1 Nov 44

Early this morning a single B-29 took off from Isley Field on a very important mission. She would be the first B-29 to fly over Tokyo. The plane, ironically named “Tokyo Rose”, was an F-13 photographic reconnaissance variant, and her mission was to take aerial photographs of the Tokyo area. The weather was clear over the Japanese capital today and “Tokyo Rose”, loitering unmolested at 32,000 feet, was able to collect about 700 valuable photographs which were used by the XXI Bomber Command as the basis for mission planning.

The build-up of American B-29’s on Saipan had not gone unnoticed by the Japanese. They were well aware that their homeland was now within bombing range. They had already begun organizing so-called Special Duty Attack Units of long-range bombers, mostly Betty’s at first, with the specific mission of attacking the B-29 units in the Marianas. These units were based in Japan and did not have the range to reach Saipan directly, but as long as Iwo Jima remained in Japanese hands, they could stage thru there.

The Special Duty Attack Units had not yet completed their organization and training as of this date, but today’s reconnaissance flight over Tokyo goaded the Japanese command into immediate retaliation. The 2nd Independent Air Unit based at Hamamatsu and the 4th Independent Air Unit based at Shimoshizu were ordered to strike Saipan. The 2nd IAU sent nine “heavy bombers” and the 4th dispatched four “headquarters reconnaissance planes”, all to stage thru Iwo Jima. The specific models of planes are unknown. What the Japanese called a heavy bomber was a twin-engine plane roughly equivalent to a U.S. medium bomber. These could have been Mitsubishi Ki-67 Peggy’s. American accounts of the attacks against the Marianas air fields refer only to G4M Betty bombers, but Betty’s were flown only by the Japanese Navy. It would be easy to mistake a Peggy for a Betty. Whatever type they were, these Japanese Army planes were to attack Saipan in conjunction with Navy aircraft from Iwo Jima, but as usual, coordination between the Japanese Army and Navy was poor and they probably attacked separately.

In less than a month and a half on Saipan, starting from nothing more than a muddy cane field, the Ground Echelon of the 500th Bomb Group had done an amazing job in preparing the working and living areas for the incoming Air Echelon. All the air crews had to do when they got to the island was move into their quonsets. Meanwhile, the ground personnel who had put up all the buildings would continue living for their entire time on Saipan in tents. Of course, they were greatly improved tents. They already had the very welcome addition of wooden floors, and more improvements would follow.

The experience of 2/Lt John Grant, 882nd Squadron Assistant Engineering Officer, was probably typical, as he wrote in a letter to his sister: "... [W]e obtained some extra wood from some Quonset Huts we have built and one of the fellows in my department, a former carpenter, offered to construct [for] me a small table and a smaller chest of drawers. The latter is a godsend and the table, with the addition of a couple of small boxes, has become a nice little desk, on which I am now writing. I got a box, put a top on it and upholstered the lid to make it more comfortable on the fanny.... [Grant also slept on a mattress which he had stolen off the Alcoa Polaris.] ... [W]ith the improvements made and a few luxuries improvised from elbow grease and stolen lumber, etc. we are fairly comfortable and quite well situated. Later our tents will all be built up with 2 x 4s and we will really be set."

West of the International Date Line, Z-1, Goldsworthy crew, and Z-4, Oswald crew, both of the 881st Squadron, landed this afternoon at Kwajalein. If all went well, they would reach Saipan tomorrow.

Maj Robert Goldsworthy took pride in his flying abilities, and especially his landings. He had made a near perfect one coming in to Mather a few days ago, and another good one in Hawaii. But Goldsworthy also believed in keeping the skills of his crew up to date, so today he had his copilot, Bob Sollock, fly the leg from Hawaii to Kwajalein. Unfortunately, Sollock always seemed to have some difficulty with landings, and today was no different. He bounced coming in, which elicited a disparaging snort and comment from Col King. Goldsworthy, always protective of his crew, didn't like that.

East of the IDL, back in Hawaii, three more planes of the 500th Bomb Group took off from John Rodgers Field bound for Kwajalein. These were Z-7, Sullivan crew, of the 881st, and Z-48, Black crew, and Z-49,
crew, of the 883rd. These planes would cross the IDL and arrive at Kwajalein on 2 Nov.

Back at Mather Field in California, the Luman crew (#109) in Z-5, 42-24643, 881st, were preparing to make their flight to Hawaii tonight or in the morning, and while they were busy with that, four more B-29's of the 500th Group flew in from Kearney today. The new arrivals were Z-9, 42-24689, Hatch crew (#118), 881st; Z-10, 42-65219, Thompson crew (#117), 881st; Z-21, 42-24652, Pierce crew (#223), 882nd, and Z-25, 42-24686, Van Trigt crew (#230), 882nd.

And back in Atlanta, the Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd was still waiting for their plane, Z-22, 42-63429, to be repaired at the Bell factory. But there was a clear sign that the enforced vacation in Atlanta was coming to an end. Today navigator Ken Fine wrote his fiancee, "They went out to test fly the plane this afternoon so if it checks out OK we will take it and go to Kearney, NB tomorrow or we might possibly go tonight." Fine hoped they waited until daylight; he did not like flying at night.

