this subject to his parents:

"Dear Mother & Dad,

The censorship has finally been lifted. It doesn't make an awful lot of difference, yet.

Our Group C.O. told us last night that we could expect to be in the States by Christmas. Nothing is definite as yet but it is expected that we will be off the island by the 15th of November or sooner. If we have everything ready and transportation is available we may leave sooner. This is the only news we have yet but it is very encouraging. Up till now we haven't had anything but rumors.

I do not know whether we will go to the East or West Coast....

There is lots of work to be done yet. The planes are still flying supplies to Japan and until this stops we can't really buckle down to packing.

I am stopping my allotment this month. Sept. will be the last month it will be taken out. I will lose 20% in pay when I get back in the States. I am perfectly willing to lose my overseas pay as soon as possible.

The cold will probably hit an all time low when I get home. After all this heat I will probably mind it quite a bit. ... I expect quite a different Christmas this year. It won't be 100 degrees F. in the shade anyway. ...

Love
George"

At the WPBC rotation pool on northern Saipan, Willie Greene continued to pass the days by playing bridge.
In Hamhung, Korea, it rained all day and the C-46 from Saipan failed to show up. Saipan told the Queen crew to call again tomorrow.

7 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"7 Sept.  POWM #14:  11 A/C to Higashi-Misone [sp?], Kyushu.  1 A/C to Sendai, Honshu."

In Hamhung, Korea, the stranded Queen crew was informed today by Saipan that they were in the process of clearing a plane through MacArthur’s headquarters. Check again tomorrow.

8 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"8 Sept.  POWM #15:  7 A/C to Oita Area, Kyushu."

The POW camp near Hamhung, Korea, where the Queen crew of the 882nd Squadron was staying must have begun running low on supplies and put out a call for help, because today the crew was informed by Saipan that if the weather cooperated two planes would be over tomorrow to drop supplies. Also today the Russians chipped in by delivering some "Japanese crackers, flour and canned sardines."

Some of the crew that had flown Z-16 from Saipan to Washington from 31 Aug to 2 Sep, including 1/Lt Norman Garrigus, got back in the plane today and flew her to Oklahoma City, where some minor repairs were made. The next day they flew to Mather Field near Sacramento, left the plane there and then dispersed for their homes. Garrigus made it home to Tucson by 11 Sep, then a few days later reported to Fort Bliss, Texas, where he officially started a 45-day leave. Garrigus would decide to remain in the Officers Reserve Corps and would eventually retire from the Air Force as a Colonel.

9 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"9 Sept.  POWM #16:  2 A/C to Korea and 1 A/C Sendai Area, Honshu.  Lt Armstrong flying Z-38 flies weather recon to Japan."

Those two planes sent to Korea must have been the same ones that showed up today over Hamhung and dropped supplies for the Queen crew and the British and Australian POW’s in the camp there.

Airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron wrote his parents today. With no more censorship he could tell them more about his duties and life on Saipan:

"Sept. 9, 1945"
Dear Mother & Dad,

... One of the boys claims he heard Gen. O'Donnell tell our Group C.O. that we would leave around Oct. 16. That is the most popular rumor here. I hope that it doesn't take as long to make it home as it did to come over. We left the States on the 13th of August and never got off the boat until Sept 19th. I knew every inch of that little scow. It shouldn't take over 15 days to get back.

We are still working on the line although it is rumored that some of the planes will be leaving soon. We have eight cylinders to change so I have a couple of days work ahead of me. A cylinder change is plenty tough on the hands.

We have been eating good the past few days. Some of the stuff intended for the prisoners of war came back in the planes so it was given to us. We got a lot of canned goods, candy, gum, cigarettes and such stuff. We warm up soup between meals for on the line. I have eaten more soup in the past three days than I ever ate in my life. I have a couple cases of chicken soup that is very good.

Colonel King, our former Group Commander has been rescued from Japan. He made a speech at the theater two nights ago. You can really get the low down from some one that has survived from being captured. He was kept in solitary confinement from Dec 3 when he was shot down until April. He went from 195 to 126 lbs. [Photo attached of a visibly thin Col King after his return to Saipan.]

The B-29 men [as prisoners] got half ration on food. Out of 1100 captured by the Japs only 150 men are accounted for. King was shot down in my first ship. [That would be Z-1, "The Rosalia Rocket".]

Love
George"

Another airplane mechanic in the 881st and an assistant crew chief, Sgt William Eilers, picked up some additional tasks today when his crew chief, S/Sgt Clay Powell, was sent to the hospital with what was later diagnosed as an ulcer. This put Eilers in charge, and he and his reduced crew were very busy today changing out #4 engine and three brake drums on Z-14. Fortunately, M/Sgt Howard Helms, crew chief on Z-5, was kind enough to come over and lend a hand.

10 Sep 45

Throughout this period, the 500th Bomb Group continued to participate in PW supply missions. The unit history provides a good summary of what it took to prepare for these missions:

"An important contribution made by Armament and Ordnance was the packing and loading [of] aircraft for supply missions. Ordnance transported the supplies from the Quartermaster Warehouse to the hardstands. The Service Center provided containers, steel barrels with the ends removed and welded together in pairs to form one long container, each with welded lugs for attaching to the bomb shackles. Armament packed these containers with foodstuffs on the hardstands and loaded them on the bomb racks with chutes attached. Also included in the load were mattress covers filled with clothing and bound with metal tape and special canvas kit filled with medical supplies. The total load was four double barrels, twelve singles, six bundles of clothing and one medical kit.

"In the middle of the supply mission phase a revision on loading was decided on and fifteen aircraft, already loaded with barrels, were unloaded. Platforms, also built by the Service Center, were installed in the bomb bays, attached to the shackles, and supplies loaded on them. Clothing supplies had been discontinued and five cases of 10 in 1 rations were bound together with steel tape and attached to the 18 foot cargo chute. This type of loading was considered considerably more successful as a larger load could be carried and less parachute
malfunctions were observed. The platform also had a 'chute attached to prevent possible damage to personnel from a free fall. Maintenance requirements from these missions were largely damaged center sections, radar domes from the barrels, and small holes and dents in the under part of the fuselage caused by static lines."

11 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"11 Sept. Lt. Norman Ek, 881st Squadron, placed on special duty with this office as Group Navigator in the absence of Capt Hopper. Lt. Raymond Porter, 881st Squadron, placed on special duty with this office as Group Flight Engineer during absence of Capt Rand."

