

# Twelve Times to Target 357

One-seventh of all the bombing missions flown against Japan by the B-29's in the Marianas were directed at the infamous Target 357, the mass engine assembly plant of Nakajima Hikoki KK (Nakajima Aircraft Co. Ltd), in Musashi, a suburb of Tokyo. Twelve times the Superfortresses struck at Target 357, and once the Navy sent a carrier-based force of dive bombers and torpedo planes against it.

Militarily, it was the single most important target on the home islands of Japan. One out of every three engines used in Japanese combat aircraft was built in one of the several plants of Target 357. The Ha-35 Sakae and Ha-45 Homare radial powerplants were the principal production engines at the time of the B-29 raids. During the time period from January 1939 to 10<sup>th</sup> August 1945, the plant built more than 40,000 engines.

Target 357 was relatively a new plant having been erected in 1938 as part of the Japanese industrial expansion in support of the war with China. Further expanded in 1941, the factory area covered almost three million square feet and employed a maximum of 45,000 workers. (For comparison, Pratt & Whitney's main plant in East Hartford, Connecticut was almost as large in area and employment during the war.

The buildings were a mix of single-storey steel framed and wooden roofed-structures: a 1941 addition was a multi-storeyed reinforced concrete building. They stretched over an area of 130 acres.

The first raids on the Musashino plant dropped a mix of demolition and incendiary using the latter because of the wooden roofs on the main plant area. Later raids used only high explosive bombs. Soon after the first raid on 24 November 1944, Nakajima began a **dispersal** programme and finally stopped all production at **Misashi** on 30 April 1945, following heavy strikes on **2, 7** and 12 April.

Yet when all the results of the 13 raids were scored, they showed that less than ten percent of the total bomb tonnage had hit within the plane area and that a little more than two percent of the tonnage actually hit buildings. Casualties were correspondingly small; 220 workers were killed and 266 were injured.

The attacking force of B-29s lost far more in casualties. Two groups alone – the 497<sup>th</sup> and 498<sup>th</sup> of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Wing – lost 40 airplanes in their assaults as part of the strike forces against Target 357. Forty B-29s carried 440 men.

On 7 April 1945, a heavy strike was mounted against Musashino. The mission was to be flown at medium altitude -- around 12,000 feet – and the load was demolition bombs. Fighter escort would be provided by P-51s from Iwo Jima.

Capt. Charles T. Moreland, of the 500<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was flying his aircraft Z Sq 42 (*Supine Sue the International Figure*) on that mission. One extra piece of equipment was on the plane; a wire recorder hooked up to the intercom system. It had been used before, several times, but those B-29s never returned.

'We thought it was a jinx,' said Sgt. Don Hetrick, a gunner aboard Z Sq 42, 'And we were apprehensive, but we figured we could break the jinx. That mission was quite a chore. It was the first one for which we had fighter escort, and the Japanese met it and us with everything they had. The flak was intense and we were the lead crew.

'We had been hit, and a foot-wide stream of oil was coming over the wing. We needed oil to feather the prop, otherwise we'd have a runaway and generally a runaway prop spun off, ripped right off the engine and often hit prop next to it. So before the runout, we feathered the engine and flew the rest of the mission on three. The secondary crew took over the lead position.

'We were jumped by an awful lot of fighters, and bombed by some others. They used those damned white phosphorous bombs on us, and when they burst, the effect was spectacular. I think they got at least one of our B-29s that way on this mission. We lost one crew to fighters just off our left wing: they took a direct hit to the cockpit, rolled over and spun in. I never saw any chutes at all. It was one heavy mission.'" Don Hetrick, gunner, 500<sup>th</sup> BG

The excitement of the mission survived in the recording. Hetrick kept a copy of the transcription, which has no identification of the

**speakers. But that is hardly necessary as you read  
the crisp chatter.**

'Fighter coming in low at ten o'clock. . . We're streaming oil . . . I'm feathering number one . . . twin engine outside right . . . one coming in at nine o'clock . . . ten o'clock high . . . four o'clock low . . . two o'clock . . . engineer, you're gonna have to cut number two . . . it's all right, going all right . . . things don't look too bad.

'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 the engine . . . you got him 'Good boy!'

'Look at number one engine on 49 . . . who? . . . 49; he's got fire on it, smoke coming out pretty bad. . . fighter coming up at four o'clock low . . . nine o'clock coming up level . . . one at eight-thirty . . . what the hell is that'

'Coming in at two o'clock, fighter coming in . . . one at nine o'clock low . . . can't get him . . . one o'clock . . . number 49 seems to have his fire out, but it's smoking a little bit.'

'Got a little hole in our right aileron . . . a *Little* hole.

'That was 47 that went down . . . did 47 get him . . . I was busy at the time. I didn't see it, maybe one of the blister gunners saw it . . . Roger . . . who was flying that? . . . Lt. King . . . Oh, damn it!