Looking back on his sojourn in Atlanta, Fine wrote, "I really have had one of the grandest times here of all my time in the Army. For over two weeks now I haven't done one lick of work." He had become quite fond of the city and contemplated coming back some day. Looking ahead to Kearney, he expected that after the crew's long absence, "they will work our heads off and the first thing we know we will be leaving there. ... I wouldn't be surprised if I was on the other side of the world in a couple of weeks or so." Fine wasn't far off. Z-22 and the Hurlbutt crew would reach Saipan on 21 Nov.

2 Nov 44

At 0130 on this date nine bombers from Japan, having staged through Iwo Jima, managed to find their way thru bad weather to bomb Saipan. Fortunately for the Americans, these planes carried only small fragmentation bombs which only slightly damaged the Isley runway. Several of the raiders were shot down by antiaircraft fire and night fighters. Japanese records confirm that five bombers were lost. One of the bombers shot down by a P-61 night fighter crashed into an engineer unit area, killing four men and seriously injuring six. Maps found in the wreckage confirmed to the Americans that the planes had staged thru Iwo. American sources consistently identify these bombers as Betty's, but these were Japanese Army planes and so were more likely Peggy's, or possibly Helen's or Sally's.

This time the men of the 500th were only spectators to the fireworks, but some were impressed enough to start work on previously neglected air raid shelters. This was not an easy task, as in most places there was only a foot or two of topsoil overlying nearly impenetrable coral. Most shelters were therefore shallow and had to have walls built up with sandbags. Typically, planks were then placed across the top, and more sandbags were placed on top of those.

This morning on Kwajalein Maj Robert Goldsworthy suggested to Group Commander Col Richard King that he should fly the last leg to his command on Saipan. It was a reasonable proposal, but Goldsworthy had an ulterior motive. He still resented King's disparagement of copilot Bob Sollock's landing yesterday and secretly hoped that King would make a bad landing coming in to Saipan. The unsuspecting King took the bait and climbed into the left seat, while Goldsworthy took the right. They started down the runway, and soon Goldsworthy began to regret his suggestion. King was steering using the brakes, which cut into their speed significantly. The runway at Kwajalein wasn't a long one to begin with, and as the seconds ticked off Goldsworthy could see they were rapidly running out of runway, with only the ocean beyond. Finally, he could stand it no longer and reached out and pushed the throttles all the way forward. "[King] turned to me like he wanted to tell me to keep my hand off the controls, but even he could see it was going to be a close thing. We got in the air at the end of the runway, but just barely." The rest of the flight to Saipan was routine, and King disappointed Goldsworthy by making a good landing.

Even though they had known he was coming for some time, the arrival on Saipan today of the 500th Bomb Group's Commanding Officer, Col Richard King, caught the Ground Echelon by tactical surprise. The Group narrative history explains:
"The Ground Echelon had been expecting Colonel King for several days, and a large key to the Island had been prepared for presentation. Daily calls were made to the Control Room as to arrival of any of our aircraft. On November 2nd we were informed that no planes for the 500th were scheduled, but unexpectedly our Commanding Officer arrived in B-29 No. 24656, Group No. Z Square 1, with Major Robert F. Goldsworthy and crew of 881st Bombardment Squadron. ... The key of welcome was presented to Colonel King, and he was escorted to the temporary Officers' Club for refreshments; then to his newly completed quarters."

Hopefully Maj Goldsworthy and his crew got some of the refreshments too.

Also arriving on Saipan today at 1340 hours but with considerably less fanfare was Z-4, Oswald crew, of the 881st. It is not known if they got any refreshments.

Meanwhile, back on Kwajalein, Z-7, Sullivan crew, of the 881st, and Z-48, Black crew, and Z-49, Feathers crew, of the 883rd all arrived safely this afternoon. And in Hawaii, Z-5, Luman crew, 881st, arrived today at John Rodgers Field from Mather. Flying with Luman as a passenger was Lt Col Ralph Reeve, CO of the 881st Squadron.

Back at Mather, Z-24, 42-24676, Tackett crew (#237), after about a week's delay on the base, was getting ready to leave tonight for Hawaii. Riding as a passenger with his friend Capt Cecil Tackett was 1/Lt Frank Carrico, a spare pilot in the 882nd. Coincidentally, in less than three months Carrico would be flying this very same plane as AC and would pull off one of the great flying feats of the war.

At Kearney, two airplanes tried to get off the ground today for Mather, but only one made it. Z-3, 42-63435, Samuelson crew (#106), 881st Squadron, was successful and landed at Mather later today. Z-8, 42-24692, Fitzgerald crew (#115), also of the 881st, was unable to take off as scheduled due to a bad solenoid leak. She would have to try again tomorrow. The delay was disappointing to young copilot Bob Copeland, who was eager to get off to the war, but he had the thought that Maj Fitzgerald's wife, who had come to Kearney to be with her husband for as long as possible, would be happy.

And today, after 16 days of waiting, the Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd finally got their repaired plane back from the Bell factory. They left their hotel in downtown Atlanta at 0700, repossessed their plane at the factory field, and were able to take off by about 1000. Fortunately, everything went well on the flight and they reached Kearney at about 1430. Then they had to sign in, get their quarters assignments, unload their stuff from the plane, eat supper, etc. They discovered that about half of the Group planes were still at Kearney, but the Hurlbutt crew was now well behind in processing and would have much to do to catch up.