Near Hamhung, Korea, this morning, the Queen crew made their daily call to Saipan and were told there was no further information about when the C-46 would arrive. So the crew went back to the PW camp where they were staying, thinking they would have to wait another day. However, that afternoon what appeared to be a C-46 was spotted overhead, and later the crew of the C-46, having landed at the airfield, came over to the camp. A Col Martin from Guam was in charge. The Colonel had already examined Z-28 and determined that it was not worth repairing. Instead, they would remove all critical items and leave the rest to the Russians. But it was too late in the day to start stripping the plane now.

12 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"12 Sept. POWM #18: 3 A/C to Sendai, Honshu, and 1 A/C to Hakodate, Hokkaido."

Airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron wrote his parents today. His mind was still mostly on going home.

"Sept. 12, 1945
Dear Mother & Dad,

... There isn't much new on going home although we have turned in some more equipment. They also took our sizes for winter clothing. ...

We got a bunch of new men in for replacements yesterday. There was[n't] enough to replace very many but it is a good sign. I don't believe we will be doing much more flying from here after this month. The latest rumors have us in the States by Armistice Day. I doubt if it will be that soon but I believe it will be before Thanksgiving.

I had to work all last night to finish up the plane for this morning. They are still flying supplies to Japan. ...

Love
George"

13 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

Up at the WPBC (Western Pacific Base Command) on northern Saipan, Willie Greene, formerly of the 882nd Squadron, was "still in this pool waiting to be shipped out."

And up in Korea, the Queen crew and the men who had arrived in the C-46 with Col Martin spent today stripping Z-28 of all salvageable equipment. "All flight instruments, gun sights, radio, radar, bomb sights, APP [?], AFCE [Automatic Flight Control Equipment], and various other equipment was removed from the B-29 and loaded onto the C-46." The stripped-out hulk was left to the Russians. The plan had been to leave late today but the weather closed in, so Col Martin decided to wait until tomorrow. The Queen crew would have to spend one more night in Hamhung.

14 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"14 Sept. POWM #20: 5 A/C to Fukuoka, Kyushu, Japan.
Lt Armstrong, Z-38, on WRM [Weather Reconnaissance Mission] to Japan."

This morning, after 16 days in Russian-occupied Korea, the Queen crew was finally ready to leave Hamhung in the C-46 which had come from Guam. Before the Americans took off, the Russians returned most of the items they had taken from Z-28 in the first days after it crash landed. According to 1/Lt Queen, "they gave us back two clocks, navigator's kit (minus watches), form 1 and 1A, [airplane commander's] handbook, engineer's brief case, G-file and flight control manual. The Bombardier did not get his brief case back, neither did we get the K-20 camera." Also, some of the crew did not get back personal items such as flying jackets and knives. Ring gunner S/Sgt Rinaldo philosophically chalked that up to Russian souvenir hunters.

Then they took off. But they weren't headed back to Saipan quite yet. The plane flew only 150 miles and landed in Seoul (Keijo), which was in the American occupation zone. There 1/Lt Queen was interviewed by Col Cecil Nist, G-2 of the Army's XXIV Corps. The crew were also interviewed by some American war correspondents they ran into in one of the hotels in the city. Later, Capt Campbell, the 882nd Squadron Flight Engineer and one of the passengers on Z-28, regretted speaking with the newsmen. "We told them our story, but realized later that we should have waited until an official report had been made of the incident."

Then they had an unfortunate encounter with one of those petty bureaucrats which abound in the military, a lieutenant who was in charge of liberated prisoners of war and who insisted that the members of the Queen crew fell under his purview. They tried to explain their situation but it didn't do any good, and they had to fill out several forms before they could get away. The crew spent the night in Seoul.

15 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"15 Sept. Weather recon missions finished."

In a letter to his parents today, airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron explained the situation on Saipan:
"We have been busy the past couple days. They have finally quit operations. We are now getting the planes in condition to fly back. We have three engine changes due to the fact that they have so much time on them. They want nothing but new or nearly new engines to fly back with.

"They are preparing a list of names now to go back with the planes. This would get me in the States much quicker but the catch is you have to stay with the plane while they put on air shows around the country. As yet I don't know if I will fly back or not. Either way I will have a furlough by Christmas time I believe. ... When I learn what way I will travel I will let you know."

This morning the Queen crew of the 882nd departed Seoul and flew to Kanoya, Kyushu, Japan, where they overnighted. At this location most of the B-29 parts they had taken off Z-28 were unloaded from the C-46.

16 Sep 45

In the WPBC rotation pool on the north end of Saipan, Willie Greene was still waiting for transportation home. He'd been there 19 days now. Among other activities, he calculated his separation points. He already had 66, and he expected to pick up 15 more from another Air Medal and two battle stars that he had coming. That would give him 81, which was enough to get out. "Oh, boy!!" he thought.

Today the C-46 with the Queen crew left Kanoya, Japan, flew to Iwo Jima, and then on to Saipan, arriving at 2030. It was a relief to be back. They'd left 19 days ago and had had more of an adventure than they'd ever expected. There remained only the task of giving statements to the 882nd Squadron S-2, which they would do over the next few days.

17 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"17 Sept. 8 A/C on flight to Guam to pick up supply parachutes.
MAJ HALE: is relieved of duty as Asst S-3 and transferred to 882nd Squadron.
MAJ BRADEN: 883rd Squadron, assigned Group Operations Officer.
CAPT OSWALD: becomes assistant Operations Officer.
LT COL PARSONS: relieved from duty as Group S-3 and will assume command of 882nd Squadron upon return from California.
SGT QUINN: leaves for U.S.A. on emergency furlough."

18 Sep 45

As the 500th Bomb Group began to close down operations on Saipan, the command wisely required most section heads to write histories of their sections. One of the best of these accounts was written by Group RCM Officer 1/Lt Milton O. Pack. It is reproduced below.

RCM HISTORY OF THE 500th BOMB GROUP

The RCM [Radar Countermeasures] history of the 500th Bomb Group actually started on the first of March 1944 when four RCM Observers (MOS 7888) reported to Walker AAF. These observers were Lieutenants
Norman F. Garrigus, Burton L. Wilner, Robert E. Holmes, and Milton O. Pack. Each of them had received thorough training preparing him for the job to be done. This training consisted of courses of instruction for communications cadets, radar maintenance officers, and RCM observers.