'How you doing. radar? . . . I think he must have fainted . . . fainted, hell. I was so scared I couldn't talk.'

'Squadron on our left side . . . get the numbers . . . how many on the right? One that I can see . . . what the hell are *we* doing here?

' Four o'clock high . . . shut off the gas on number one . . . we shall have about 65 gallons of oil on the gauge for number one . . . .fighter at twelve o'clock level . . . come on, baby, give me a kiss . . . can you see him? . . . one fighter coming in at about five o'clock . . . fighter at nine o'clock, hit him . . . fighter low . . . look at those P-51s . . . two of them way high, come down and give us a hand.'

That damned phosphorus . . . they hit the tail. . . are you okay. Dietz? . . . anything serious . . . nothing.

'There's the target . . . have you got the doors open? Roger . . . 31 is dropping . . . Bombs away! . . . Close doors . . . Roger . . . plane coming in, two o'clock . . . got one . . . coming in from the lower left . . . one coming from two o'clock . . . nine o'clock level . . . low . . . two o'clock level . . . B-29 flaming way below us.

'Nine o'clock coming in high . . . we got him . . . got that son-of-a-bitch . . . ten o'clock low . . . another one at seven-thirty . . . ten o'clock level . . . four o'clock high . . . nine o'clock ambitious . . . one coming underneath . . . look at those phosphorous bombs . . . nine o'clock high . . . something's leaking out of number two nine o'clock high . . . it must be moisture.

Which one is 49 . . . 49 is below us. 1,200 yards . . . three ships behind us all together . . . is that 53 behind us also? I believe it is . . . no, I just saw him feather number one . . . 50 is just behind us.

Did anybody see the bombs hit? . . . I saw some hit, I know about where . . . I just wondered if they hit the target . . . pilot to radio operator . . . getting his headset on, sir . . . this is the radio operator . . . is that dictaphone still on, Agee? . . . yes sir, I think it is . . . turn that damned thing off, will you?

The nine B-29s of the 500<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Hetrick's outfit, claimed 13 Japanese fighters, shot down, two probables; and 13 others damaged. The 497<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group along on the same mission claimed 37 Japanese fighters destroyed. 14 probably destroyed and 15 damaged. There were 130 fighter attached noted during the running battle and 29 of the 497<sup>th</sup> Group's aircraft were damaged by flak and enemy attack.

Mission No. 39  
Flown 7 April, 1945

500<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
883<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Sqdn

Pilot from Navigator

Go ahead

We should be turning now.

Roger, we're beginning to turn

Radar from navigator

Roger

Fighter coming in at two o'clock. She's coming in. She's low, but she's coming towards our formation.

Can't see anything yet

Seem to have lost him. can't see him myself

Bombardier from navigator

Go ahead.

Are we on our own?

Yes and no. From now on I may have to make alterations of course to keep from running up on these men in front of us. I'm afraid I'll have to throw it a little wide, Navigator, as these ships in front are throwing it wide and if I cut it short, I'll run over them.

Roger

That's a good picture, Radar, a good scope picture.

A 51 just got another fighter over here on our left. He's going down, spinning away.

Bombardier from Navigator

Can you make out the IP/?

Roger, it should be about eight o'clock.

Pilot from Navigator

Are we on our own? Don't want to miss the radar aiming point.

OK Navigator, we'll do the best we can.

Good radar picture

P-51 on side of me on the left

Good deal

Ships, capital ships in Yokosuka harbor.

Will make a note

Notice the white lines.

Those are phosphorus bombs –two of them – there's a third.

How about that vapor trail you were talking about?

Should be turning soon.

There's Yokohama

There are a few ships in Yokohama Harbor.

Roger

IP is at nine o'clock

Two planes ahead – three coming in – a Jap, get him.

One coming in at ten o'clock, low, eight o'clock, nine o'clock level

Eleven o'clock low

Can you make out the target area.

Will have to turn in.

Fighter coming in low at ten o'clock

We are streaming oil. Am feathering No.1

Twin engine outside right.

Are you taking over?