3 Nov 44

With the arrival of the first planes on Saipan, many of the men in the 500th Bomb Group Ground Echelon, including airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron, saw a change of duties. Hughes touched on this in a letter to his parents today:

"November 3, 1944
'Somewhere in the Pacific'

Dear Mother & Dad,

I received two letters from you today and one from Anna [George's sister]. ...

I believe that my ditch digging and road building has [sic] ended for awhile. I go to work tomorrow on the line. [Hughes was part of the ground crew for Z-1.] This will be a relief anyway for awhile.

There still isn't much to do here for amusement. I take in a show about every night. That and playing cards are about all you can do. They are building a ball diamond and this should be completed in a few days. It will be too
hot to do much running here. It also gets dark too early to do any playing after supper. I guess it won't get much use for awhile anyway. So far the only ones that have time to play ball are the cooks. ...

Love
George"

Three more B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group landed at Isley Field on Saipan today. These were Z-7, Sullivan crew of the 881st Squadron; Z-48, Black crew of the 883rd; and Z-49, Feathers crew, also of the 883rd. This made a total of six planes now on hand, three from the 881st and three from the 883rd. Where was the 882nd?

Z-5, Luman crew, 881st, had arrived on Oahu yesterday, but it's uncertain when she left for Kwajalein. It could have been as early as today or as late as 5 Nov, but somewhere along the way she was held up for a couple of days. She was joined at John Rodgers Field today by Z-24, Tackett crew of the 882nd, flying in from Mather.

Meanwhile, back at Mather, Z-21, 42-24652, Pierce crew (#223) of the 882nd, was preparing to leave for Hawaii tonight or in the morning. Flying with the Pierce crew was Maj Frank Roberts, 882nd Squadron Operations Officer.

Also at Mather but definitely not leaving tonight was the Samuelson crew (#106) of the 881st in Z-3, 42-63435. During the physical exam today, the bombardier, 2/Lt John Wright, was found to have "ear trouble" and was grounded. According to Airplane Commander 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson, "Wing Headquarters immediately sent in a replacement and gave us less than six hours to leave the field for overseas." This was unacceptable to Samuelson. The crews had become like family, and you just didn't break them up like that. Samuelson was already a combat veteran, having flown 50 missions in B-17's in the Mediterranean Theater. He had volunteered to be shot at again in B-29's, and he wasn't going to be intimidated by some armchair officers. As Samuelson put it later, "I wasn't sure whether we would lose our bombardier for good or just for the trip across, and I wasn't taking any chances. Everyone was tired from lack of sleep and some had been drinking a few beers at the club. Because this trip was a long one, I didn't think we were in the best condition to fly on such short notice, so I immediately contacted the medical officer to ground the whole crew for a short period."

The movement of the 73rd Bomb Wing overseas was being closely followed at the highest levels, and this action set off a firestorm. Samuelson continued: "That's when the wires really started to burn -- all the way to Washington and back. The generals chewed out colonels and colonels chewed out majors all the way down to Mather Field. This all resulted in declaring all liquor off limits on the base and our crew was made out to look like a bunch of drunks." The liquor ban can't have made Samuelson popular among his fellow officers, so he was probably in everybody's doghouse for a while. But the delay served its purpose. The next day bombardier Wright was checked out and given a clean bill of health, so the crew was able to remain intact.

4 Nov 44

No B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group reached Saipan today but at least one was close. Z-24, Tackett crew of the 882nd Squadron, took off from John Rodgers Field on Oahu this morning headed for Kwajalein, but due to crossing the International Date Line, she would arrive at the atoll on the afternoon of the 5th. Z-5, Luman crew of the 881st, which had arrived at John Rodgers on 2 Nov, either remained there another day or possibly flew to Kwajalein and was delayed there, or possibly she had made an emergency landing en route at the tiny speck of Johnston Island, 700 miles southwest of Oahu. Records are unclear.

Z-21, Pierce crew of the 882nd, reached John Rodgers from Mather today, while back in California Z-25, 42-24686, Van Trigt crew (#230) of the 882nd, was preparing to leave for Hawaii tonight or in the morning. Riding with the Van Trigt crew was 882nd Squadron Bombardier Capt Richard Hale.

Meanwhile, back at Kearney in Nebraska, the Fitzgerald crew (#115) of the 881st in Z-8, 42-24692, was trying for the third day in a row to get off to the war. Yesterday they had been held back by bad weather. Today the third time proved to be the charm. They took off at 0919 and flew the southern route via Albuquerque to reach
Mather in California about 7-1/2 hours later, at 1650. The wings picked up some ice in clouds over Bakersfield and the crew had to use the de-icing boots, but other than that everything went fine.

On this Saturday evening in the town of Kearney, Capt Robert M. "Mac" Cordray of the 882nd Squadron treated his entire crew (#239) to a steak dinner. They were on pass until 0700 Monday morning, and they expected to fly out a day or two after that, so this would probably be their last weekend in the States. The steak was good and so were the drinks. Several of the men, including CFC gunner John Ciardi, got a little drunk.