They arrived just in time to take over the work of the observers of the 462 Bomb Group, who had been relieved of duty, in preparation for overseas shipment. This work later proved to be of immense value as it was the only contact the observers had with RCM equipment during the remainder of their stay in the States.

The "fly-away" planes of the 462 Bomb Group had just arrived at Walker AAF and they had no RCM equipment installed. The equipment, however, was lying crated in the radar building and had to be installed before the planes left the field. The equipment to be installed consisted of shock-proof mounts, pressure cans for RCM antennae, antennae, transmitters and receivers. The observers and the few enlisted men that were available set to work and the job was completed before the planes left the field for their overseas trip. Months later, word was received from the 462 Group observers expressing thanks for the good work that had been done.

After that phase of work had been completed, the observers set to work studying the circuits and operations of the radar set that was to be used by the 500th Group -- the AN/APQ-13. Word had arrived that the radar operators would be enlisted men, who had had no previous training in the operation of a set similar to the AN/APQ-13, and the observers realized that the flight training and a good part of the ground training of these men would fall on their shoulders.

In order to prepare themselves for this job, all available time was spent in studying. This was no easy task, because all of the work had to be accomplished alone -- none of the radar maintenance officers had any spare time to assist them. At last, just about the time that the radar operators arrived, the observers realized that they were ready to undertake the job.

It will not be necessary at this time to go into the difficulties that were experienced in training the radar operators. They were, however, numerous; lack of ground equipment, lack of flight equipment, lack of sufficient flight instructors, even resistance on the part of some of the Group personnel to realize the importance of radar training for the "strike team" -- radar operator and navigator. In spite of this, the training was accomplished and the Group left for its overseas base -- with the fingers of some of the personnel crossed for luck.

Once in the theatre, the main job of the RCM section was no longer radar, but RCM. For the first time the observers realized how little they knew about the job to be done. It is doubtful whether, during the first months of operation, any one had a concrete idea of what the Wing RCM policy was -- if there was any at all.

First of all, it was realized that the Wing would have to start from scratch in their operation against the enemy. This if nothing else was a blast at the RCM program of the Army Air Forces. RCM personnel, both army and navy, had been operating in the Pacific areas for quite some time, but still there was no liaison between those organizations and the 73rd Wing. It would have been of invaluable aid to the Wing to have received information about the then known Japanese equipment. But none was forthcoming and the information was gotten the hard way.

RCM stands for Radar Counter Measures -- but before one can take counter measures, one must know something about the "thing" that the measures are to be taken against. In other words, not a damn thing was known about the Jap radar set-up and it was the job of the RCM observers to find out what that set-up was. The only way to do that was to fly observers in strike aircraft with radar intercept equipment, to search the spectrum of radar frequencies.

The intelligence that can be gotten from intercept equipment is very limited -- however, that limited information can be invaluable in determining the enemy's radar defense system. The following information can be gotten from intercept equipment:

1. The presence of an enemy radar set within "line of sight" of the intercept plane.
2. Whether the enemy radar set is searching or locked on the plane that the observer is in.
3. If searching, the rate of sweep can be determined and the beam width of the radar set can be estimated.
4. The exact frequency of the radar set can be determined.
5. The pulse repetition frequency -- PRF -- can be determined.
6. The pulse width -- PW -- of the radar set can be determined.
7. It can be determined whether the enemy radar transmitter is lobe switched.

With this in view, each Group sent an RCM observer on all missions, to determine the enemy radar defense set-up. At first, operation of the intercept equipment was started at take off and all signals were logged, once out
of radar range of Saipan. Since Iwo Jima was not in our possession at the time, all intercepts were from enemy radars, with the exception of friendly naval radar signals.

The early logs of radar intercepts were prolific with entries. It was not exceptional for an observer to return with more than fifty entries. At that time, accuracy of PW and PRF was not too important, however, the more frequencies that were logged, the better. Intercepts were broken down into those logged enroute and those logged in the target area.

After the first month of operations, the intercepts that [had] been gotten began to follow a definite pattern. 1. Intercepts seemed to fall in the following groups of frequencies: 37mc, 60mc, 70mc, 90mc, 120mc, 150mc, and 200 mc. 2. PRF's were mainly centered about 500 pps. However, some exceptional ones went as high as 2000-3000. 3. Pulse Widths were either around 30-50 usec. or 5-10 usec.

In addition to the information about the radar signals, it was determined that the planes were being picked up by early warning radars on Iwo Jima and were being tracked by other radars in the Nanpo Shoto chain of islands. Thus the enemy had plenty of warning that raids were in progress.

It was suggested at the time that the missions be planned so that the planes fly out of radar range of those islands, but it was decided that the benefit derived from these islands as aids to navigation greatly outweighed the disadvantage of the planes being tracked by the enemy radars.

With the knowledge of the characteristics of typical early warning and gun laying radars, and with the aid of additional intelligence reports that were beginning to trickle in through channels, it was possible to determine whether intercepts were from early warning or gun laying radars. This was of great assistance to the later search missions of the Wing. It was possible to break down the RCM search and assign special jobs to different observers flying the same mission.

Despite the fact that it was known that the enemy had gun laying radar, it was the Wing policy not to use jamming transmitters against them. There were two main reasons for this decision. First, it was decided that the enemy GL radars were not good enough to give accurate results against the high altitude raids that we were flying. Second, the Wing did not want to tip its hand and show that it had transmitters that covered the Jap GL radars.

From 24 November until 7 April the RCM operations of the Group remained the same -- RCM search on each strike -- with the exception of the five low altitude fire raids during March. On these raids, each plane was equipped with as much "Rope" RR-3/U [long strips of aluminum foil] as was available at the time. The crews were briefed to drop the rope as a countermeasure against SLC [searchlight control] radars.

The method of dropping the rope was to be 3 packages every ten seconds, the rope to be dispensed through the camera hatch [in the rear unpressurized section]. The best time for dropping the rope is before the searchlight beam catches the plane. Once the plane is caught, it is possible to track the plane visually and the rope has no effect.

After each of the five raids, it was agreed that the rope had been effective as a countermeasure. Crews reported that the lights had been diverted from detecting their planes and others reported that the rope had been effective even after their planes were tracked by the lights. This was very encouraging, but it was wondered how long that simple method would be capable of fooling the enemy.