One coming in at nine o'clock

Ten o'clock high

Four o'clock low

Two o'clock

What the hell are we doing here?  
Four o'clock high  
Shut off the gas on No.1  
We still have about 65 gallons of oil on the gauge for No.1  
Fighter at twelve o'clock level.  
Come on baby, give me a kiss  
Can you see him?  
One fighter coming in at about five o'clock  
Fighter at nine o'clock, hit him.  
Fighter low.  
Look at those P-51's  
Two of them way high. Come on down and give us a hand.  
That damn phosphorus  
They hit the tail  
Are you OK Dietz  
Anything serious  
Nothing  
Fighter at nine o'clock level, coming in  
There's the target  
Nine o'clock high come on 51's  
They got one, Z square 40 something.  
One bomb fell already when the doors opened.  
Got one fighter out there.  
Have you got the door open?  
Roger  
31 is dropping  
Bombs away.  
Close doors.  
Roger  
Plane coming in, two o'clock  
Got one  
Coming in from the lower left  
One coming in at two o'clock  
Nine o'clock low  
Two o'clock level  
B-29 flaming away below us.  
51's – I suppose they are.  
Nine o'clock coming in high.  
We got him – (lot of excitement at this point, everyone trying to speak at the same time)  
Got that sonofabitch.  
Ten o'clock low.  
Another one at seven thirty  
Ten o'clock level  
Four o'clock high  
Nine o'clock, ambitious.  
One coming underneath  
Having a nice dog flight.  
Look at those phosphorus bombs.  
Nine o'clock high.  
Something's leaking out of No.2  
Nine o'clock high  
It must be moisture

Engineer you're going to have to out No.2  
It's all right, going all right.  
Things don't look so bad.  
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 along side 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?  
No. 1 is on fire  
Fighter coming after him.  
Keep close watch on No. 3.  
Fighter coming in at seven o'clock.  
49 looks like he's got a fire, smoke coming out pretty bad.  
Interphone is out. No. 1 coming all right?  
Interphone now working – OK  
Five and six o'clock, right behind.  
Let him have it.  
Think he may be a 51  
One at nine o'clock low. I believe He's pulling out and leaving.  
Fighter coming up at four o'clock low  
Nine o'clock coming up level  
One at eight thirty  
What the hell is that?  
Coming in at two o'clock, fighter coming in.  
One at nine o'clock low.  
Can't get him.  
One o'clock  
No.49 seems to have his fire out, but its smoking a little bit.  
Got a little hole in our right aireron.  
A LITTLE hole?  
Roger  
Four fighters out here.  
There's a fighter out here, at nine o'clock low.  
We will be out to sea soon gentlemen  
That won't be too soon for me.  
Nine o'clock low.  
Looks like a Tony.  
One at two o'clock level, a little high.  
Coming in at four o'clock  
Fighter coming up from the rear.  
Don't see him.  
Four o'clock  
Three over here on the right, too far away, can't get them  
Fighter low at two o'clock.  
Wonder where the P-51's got to.  
There are some fighters following us not making a pass. Will jump us out at sea.  
Nine o'clock.  
Following us coming up at five o'clock low.

One at two o'clock a little low.  
Here they come, seven o'clock — going back.  
Turn on the fan, I'm getting sick from the heat  
Coming in at the tail  
Looks like phosphorous at three o'clock level.  
Looks like something was hit – it made a big flash.  
Here he comes five o'clock, coming in.  
Can't see him.  
He's way out there.  
Fighter coming in at two o'clock.  
Still following us.  
P-51 moving in on us.  
Something coming from the front. That's a twin engine job. A beautiful Irving.  
He's laying out there for us.  
He tried to run 56 up there  
Keep your eyes open  
Two o'clock low.  
Is that a 29 squadron out there.  
It better be.  
See that formation at ten o'clock – B-29 it is.  
Roger I see it.  
I hope –  
Let's hold that a while.  
Roger  
Two o'clock level, Looks like he's coming in.  
Coming right into him.  
49 still in trouble.  
Two fighters about  
Fight out in **groun.**  
Coming in at twelve thirty.  
Watch for a ram  
Where did they go?  
See them coming out of the clouds.  
What happened to 56?  
Can't find it.  
What about 53, can you see him?  
He's to our left. I believe it is him.  
That was 47 that went down.  
Did 47 get hit?  
I was busy at the time I didn't see it, maybe one of the blister gunners saw it.  
Roger  
Who was flying that?  
Lt. King  
Oh, damn it  
How you doing Radar?  
I think he must have fainted.  
Fainted hell. I was so scared I couldn't talk.  
The Japs have a 150 mile limit out here.  
I was thinking what might happen. Gawd I was scared.  
Squadron on the left side.  
Get the numbers.  
48, 50, 54, 43.  
How many on the right?  
One, that I can see.

Which one is 49?  
49 down below us, 1200 yards.  
Three ships behind us all together.  
Throw on automatic lean.  
Is that 53 behind us also?  
I believe it is.  
No, I saw him feather No.1  
50 is just behind us.  
Wait a minute he will put his headset on.  
Engineer, there's a flak hole on the top of the wing.  
Transfer all the gas out of No.1 to No.3 engine.  
Engineer from Pilot, you got on automatic lean engineer?  
Use your bearing off that point now.  
Navigator – OK read  
After 25 miles, 117 degrees.  
Roger.  
Keep an eye on it, don't let it get away.  
Roger  
50 turning back  
Are we depressurized?  
I don't know  
Did any see the bombs hit?  
I saw some hit, I know about where.  
I just wondered if they hit the target.  
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?