Ciardi was not a typical enlisted man. For one thing, he was older, 28. For another, he was not only a college graduate but had actually taught briefly at the University of Kansas City as a guest lecturer in Modern Poetry. He was already gaining national recognition as an up-and-coming poet. Then the war came along.

Ciardi joined the Aviation Cadet program to avoid the draft. He was washed out of pilot training like many others but completed navigation school. However, he was denied a commission because of a flirtation with left-wing politics in graduate school, and he ended up as an enlisted B-29 gunner. The other enlisted men looked up to Ciardi due to his age, education, experience and confident bearing. The officers accepted him almost as one of their own. Capt Cordray even relied on Ciardi as a back-up navigator should it ever become necessary.

Earlier today, Ciardi had gone looking for a hotel room, thinking it might be his last chance for a room to himself, with a tub, a bed and clean sheets. But he was to be disappointed, as there were absolutely no rooms to be had in Kearney. Ciardi did however have some female acquaintances in town. The darkly handsome and worldly Ciardi was envied by the rest of the crew for never lacking female companionship. So after dinner he called up a girl he knew and spent the night with her. That still left Ciardi nowhere to go the next morning but back to base, where he spent the last day of his pass catching up on his sleep and then losing his last $60 at baccarat.

Unlike Ciardi, navigator Ken Fine of the Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd did not have any female companionship this evening. He had to settle for a long-distance phone call to his fiancee down in Houston. That was after he had gone to the movies to see Kay Kayser in "Carolina Blues". Then after the phone call he went to the Club for a few drinks with flight engineer Glenn Truesdell.

5 Nov 44

No one was happier to see more B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group begin arriving on Saipan than the ground crews. They eagerly stopped digging ditches and returned to their regular maintenance duties. They swarmed over the new planes, checking everything and getting them ready for their first mission. One of these men was the 881st Squadron's Cpl William Eilers, who kept a small diary. Eilers spent all day today up on the line working on Z-7. It was hot, sweaty work, and the sun reflecting off the white coral of the hardstands was very hard on the eyes, but Eilers was dedicated to his job.

West of the International Date Line Z-24, Tackett crew of the 882nd Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, arrived at Kwajalein this afternoon. Meanwhile, east of the IDL, Z-21, Pierce crew of the 882nd Squadron, and possibly Z-5, Luman crew of the 881st, left John Rodgers this morning for Kwajalein. On the way they passed over the International Date Line and time-warped into 6 Nov.

Flying into John Rodgers from Mather Field in California was Z-25, Van Trigt crew of the 882nd.

Arriving probably a little later at John Rodgers was Z-3, Samuelson crew of the 881st. For the first four hours out of Mather, everything went fine with Z-3. The plane was on autopilot, and most of the crew were asleep or playing cards. Then, according to AC 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson, "Suddenly the plane began to vibrate terribly. One look at the instruments told us that number four engine was bad so we had to stop the engine and feather the propeller immediately before she caught on fire." Then they re-trimmed the controls, put the plane back on autopilot and flew on in to Hawaii. They discovered that the B-29 flew almost as well on three engines as on four, but of course they were sweating it a little because now there was no safety margin. Nobody wanted to try it on two engines. Just in case, Samuelson went over with the crew what they would throw out of the plane.
if they lost another engine. They probably couldn't maintain altitude on two engines, but by jettisoning as much weight as possible they could stay in the air for some time and get closer to Hawaii.

The crew kept in close contact with the ground stations, and fortunately the remaining three engines ran well. About six hours later Oahu came in sight and six P-38's came up to check them out. Samuelson landed at John Rodgers with no problem, but when he taxied to his assigned spot and cut off the engines, he was surprised by a greeting party of "a couple of colonels and majors", who wanted to know how the plane had operated on three engines. Z-3 must have been one of the first ones to come in to Hawaii on three.

Meanwhile, back at Mather, three more B-29's were getting ready to fly out tonight or early in the morning. These were Z-8, 42-24692, Fitzgerald crew (#115), Z-9, 42-24689, Hatch crew (#118), and Z-10, 42-65219, Thompson crew (#117), all of the 881st Squadron. Like others before them, the Fitzgerald crew found Mather to be very pleasant stopover. Copilot 2/Lt Robert Copeland was particularly impressed by the food.

And back at Kearney AAF in Nebraska, even though it was a Sunday, the Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd had classes today, probably to make up for the time they had lost in Atlanta.

After the last of the air crews had flown off in their flyaway aircraft to the overseas staging area at Kearney AAF, Nebraska, there were still probably around 250 ground support personnel -- mechanics, technicians, clerks, intel specialists, etc. -- left at Walker AAF, Kansas. These men would fly over to Saipan via Air Transport Command aircraft. But first they lingered at Walker for a couple of weeks performing various administrative tasks and dispensing short leaves to as many personnel as possible. Then in early November orders came for rail travel to Hamilton Field, California, north of San Francisco, from where they would fly overseas. The deployment was made in at least three groups. The first included the Group Operations Section, one member of which left a detailed account of their journey, which is probably fairly representative of the unit as a whole:

"5 Nov 44. The Air Echelon, 500th Gp, departed this date from W.A.A.F. for Hamilton Fld., Calif., via Union Pacific Railroad. Train was boarded at Victoria Station at approximately 0600 CWT [Central War Time]. Lt. Col. Smith [Exec Officer, 500th Bomb Group] was at station to see us off.