During this period, recording equipment had been received in the Group and recordings of VHF transmitters and interphone conversation in the target areas were made. In addition, some recordings of suspected fighter control communications channels were made. These recordings were submitted to higher echelons [because the 500th had no Japanese linguists].

Jamming transmitters were first used against the enemy on the medium altitude daylight mission on 7 April. This was the first medium altitude daylight raid for the Wing and it was decided that it would be necessary to use the jammers to protect the formations from radar controlled AA guns.

Very little time was allowed for getting the transmitters out of storage and tuned to predetermined frequencies. However, sufficient transmitters were prepared so that each combat squadron had a complete barrage coverage between the frequencies 190-210 mc. From previous search missions, it had been learned that the majority of the enemy GL radar lay between 190-210 mc.

Unfortunately, none of the Group observers flew on this mission and it was impossible to determine the completeness of the barrage. However, from later analysis it was believed that the barrage was quite complete. It is doubtful, however, that our jamming had any effect that day, as visibility was unlimited and visual gunsighting was possible.
The use of RR-3/U had been SOP since the first night fire raids, but the jammers were not used again until after the two night fire raids on Tokyo on 25 and 27 May. On these missions the losses of the Bomber Command were excessively high and it was decided to use a maximum number of jamming transmitters on all future missions.

In the opinion of the writer, it would be practically impossible at this time to evaluate the effect that our jamming has had on the enemy searchlight defense, and radar controlled gun laying systems, for the simple reason that it is not known to what extent the Japs relied on the information they received from their radar for SLC and GL.

It is known that Jap GL and SLC radars are of early design, being copied from captured Allied equipment. The sets that were copied were of the earliest type GL and SLC radar and were not very accurate. The enemy must have realized this fact and made allowances for it. The question is -- did they use their SLC and SL radar extensively in their defense system?

If they did use their radars extensively, it is safe to assume that our countermeasures program was successful. This statement is based on observations by RCM observers, who are the only personnel that can compare the signals received, both before and after the jamming program was started.

Three facts are outstanding in their importance for indicating the effectiveness of our jamming.

1. Many signals, when spot-jammed by RCM observers were noted to go off the air completely, or shift in frequency. This most definitely indicates that the jamming was effective.

2. Before the jamming program started, as many as 10-15 GL and SLC signals could be found in any of the important city areas. After the jamming program started, there was a noted decrease in the number of gun laying signals.

3. Before the jamming program started, the majority of the SLC and GL signals lay in the 200 mc band and extremely few lay in the 75 mc band. It is a significant fact that there were only two jammers per Group that could cover the 75 mc band and there were 60 jammers that could cover the 200 mc band. In other words, the enemy must have noted the comparative absence of jamming in the 75 mc band and placed more emphasis on the radar sets in that band.

If the enemy did not make extensive use of their GL and SLC radar sets, it cannot be attempted to even guess how much effect was had on his defense system. There are indications that many searchlights and guns were not radar controlled. This is evidenced by the accuracy of some of the searchlights despite the extensive use of rope and electronic jammers.

Towards the end of our operations, another tactical usage of RR-3/U rope was attempted. On one mission two of the planes in the Wing flew a rectangular course around the approach from the IP to the target, sowing rope on one of the legs. It was thought that the rope dropped by the orbiting planes would shield the approaching strike planes. This procedure was thought successful by observers accompanying the mission.

The end of the war caught the Wing in a period of expansion as far as RCM operations was concerned. Seven enlisted men had been given instruction as spot-jammers and extensive use would have been made of them on future missions. In addition, each Group was outfitting one plane as a "Guardian Angel" to carry as many as fifteen jamming transmitters and to orbit the target area. New equipment was coming in in ever increasing numbers and it was expected that they would be put to use in the near future.

The 500th Bomb Group was fortunate in that none of the original RCM observers were lost due to enemy action. In fact it was the only Group in the Wing to be that fortunate. Of the original observers, Lieut. Robert E. Holmes was transferred to Wing, Lieut. Burton L. Wilner finished his tour of 35 missions, Lieut. Norman F. Garrigus completed 33 missions, and Lieut. Milton O. Pack completed 26 missions.

As a final recommendation, it would be of immense value in evaluating the effectiveness of the RCM program of the 20th Air Force if evaluation teams were sent up to Japan to get the information from the Jap radar personnel. No amount of theorizing or guesswork on the part of armchair RCM personnel will unveil the true effectiveness, or ineffectiveness as the case may be, of the countermeasures that were used -- only first hand information from Jap radar personnel will reveal the true nature of that effectiveness.

MILTON O. PACK,
1st Lieut., Air Corps,
RCM Officer
19 Sep 45

Today, after 22 long days in the rotation pool at the Western Pacific Base Command, Willie Greene finally shipped out. Coincidentally, the ship his group was placed on was the SS Alcoa Patriot, probably a sister ship of the SS Alcoa Polaris, which had brought the ground echelon of the 500th Bomb Group to Saipan exactly a year ago today.

Acting crew chief Sgt William Eilers and his crew spent the day installing bomb bay tanks and luggage racks in Z-14 in preparation for the flight back home. Later Eilers went to visit his crew chief, S/Sgt Clay Powell, who was still in the hospital with an ulcer.

20 Sep 45

Today was Willie Greene's first full day at sea on his way home to the States. He wasn't too happy with the accommodations on the SS Alcoa Patriot. The bunks were too short for his lanky frame, it was hot in the compartment, and the food was terrible. Also, the ship was not moving as fast as he would like. Other than that, things were fine.

21 Sep 45

Another of the useful section histories written during the winding down period on Saipan was that of the Intelligence Section, authored by Group S-2 Capt John R. Smolenski. He titled it "An Evaluation of the Work of Intelligence with the 500th Bombardment Group." Here are excerpts from this eleven-page-long document:

"... The physical set-up for each Group and Squadron Intelligence Section within the 73rd Wing was substantially the same. Each Group was provided with a large double Quonset briefing room, capable of seating about 45 full B-29 crews. In the rear of the briefing building was the Group Intelligence Office, which although crowded to some extent, was better than anything provided by any training base in the United States. This Briefing building was not ready to occupy when the first missions were run, but rather two single story Quonset huts were placed end to end, and this was used to brief and carry on Intelligence work, during the early missions. Each Squadron was eventually provided with a Quonset hut which served as both a Squadron briefing room and a Squadron Intelligence Office.

All major strikes were briefed in the group Briefing room, whereas all Weather Reconnaissance missions, Radar Scope missions, Leaflet bombing missions, and all other single ship missions were briefed in the Squadron briefing room. ...

One of the most important duties of Intelligence was the briefing of the crews, and simultaneously, the preparation of the folders which were to be taken by the various crew members on the mission. At first, when the 73rd Wing was assigned nine Primary targets that it was to concentrate on, each Intelligence Officer was assigned one of the targets. It was thought that with each officer devoting his time to that one target, more information and better presented information could be given to the crews. This did not prove to be the case, inasmuch as all of the Intelligence Officers were not equal in speaking ability, and thus some of the Intelligence briefings were below par whereas others were exceptional. It was therefore decided to assign two officers, best in the public speaking arts, to do all the intelligence briefings, and this worked out very well as evidenced by the letter of commendation this Section received from the Commanding General of the 73rd Bombardment Wing. As for the preparation of folders for certain crew members, each group was allowed a certain amount of freedom in its arrangement of the material in the folders, so long as certain Wing minimum requirements were fulfilled. Each bombardier, navigator, and radar operator received a folder with that material necessary to do his job better. Due to a shortage of the standard black target folders, with the transparent plexiglass pages, the radar operators' folders were only large manila folders. However, when Radar Bombing reached the peak of importance in the night incendiary raids against Japanese cities, the standard black target folders were provided by robbing the navigators of their folders. Folders were prepared on a production line basis. The Group Intelligence Officer made up sample folders for the Bombardier, Navigator, and Radar operator, and these would
be reproduced by the enlisted personnel in the section. Although it was the desired policy of the Intelligence section to pass the folders out before the briefing, so that crew members could refer to the folders during the briefing, this was not always accomplished. The short notice received from Wing on a forthcoming mission was never more than 24 hours and often less than that time, and thus on many occasions the folders were still being prepared while the briefing was in progress and not distributed until the briefing was over.

One of the essentials in the target folders was a map showing in grease pencil the overall route of the mission, from landfall to I.P. to Target, and to land's end. When this was left out many of the crew members complained, and therefore it was made a must. ... The Lithomosaics, vertical photographs of the target provided by XXI Bomber Command and XX Air Force, proved very valuable in the folders.

Briefings were carried out in accordance with the Group Commander's policy, which was to make each person taking part in the briefing to have definitely in mind what he was going to say, to cut out any irrelevant information, and to speak loudly and clearly in an erect manner. Crewmen were seated by crews in the Briefing Room, and were called to attention when the Group Commander arrived. The Group Commander opened the briefing, followed by the Operations Officer, the Intelligence Officer, and then the Weather Officer. This was the procedure during the latter part of operations, however the Medical Officer, Group Bombardier, and Group Navigator also participated during the early briefings. The latter were then omitted from the General Briefing and handled their subjects only during the Specialized Briefings. At the peak of operations the General Briefing never took more than 30 minutes, and on the average took about 25 minutes.

The second big job of Intelligence was the interrogation of the crews and the preparing of reports for higher headquarters. Interrogations were made in individual booths, separated by large canvas partitions, and this separation cut down the confusion and speeded up the quality and quantity of the interrogations considerably. Before proceeding to the designated booth, each crew would report to the Flash News Desk, where a rated Officer handled Flash News. After the general interrogation, the crew members concerned would report to the specialized Interrogations located [in] the Group Operations building. One of the problems of interrogation during the early days of operations, when fighter opposition was extremely heavy, was trying to get all the fighter opposition information required by higher headquarters, and still keep the overall length of the interrogation down to a minimum. One attempt to handle this problem was to get just the overall fighter opposition picture at the general interrogation and then on the following day get the gunners together again for a more detailed interrogation on fighter opposition, but this was not too satisfactory. The problem was solved by the enemy itself only when fighter opposition decreased to such a point that it was only necessary to write "None" on the fighter opposition sheets.

For fighters destroyed, probably destroyed, or damaged, a card file index was set up showing just how each gunner stood. [I would love to get my hands on those card files, but I fear that at some point they went out with the trash.] At first, each Group passed on its own claims of enemy aircraft, but later the Wing A-2 Section set up a procedure whereby a Wing Claim Committee was set up and this committee passed on its own claims by studying the combat claim forms filled out by each gunner who made a claim. From the morale standpoint, keeping a record of each gunner's claims proved very valuable, for later awards public notice were given ace gunners [sic]. ...

Intelligence training of the combat crewmen was sadly neglected during the first phase of operations due to the fact that sufficient time was not available in which to train and also because the important things to learn had not been separated from the unimportant subjects. Due to the directives of Bomber Command shortly after General Curtis LeMay took over that Command, ground training received new impetus, and the Squadrons conducted regular classes in target identification and other allied Intelligence subjects. During the period of the night incendiary strikes, crews were required to complete two hours of target identification on the forthcoming target before the mission, and the Squadron Bombardier, Squadron Radar Officer, and the Squadron Intelligence Officer all took part in this two hour session. ...

In the field of cameras and photographs, there were few problems. Camera installation was handled by the Group Photo Officer with qualified enlisted personnel drawn from the three Squadrons and assembled into one Section. Working closely with the Group Operations for information on forthcoming strikes, a high standard of efficiency was maintained by this section. The Group Photo Officer gave his personal attention to each plane carrying a camera so as to check each bombardier out in correct procedure for the taking of vertical pictures over the target, by being present on the line before take-off and visiting each camera laden plane. As a result, commendation for this section was made by the Commanding General of the 73rd Wing on the consistent good quality of photographs taken on major strikes. Photographs printed by the Wing Photo Lab and distributed to the Group were handled by the Photo Interpreter Officer, together with all other photographic material, such as
Damage Assessment Reports, Survey Reports, and blowups of the more important checkpoints and targets. ...

The S-2 Section also had the responsibility for censorship, public relations and keeping the Group history. Regarding this last task, Capt Smolenski wrote, "It is felt that when official histories of the many operations of this war are written that this Organization's Historical file will prove a bountiful source of information." Yes, Capt Smolenski, it has indeed. Thank you very much.

**22 Sep 45**

For the 500th Bomb Group on Saipan the war was over but the training wasn't. From the Group Operations Journal:

"22 Sept.  9 A/C of 883rd squadron on local training flight."