"6 Nov 44. All concerned are enjoying our trip to west coast A.P.O.E. [Aerial Port of Embarkation] This echelon section has one (1) pullman coach to itself. Diner is attached to rear & we've always had first chance on each meal. Awoke near Ogden, Utah this A.M. & were given 4 hours to see city between trains.

"7 Nov 44. Arrived Oakland this A.M., and proceeded to cross bay by Ferry to San Francisco. Weather today was very good. Greyhound Bus awaited us at Ferry Dock and we departed San Francisco for Hamilton Fld. almost immediately. Major Weber reported to Port Control as per instructions and EM were sent to Base Unit Orderly Room. All were assigned bunks in 2 story barracks. This seems to be a very pleasant station."

The second and third groups of the Air Echelon would depart Walker AAF on 7 and 10 Nov and probably follow the same route as the first.

6 Nov 44

On Saipan, airplane mechanic George Hughes of the 881st Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, was happy to be back doing what he had been trained for. He wrote his parents today, "I am working on the planes now and time seems to pass much faster than it did. I have had about enough ditch-digging to last me a long while. So far I have been working day[s] and I hope to continue. ... The routine is about the same as always here. I take in a second run picture at night and go to bed. It has been very cool the past week. Maybe we are having our winter time. It's a good thing it did cool off or the planes would have been too hot to touch. They are still hot enough. ... Our P.X. has a pretty good stock of candy, gum, peanuts and cookies now. The food is also getting better. Our Group Special Service has a library set up. I can catch up on my reading now. I will probably be here long enough to read all the books."
Today Z-24, Tackett crew of the 882nd, became the first B-29 of the 882nd Squadron and the seventh of the 500th Bomb Group to land on Saipan. Arriving with Tackett as a passenger was 1/Lt Frank Carrico, a spare pilot.

While Z-24 was landing on Saipan, Z-5, Luman crew, 881st, and Z-21, Pierce crew, 882nd, were landing on Kwajalein.

East of the International Date Line, Z-25, Van Trigt crew of the 882nd, took off from John Rodgers Field on Oahu headed for Kwajalein, and Z-9, Hatch crew, Z-10, Thompson crew, and Z-8, Fitzgerald crew, all of the 881st, took off from Mather Field for Hawaii. The three planes from California all arrived at John Rodgers Field later today without incident.

This morning at John Rodgers, the bad engine on Z-3 "was inspected and proven to be absolutely worthless," in the words of AC 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson. This meant the plane and crew were going to be on Oahu for at least several days, until a new engine could be installed. For the crew, there was nothing to do but make the best of the situation. Samuelson left the following account:

"As a rule all transient crews were restricted to the field. However, due to our expected long stay, the commanding officer gave us permission to go to town and also to Waikiki Beach. Everyone took off to the beach with great expectations, only to be very disappointed. There was the beach, not a half mile long and hardly fifty yards wide. Some of us tried the native surf boards with almost disastrous results. Sure looks easy but then so does ice-skating."

"Honolulu is just another large American city; high prices, crowds of people and vehicles running all over the place. The city is filled with Japanese who actually outnumber everyone else on the island. Every time the government tries to draft one of them, they say they are for Japan and end up in the 'clink.'"

[A digression is in order here to keep the record straight. The contemporary wisdom that Samuelson repeated here is wrong. First of all, Japanese-Americans were not even allowed into the US military until 1943. And while there were some who avoided military service, there were also many young Nisei who eagerly volunteered. One of the latter was nineteen-year-old Daniel Inouye, who immediately left the University of Hawaii medical school to join the Army. He was assigned to the all Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought with great distinction in Italy and France, becoming the most highly decorated unit in the history of the US Army. Inouye himself was soon promoted to sergeant, then later received a battlefield commission to lieutenant. When he returned home, it was without a right arm but with a Distinguished Service Cross -- later upgraded to the Medal of Honor -- on his chest. In 1959, Inouye became one of the first two US senators from Hawaii, and he continues in the Senate to this day. You can read more about his life and military exploits on Wikipedia. To be fair also to young Americans like Lt Samuelson, the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent atrocities such as the Bataan Death March understandably evoked some very bitter feelings against all things Japanese. - JEB]

"The whole crew went souvenir hunting and ended up almost broke. I kept clear of such articles as $140.00 earrings and $240.00 gold cigarette lighters. Sailors who have been on the seas for about seven months come into Honolulu with a stuffed wallet, and care nothing about prices -- consequently the ridiculous prices of most souvenirs. After dinner in one of the better hotels, we called it a day and took a GI bus back to camp. From then on, most all our time was spent with the plane, or playing cards. Incidentally, I'm fifty dollars to the good -- so far."

Far away from warm, sunny Hawaii, the weather had turned nasty at Kearney AAF in Nebraska. John Ciardi of the Cordray crew (#239), 882nd, noted that "The bottom dropped out of the weather" and the field was "socked in solid. ... The card games boil in the barracks, the planes roar on the ground and stay there, and you can't see the barracks across the street." Maj Barney Hurlbutt and two of his officers from the Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd went into town this evening to get their first look at Kearney. Navigator Ken Fine's judgment was, "not much here.... It's larger than Hays or Russell but doesn't seem to be much more as far as places to go are
concerned."

7 Nov 44

Two more B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group landed on Saipan today -- Z-5, Luman crew of the 881st, and Z-21, Pierce crew of the 882nd. Arriving with Z-5 was Lt Col Ralph Reeve, CO of the 881st Squadron. Arriving with Z-21 was Maj Frank Roberts, 882nd Operations Officer.

Back along the route, Z-25, Van Trigt crew of the 882nd, made it to Kwajalein this afternoon from Oahu. On the other side of the International Date Line, Z-10, Thompson crew of the 881st, took off this morning for Kwajalein from John Rodgers Field on Oahu.

The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st in Z-8 briefed today at John Rodgers for their scheduled flight tomorrow to Kwajalein. Copilot Bob Copeland noted that they would be passing close to some Japanese-held islands. He also noted that as they moved farther away from civilization, i.e., the States, little things formerly taken for granted, such as fresh milk, were no longer available.

At Kearney AAF in Nebraska, the weather cleared up enough today to allow Z-29, 42-65221, Savage crew (#224) of the 882nd, to get off. She arrived presumably later today at Mather Field in California. Scheduled to leave tomorrow for Mather were Z-6, 42-24694, Field crew (#110) of the 881st; Z-23, 42-24664, Hays crew (#228) of the 882nd; and Z-30, 42-24700, LaMarche crew (#226), also of the 882nd. Bombardier Hal Towner of the Hays crew wrote in the crew diary: "We have said our goodbyes and are ready to go. Tomorrow's the day. We'll be gone a long time and we'll be far from home so nobody is elated tonite at the prospect of leaving loved ones behind."

This first Tuesday in November 1944 was election day, and many men of the 500th followed the results by radio. Those still in the States listened in the evening, those in Hawaii in the afternoon, and those already on Saipan on the other side of the IDL sat by their radios on the morning of the 8th. The "Global 20th Air Force" was living up to its nickname. Those men who wished to vote had already done so by absentee ballot. As with the rest of the American people, some were happy with Roosevelt's re-election, others were not.

8 Nov 44

With the arrival on Saipan of more personnel of the 500th Bomb Group by B-29 and Air Transport Command, some changes were in order in the command structure. By Special Order #14 dated 8 Nov 44, Maj Robert Wolcott was officially relieved as CO of the Ground Echelon and designated Acting Group Executive Officer; Maj Frank Roberts, 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, was appointed Acting Group Operations Officer; and several other officers were given acting Group staff appointments.

One purpose of these appointments was to facilitate planning and preparation of a shakedown mission for the 500th. The target would be Truk Atoll, about 650 miles to the southeast. This mission would take place in a few days.

Today Z-25, Van Trigt crew of the 882nd Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, landed on Saipan from Kwajalein. This addition gave the 500th ten planes on hand, a full third of the original 30 flyaway aircraft. Soon there would be more.

Arriving at Kwajalein this afternoon from Hawaii was Z-10, Thompson crew of the 881st. To the east of the International Date Line, Z-8, Fitzgerald crew, and Z-9, Hatch crew, both of the 881st, left John Rodgers Field on Oahu this morning and headed for Kwajalein. Z-8 took off at 0745. As they flew out over Pearl Harbor, an observant Robert Copeland in the copilot seat on Z-8 noted below a naval task force containing an aircraft carrier with some cruiser and destroyer escorts heading out to sea. He also saw a few subs and a ship that
looked like it had been torpedoed. Later they flew over tiny Johnston Island, then crossed the IDL and passed into 9 Nov.

Flying in to Mather Field in California this afternoon from Kearney AAF, Nebraska, were Z-6, 42-24694, Field crew (#110) of the 881st; Z-23, 42-24664, Hays crew (#228) of the 882nd; and Z-30, 42-24700, LaMarche crew (#226), also of the 882nd. Flying with the Hays crew was 882nd CO Lt Col Joseph F. Brannock. At the outset of the flight, Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew, wrote a little melodramatically in his crew diary, “At last we're really on our way. All of us are excited at what's ahead of us as we fly into the setting sun bent on the invasion of the land of the 'rising sun'.” The Hays crew landed at Mather at 1400 and were told they'd be there for three days for final processing and physicals. As had many others before them, the Hays crew thought Mather was beautiful and that "it would be a swell field for permanent assignment." A raid on the last mainland PX they would see for a long while secured gum and candy in quantities but found other critical items such as cigarette lighters scarce.