**23 Sep 45**

Today on the SS *Alcoa Patriot*, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean between Saipan and the West Coast, Willie Greene, a combat veteran with 35 missions over Japan, holder of the Distinguished Flying Cross and several Air Medals, turned 20 years old. Now no longer a teenager, Greene was looking ahead to the rest of his life and thinking that he would be starting college at a little older age than most.

Meanwhile, back on Saipan, George Hughes of the 881st Squadron was also thinking about life after the Army, and it couldn't come soon enough for him. He calculated that by 1 Nov he should have 60 points, which would be enough for discharge. Today in a letter home he complained again about the Army: "We had an inspection Friday and one this morning which was Sunday. I don't go much for this playing soldier. After 13 months overseas it is hard to dig up a suitable uniform to stand inspection in. These officers relish a chance to strut around giving orders. Some changes from the days when we were being strafed and they were all carrying a steel helmet & gas mask wherever they went."

**24 Sep 45**

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"24 Sept.  18 A/C of this Group on local training hop from 1300 until 1630."

Today S/Sgt Clay Powell, crew chief on Z-14, was evacuated back to the States. Powell had been in the hospital since 9 Sep suffering from an ulcer. Sgt William Eilers, his assistant crew chief, was promoted to crew chief on Z-14.

**25 Sep 45**

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"25 Sept.  20 A/C dispatched at 1400 this afternoon on local training flight."

**26 Sep 45**

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:
"26 Sept. 14 A/C flying this afternoon on training and maintenance flights."

28 Sep 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"28 Sept. The three squadrons participated in a local training flight employing 29 A/C. The 883rd landed at Tinian and picked up a load of cargo platforms before returning to base."

Airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron wrote home again today:

"Sept. 28, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

... The Group Adjunct [Adjutant] gave us the official word last night. Our planes will leave around the 19th, 20th and 21st of next month. The men that are left will leave by boat about 8 or 10 days later. I have a remote chance of flying although I think that I will probably go by boat. It should take about 15 days to go back. We won't have to zig zag all over the Pacific this time.

I have 60 points now which is good for a discharge after the 1st of Nov. The way I figure now I should be a civilian by the 1st of Dec. What a happy thought.

We had another personal inspection today out on the ball field. It started raining so we didn't look too good before it was over. ...

Love
George"

2 Oct 45

Just a year earlier the 500th Bomb Group had been moving in to Saipan. Now they were getting ready to move out. George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, wrote home today with the latest news:

"October 2, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,

Everything is just about the same as when I wrote last. We were given our last pay a couple of days ago. The C.O. told us our next pay would be sometime late in November.

Some of the planes are being held up by bad weather so they can't leave for the States. [A huge typhoon tore through the North Pacific in early October, with part of it striking Saipan and doing much damage, including blowing down many tents.] I hope the weather clears up soon. We can't leave until all the planes are gone. The way it looks now the last of us will leave late this month or early in Nov. With luck I will be home by Nov 30th. ...

Love
George"
5 Oct 45

On this morning at 0600, after 16 days at sea, the SS Alcoa Patriot carrying Willie Greene and other veterans finally docked at San Pedro, California. The men were transported to Camp Anza, the same place that the 500th Ground Echelon had passed through on their way to Saipan 14 months before. After a day’s worth of processing, Greene would be on his way tomorrow back to North Carolina, specifically Fort Bragg, for separation from the Army.

6 Oct 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"6 October The movement of the Staff Officers began with the departure of Capt's McClintick and Dolkart with the 497th planes -- first of our Wing to be redeployed."

9 Oct 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"9 October M/Sgt McGettrick [of the S-3 Section] left with 498th [Group] ship to be separated."

Meanwhile, far away from Saipan, the train carrying Willie Greene home to North Carolina pulled into New Orleans this morning. Greene took advantage of an eight-hour layover to visit the French Quarter, where he "got drunk -- big time"... but apparently not drunk enough to miss his train.

11 Oct 45

On this day T/Sgt Willie Greene, former gunner in the 882nd Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, essentially returned to civilian life. His train arrived at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, at 11:30 AM, and by 6:00 PM Greene had completed processing and been given a 45-day furlough, with final pay and discharge to follow at the end of that time. Mister Greene slept overnight at Bragg but was picked up by his father the next day and went home to start the next phase of his life.

18 Oct 45

Sgt Bill Eilers, crew chief on Z-14 of the 881st Squadron, recorded in his diary that there was a big party at the Officers Club today: "90 cases of beer, hamburgers, all kinds of meat, cigarettes and candy."

19 Oct 45

On Saipan, airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron was still waiting with the rest of the ground personnel to leave for home. It seemed to be taking a long time.

"Oct. 19, 1945

Dear Mother & Dad,
I started processing yesterday in preparation for leaving. All records were checked and brought up to date. I still have clothing checks and other things to take care of. The way things stand now it looks as though we might leave between the first and fifteenth of next month. Of course everything could change before then.

The men with 70 points are still in the outfit. They were ready to leave around the first. The shipping seems to be pretty well tied up. I guess the men below 60 points will leave the island for new assignments soon. When they all leave and the planes are gone then I might get a chance.

Our planes leave on the 21, 22, and 23. They are the last on the island to leave. We will also be the last men to leave. Our group had the best record in the wing but we still have to be the last to leave.

As you can see on the envelope I made Staff Sergeant. This means about $20 more a month overseas and about $18 in the States. Let's hope I don't draw many more pays in the Army. When I get all my pay and discharge money I will have quite a tidy sum.

I hope everything is fine at home. We had a Sqdn. party last night. I guess the outfit won't be together much longer. ...

Love
George"

21 Oct 45

On this day the Air Echelon of the 500th Bomb Group began flying their B-29's from Saipan back to the United States. This evening the first group of 11 airplanes, all from the 883rd Squadron and led by Major James Braden in Z-50, took off. Each plane carried eight crew members and twelve passengers, the latter consisting of "high point officers and enlisted men out of units within the 73rd Wing and also the group staff of the 500th Bomb Group." The 500th planes were joined by four planes from the 499th Group.

22 Oct 45

Tonight 14 more B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group plus one B-24 loaded with 500th personnel flew off for home. The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal noted that one plane "was scratched when a crew member on Major Thompson's crew was taken sick and admitted to the hospital."