Back at Kearney, the Cordray crew (#239) of the 882nd had been trying for the past two days to take their plane, Z-27, 42-24668, up for its required pre-departure test flight but had been thwarted by the weather. Today it looked like they might be able to fly, so the crew went down to the flight line. The base maintenance people in charge of their plane handed them a clean Form 1A that indicated everything was fine. The crew decided to check out the plane anyway, and they were really glad they did. According to CFC gunner John Ciardi, “We'd have done better to fly the Form 1A -- the ship was short on gas and oil, the strainers were fouled, the left landing strut was flat, the new upper forward turret cover was not latched and improperly adjusted so that it couldn't latch, and #2 engine cut out when it was run up.” Capt Cordray had a few choice words with the maintenance officers and by dusk the plane was ready to take up. So they went up for a couple of hours for what Ciardi labeled “mostly an air-speed calibration run.” Then #3 engine had a problem and had to be feathered, and they “came in on three engines past the disappointed meat wagon.”

Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd, spent part of the day packing things into a footlocker to send home. These included his woolen winter uniforms, coats, etc. He expected to be wearing only cotton for a while.

9 Nov 44

On Saipan the hard-working ground crews continued to get their planes all ready to go. Cpl William Eilers, who had helped get Z-7 ready, had been transferred yesterday to MSgt Howard Helms' ground crew to help them with newly arrived Z-5. That's where he spent the day. Somebody must have appreciated the ground crews' work, because Eilers recorded receiving today 6 bottles of beer and 3 cans of fruit juice.

Z-10, Thompson crew of the 881st Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, landed on Saipan today from Kwajalein. Arriving at Kwajalein this afternoon from Hawaii were Z-8, Fitzgerald crew, and Z-9, Hatch crew, both of the 881st. The Fitzgerald crew went swimming in the lagoon soon after landing. Copilot Bob Copeland took note of all the destruction still quite visible on Kwajalein several months after the invasion. They were scheduled to take off for Saipan tomorrow at 0900.

Yet another 881st plane, Z-2, Irvin crew, finally got away from Mather Field today. They had been there a full two weeks getting an engine changed and probably other problems fixed. Z-2 arrived safely later today at John Rodgers Field on Oahu.

Back at Kearney in Nebraska, the faulty engine on Z-27, 42-24668, had been repaired and the Cordray crew (#239) of the 882nd was all ready to leave for California today. Unfortunately, the weather failed to cooperate – storms over the Rockies. So the crew washed down their plane in the afternoon. When they finished, the now gleaming B-29 had significantly less drag.

10 Nov 44
Today on Saipan, while M/Sgt Helms’ ground crew was getting Z-5 all ready to go, two more B-29’s of the 881st Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, landed on Saipan from Kwajalein. These were Z-8, Fitzgerald crew, and Z-9, Hatch crew. Z-8 left Kwajalein as scheduled at 0900 and reached Saipan at 1835. Copilot Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew set down his first impressions of Isley Field and the 881st Squadron area: "It's a swell field with 1 asphalt runway and another under construction. [The second runway would be ready for use by about 1 Jan 45.] We were quite impressed with the amount of construction that has been done in the Squadron area. We are eating [in] the E.M.'s mess at present but will soon have our own. The food isn't bad considering everything. We are living in Quonset huts which are very nice and a lot better than I'd ever expected."

Copeland also became acquainted with the legendary Tokyo Rose today: “Tokyo Rose announced today at 1600 that every man on Saipan would be dead in 6 hrs. So we're kind of expecting an air raid. There have been two so far since our outfit moved in. [The nights of 2-3 and 5-6 Nov.] The Japs made preposterous claims as to the amount of damage done, altho 11 men were killed when a Betty hit a tent after [being] shot down. A few incendiaries hit the runway.” The 500th sustained no damage in these attacks.

Z-2, Irvin crew of the 881st, departed John Rodgers Field on Oahu today bound for Kwajalein. After crossing the International Date Line, the plane would arrive there safely on the afternoon of the 11th.

Several thousand miles away in Kearney, Nebraska, no planes were able to take off for Mather today, probably due to continued bad weather over the Rockies. The skies around the field itself were flyable, so the Holmes crew (#354) of the 883rd Squadron was able to take their plane, Z-46, 42-24721, up for a pre-departure test flight. The Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd was also supposed to test fly their plane, Z-22, 42-63429, today but she wasn't ready, so the flight was postponed till tomorrow.

11 Nov 44

On this day the 500th Bomb Group engaged in its first military action against the Japanese. It was really just a training, or shake-down, mission targeting the submarine base on Dublon Island in the Japanese-held atoll of Truk, about 700 miles SE of Saipan, but this was the first opportunity the men of the 500th had had against the Japanese, so it was a big deal for them. Nine B-29’s and crews led by Group CO Col Richard King took off this morning:

Z-1, Goldsworthy
Z-5, Luman
Z-4, Oswald
Z-7, Sullivan
Z-25, Van Trigt
Z-21, Pierce
Z-42, Moreland
Z-48, Black
Z-49, Feathers

Col King flew as usual with the Goldsworthy crew in Z-1. 881st Squadron CO Lt Col Ralph Reeve flew with the Luman crew in Z-5. Acting Group Operations Officer Maj Frank Roberts rode with the Pierce crew in Z-21. 1/Lt Frank Carrico, an experienced extra pilot in the 882nd, flew in the right seat on Z-25 with Maj John Van Trigt, replacing the regular copilot, 2/Lt Hubert Bingham.