23 Oct 45

Early this morning at 0510, AC 1/Lt Donald G. Martin of the 883rd Squadron brought Z-52 in for a landing at John Rodgers Field on Oahu. The plane had left Saipan on 21 Oct as part of the Sunset Project bringing men back to the States. The landing itself went fine but as Martin turned off the end of the runway onto the taxiway he stopped. The "follow me" jeep that should have been there wasn't, and Martin didn't know where to park his plane. But the tower ordered him to clear the runway for following aircraft, so Martin, very conscious of the great wingspan of the B-29, proceeded cautiously down the taxiway, constricted with planes parked closely on both sides. As he attempted to maneuver between two B-24's, the B-29's right wing tip impacted the right rudder of the B-24 on the right. Damage was slight to both planes, requiring only a few hours to repair, but any accident in the military requires a lot of paperwork, and Martin had to fill out a statement. It is unknown how long Z-52 was held up by the accident, but eventually she made it safely back to the States with her passengers.

Back on Saipan, the planes and crews of the 500th Bomb Group, with ground personnel as passengers, continued to depart for the United States in daily squadrons. From the Operations Journal:

"23 October -- 13 instead of 15 of our 29s left tonight when we were notified at the last minute that ATC [Air
Transport Command] had two others going. [I'm not sure what this sentence means. Does it mean that because ATC was sending two additional planes two B-29's did not need to go? Were only so many planes allowed to leave Saipan per day? Dunno.]

Col Dougherty flew Z-49 ['Flagship 500'] with Capt Oswald as Co-Pilot and a load of staff members as Passengers.

With the departure of Capt Oswald Group Operations was left without an Officer and only three enlisted men.

But despite the steady departure of B-29's and air crew, there were still plenty of 500th ground personnel on Saipan who had to wait on a slow boat to take them home.

24 Oct 45

George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, was still stuck on Saipan, where, as he wrote his parents today, "things are progressing very slowly." George added, "The last of our planes leave tonight. They are the last B-29's on the island. My plane left last night. [This was Z-19, "Sharon Sue"]. It looked good taking off for the last time. We are cleaning up the line now and turning in tools, equipment, etc. We had a meeting today and our new C.O. [this would be Lt Col Herbert Adamson, formerly Group Executive Officer, now Commander of the Ground Echelon] told us that we didn't have any definite shipping date but that we would probably leave some time around the 5th of Nov. It seems as though they keep telling us later dates all the time."

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"24 October -- With Major Curtis as Acting Operations Officer the final seven aircraft of the 500th Group and one from the 499th took off for the states. There is nothing but the Ground Echelon left."

So Maj Ferd (yes, Ferd) Curtis, veteran of 30 B-29 combat missions, plus 80 anti-sub missions off the US East Coast and 57 B-24 anti-sub missions (with one credited submarine kill) out of England, holder of five (yes, five) Distinguished Flying Crosses, four of them with the 500th Bomb Group (no one else got more than two), watched his flock take off from Saipan one last time, then, waiting until last like the good shepherd he was, followed them up in faithful old Z-12, 44-69721. Once airborne, Curtis collected his squadron and turned them toward home. Ferd Curtis would stay in the Air Force and retire in 1968 as a Lt Col.

27 Oct 45

Maj Ferd Curtis in Z-12, after stops at Kwajalein and Hawaii, arrived safely today at Mather Field, CA.

30 Oct 45

From the 500th Bomb Group narrative history:

"With the departure of the air echelon, the ground echelon turned toward completion of preparations for shipment of the unit to the Continental United States. Lt. Colonel Herbert Adamson [formerly Group Executive Officer] took over as Group Commander of the ground echelon, with 1st Lt. Robert L. Judell as adjutant.

"Officers having below seventy-five discharge points and enlisted men having below sixty points were transferred from the 500th Bomb Group to other units in the Pacific area. In turn, 'high point' officers and men from other units were transferred to the 500th Bomb Group, to be returned to the Continental limits with the ground echelon."
Just one point shy of the magic 60 was S/Sgt Clyde Barnhart, propeller specialist in the 883rd Squadron. As a result, Barnhart was transferred to Iwo Jima and arrived there on or about this date via the light cruiser *USS Columbia*, called by her crew “The Gem of the Ocean”. The Gem had had a rough war, having been struck off the Philippines in January by two *kamikazes*, with another barely missing her. She had since been repaired. Barnhart was the only man from the 500th on board.

Today the final entry was made in the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal by an anonymous enlisted man:

“30 October -- For the past few days we have been cleaning out our quonset, turning in all equipment and packing those items which will return with us to the Estados Unidos. Cpl Johnson leaves for [illegible] today -- the last of the transfers of underpoint men as the group makes final preparations for departure.

Diary closed -- shipped home!!”

31 Oct 45

On or about this day George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, wrote his last letter from Saipan. Actually, it wasn’t really a letter, just a note written on a V-mail form letter for change of address. The V-mail was postmarked Oct 31 1945.

“Dear Mother & Dad,

This will probably be the last letter from me. I will be leaving in the near future and no more mail can be sent from here. If everything goes right this time I will soon be home. We are still cleaning up around here but should be done soon.

Love
George”

On Iwo Jima there was no opportunity for S/Sgt Clyde Barnhart of the 883rd Squadron to apply his very specialized skills to propeller governors. The Navy was in charge of the island. Barnhart was put to work servicing generators, driving a Navy dump-truck, helping to unload quonset huts from ships, and similar duties.

15 Nov 45

On this date the ground echelon of the 500th Bomb Group, including long-serving airplane mechanics George Hughes and Bill Eilers, who had been on Saipan from beginning to end, departed the island by ship for the United States.

While all their old friends on Saipan were heading home, S/Sgt Clyde Barnhart and Sgt Donald Thurow, formerly of the 883rd and 882nd Squadrons respectively, were still stuck on Iwo Jima doing odd jobs for the Navy. Had they been forgotten?

29 Nov 45

On this day at 0900 the ship carrying the Ground Echelon of the 500th Bomb Group arrived at the Los Angeles Port of Embarkation. The men left the LAPE at 1030 and arrived at Camp Haan, adjacent to March Field, Riverside, California, by 1630. Here the Ground Echelon consolidated with the Air Echelon, which had been at March Field since 24 October. The process of discharging or transferring the personnel in anticipation of deactivation of the unit began almost immediately.
30 Nov 45

Sgt William Eilers, former crew chief of Z-14 of the 881st Squadron, finished processing at Camp Haan and departed for home, presumably by train, at 1930 hours.

3 Dec 45

Not all the men of the 500th Bomb Group were back from the Pacific yet. When the main body of the 500th left Saipan for home, those men who did not have the requisite 60 points for rotation home had been transferred to other units and stations. One of these men was S/Sgt Clyde Barnhart, former propeller specialist in the 883rd Squadron. But today, after more than a month on sulfuric Iwo Jima, Barnhart was told to collect his gear and hasten on board the light aircraft carrier USS Independence anchored offshore. He was finally going home.

Another former 500th man made it aboard the Independence today. Like Barnhart, Sgt Donald Thurow, former photographic intelligence analyst in the 882nd Squadron, had not had the requisite 60 points. Thurow had been sent to Iwo Jima in late October aboard an LST (Landing Ship Tank) that had been reconfigured to carry troops. En route, they ran into the fringes of a typhoon, which pummeled the flat-bottomed craft unmercifully. Thurow remembered, “That LST reared up on its fin tail, twisted left and then right and then smashed down on the water with all sorts of loud metal screeching sounds. I thought the damed thing was sure to break up and sink – and I was so sea sick that I hoped it would! The deck was awash and there were sick GIs scattered around among the waves washing across them. I’m sure some of them were washed overboard, but no one on that boat knew anyone else. The GIs were gathered up from all over Saipan....” But the battered LST eventually made it to Iwo Jima and disgorged its by then thoroughly miserable human cargo, who were just thankful to be back on land, even a place as bereft and barren as Iwo.

There was no need for Thurow’s highly specialized skills on the little island. After helping out as a cook for a while, he decided to put his intel skills to use on his own behalf. He managed to dodge most work details and spent most days exploring Japanese tunnels or fishing down on the beach. And then one day an aircraft carrier appeared off shore and Thurow was told to get aboard. This proved to be much easier said than done. There was no harbor at Iwo, so everything had to be transported back and forth via landing craft on the usually rough sea. Thurow and several dozen other men carrying their barracks bags packed themselves shoulder to shoulder into a landing craft which had been run up onto the beach, and then a bulldozer pushed them into the water. The coxswain started the engine, turned the boat toward the Independence, and they were off... for a short distance.

It quickly became obvious to those on board that this craft had a serious problem. Water began pouring in and those who were able climbed up onto the landing ramp to stay dry and started waving frantically at other passing landing craft. Fortunately, an empty one saw their predicament, came alongside and took the endangered soldiers aboard. It was not easy to clamber over the side, especially holding a bag, with the two boats heaving up and down in the 8-10 feet swells, but everyone made it.

Finally, they arrived at the carrier, where they had to wait at the end of a line of boats trying to unload. The process was very slow because the men leaving the landing craft had to wait until the swell lifted the small boat up past the small platform at the bottom of the ship’s ladder. One man with his bag could jump off at that point, and another as the boat passed the platform again coming back down with the swell. Somehow everyone managed to make it on board without anyone being lost into the drink.

The Independence had just come from Japan and was packed full of men going home, but as a relatively high-ranking S/Sgt, Barnhart was berthed with about a dozen other NCO’s in the carrier’s former pilot ready room, so the accommodations were not too bad. And as always on Navy combat ships, the food was good. The only problem was that there was something wrong with the boilers and there was no hot water, so the men had to shower in cold sea water. But they were going home, so much could be forgiven.

Thurow’s accommodations were not as comfortable as Barnhart's. Thurow was assigned to the hangar deck,
which was filled with endless rows of bunks, about nine high with very narrow walkways between. But then Thurow had a stroke of good fortune. He ran into an old high school classmate among the crew... and not only a member of the crew but in charge of the ship's store! "He showed me around the ship, taught me the daily routine of the crew and guided me to a mess hall; but most important of all, he sold a complete set of Navy clothes to me!" After that, all Thurow had to do was get up early in the dark, pull on his sailor outfit and clear out of the hangar deck area before the work details were formed. With that uniform, he could go practically anywhere on the ship without question and find quiet places to spend the day. Best of all, he could eat with the crew and have real Navy chow.

10 Dec 45

Sgt William Eilers, former crew chief on Z-14 of the 881st Squadron, received his discharge from the service today at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and headed home to Covington.

15 Dec 45

On this day the USS Independence arrived at San Pedro, California, near Los Angeles, bringing home a large contingent of men from the Pacific. Among them were S/Sgt Clyde Barnhart, formerly of the 883rd Squadron, and Sgt Donald Thurow, formerly of the 882nd Squadron. These two men were very possibly the last original members of the 500th Bomb Group to make it back to the States. Soon they would both be on their way home. Curiously, Barnhart and Thurow, who being in different Squadrons had not known each other on Saipan, never knew they had both been on the Independence until exchanging stories at a reunion many years later.

22 Dec 45

Today was the last day in the Army for S/Sgt Clyde Barnhart, former propeller specialist in the 883rd Squadron. As with just about everything else in Barnhart's final months of service, his trip home from California had not gone as planned. A group of 13-14 veterans set out from Los Angeles by plane headed for Washington, DC. The men were very pleased with the air transportation, as they would get home much more quickly by plane than train. However, a bad snowstorm forced the plane to land in Cleveland, where they had to stay overnight. The closest military installation where they could be accommodated was a hospital, which put them up in the only space with enough beds, the mental ward. Must have made for an interesting night. The next day the men were able to catch a train to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, and today, after nearly three years of faithful service to his country, Clyde Barnhart was duly discharged. He had made it home in time for Christmas.

17 Jan 46

From the 500th Bomb Group Narrative History:

"500th Bombardment Group inactivated as of 2400, 17 January 1946, per paragraph 1, General Order #160, Headquarters Fourth Air Force, dated 11 November 1945."

With that brief, dry statement an outstanding combat unit passed into history. But its men, members of what would one day be labeled "The Greatest Generation", were just getting started. Each in his own way would contribute to the growth of this nation, and in doing so a surprising number would find themselves putting to good use the lessons they had learned during their time in the 500th. Later, in the autumn of their lives, with the quiet satisfaction of jobs well done, families well raised and lives well lived, many veterans would find their thoughts turning more and more often to their time on a distant Pacific island where they arrived as boys and left as men. And at the end, as still bold spirits battled failing bodies, many a family gathered around the deathbed would exchange puzzled glances and wonder why their patriarch's last words were of a time and
place so far away.

Once upon a time great fleets of silver bombers filled the skies, and their thunder shook the ground. And inside these giant bombers were giants among men. We will never see their like again.

THE END

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