You may recall that all the crews in the 500th Bomb Group were short one of their gunners, left back in the States to come over later via Air Transport Command. However, everyone was eager to get a crack at the Japs, so there was no shortage of volunteers to fill the vacant position. In the case of Z-1, Z-5 and Z-21, the copilots who were displaced from their right seats by King, Reeve and Roberts (2/Lt Robert Sollock, 2/Lt Donald Hardy and 2/Lt William Douds, respectively) simply moved to the rear of the plane and became gunners for a day. Group Ordnance Officer 1/Lt Harry Salomon took the right gunner's position on the Van Trigt crew in Z-25. Two crew chiefs decided to become temporary gunners too, T/Sgt George DeVelbis on the Moreland crew in
Z-42 and M/Sgt Howard Ball on the Black crew in Z-48. Never has an ordinary gunner's position been graced by so much rank. We don't know how much training on the remote control gunsights these volunteer gunners were given.

Also along to memorialize this mission were several photographers, probably from the 11th Combat Camera Unit.

Truk had once been Japan's greatest island bastion, but by this point in the war it had been bypassed and was only a shadow of its former self. The Japanese had withdrawn all their major naval vessels and most of the aircraft, but Truk still had antiaircraft guns, and some fighters remained. No one was really certain what level of resistance the American bombers would encounter.

Take-off from Isley Field was at 1100 local. Seven planes carried between 14 and 20 x 500 lb General Purpose (high explosive) bombs; two planes (Z-7 and Z-25) carried 500 lb cluster fragmentation bombs. After assembly, the formation headed for the IP, which was 27 miles southeast of Ruo Island in the Murillo Group.

There was one abort. The #2 engine on Z-48, Black crew, failed about 350 miles out of Saipan and the crew returned to base after jettisoning their bombs.

The remaining eight aircraft continued to the target and bombed successfully from 25,000 feet. From the Consolidated Intelligence Report:

"Eight aircraft bombed the target. Three made radar approach, but all eight made visual release. Lead bombardier sighted for range and deflection; others for range only, dropping on the leader. One of the aircraft carrying fragmentation clusters had difficulty with release. One cluster had broken and some of the bombs were loose in the bomb bay. It is reasonable to presume that some of these bombs were widely scattered in the area. One aircraft returned with one 500 lb. GP bomb. A total of 76,000 lb. of bombs were dropped on target area, 20,000 lb. of which were fragmentation bombs."

Fires and smoke were observed in the target area but an accurate estimate of damage was not possible.

The Japanese put up flak but it was inaccurate, the shells exploding at least 1,000 feet below the bombers. A few fighters, mostly Zekes, came up and made some passes but did not press their attacks. In the front of Z-1, AC Bob Goldsworthy, bombardier Walter "Pat" Patykula, and Col King, in the copilot's seat, watched as one fighter dropped a phosphorous bomb which exploded harmlessly well out of range. The fighter was also out of range but King evidently thought Patykula should have fired at it anyway, because he lifted his foot and gave the bombardier a little kick. An annoyed Patykula told King "I see him." The bombardier on Z-5, 2/Lt Admer Boren, claimed possible damage to a Zeke, and the bombardier on Z-21, Capt Richard Hale, 882nd Squadron Bombardier, claimed another Zeke as probably damaged. No damage was sustained by the B-29's.

All planes returned safely to base, landing at about 1700 local.

The Truk raid was less a combat mission than a training exercise, and in that sense it proved valuable. Crew feedback was that the target briefing was not detailed enough, while the weather briefing was too detailed. There were complaints that preparation time for the mission had been insufficient. The gunners in particular wanted more time to prepare and load their guns. Some men complained of wet parachutes.

Back on Saipan, four recently arrived planes and crews did not participate in the Truk mission. These were Z-8, Fitzgerald crew; Z-9, Hatch crew; Z-10, Thompson crew; and Z-24, Tackett crew. Copilot Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew seemed almost disappointed that there had not been an air raid on the island as Tokyo Rose had seemed to promise the day before. The crew spent most the day working on their plane, after which Copeland censored mail for an hour. "What some E.M. don't write," he wondered in his diary.

While the forward elements of the 500th Bomb Group were bombing Truk today, the rest of the Air Echelon was
moving up. Z-2, Irvin crew, arrived this afternoon at Kwajalein from Oahu. A day behind them, landing at John Rodgers Field on Oahu from Mather Field in California, was the Savage crew of the 882nd in Z-29. Two other B-29's, Z-23, Hays crew, and Z-30, LaMarche crew, both of the 882nd, were preparing to leave Mather late tonight or in the morning.

Back at Kearney in Nebraska, bad weather over the Rockies for the last few days had delayed the departure of several planes. Today, despite the weather, somebody decided to send them off by the southern route over Arizona. At least five, and possibly six, planes left Kearney today – Z-26, 42-24687, Grise crew (#231); Z-27, 42-24668, Cordray crew (#239); Z-28, 42-63436, Gerwick crew (#233); Z-46, 42-24721, Holmes crew (#354); Z-47, 42-24600, Adams crew (#358); and possibly Z-50, 42-24696, Braden crew (#364). The first three planes were from the 882nd, the last three from the 883rd.

The Cordray crew were awakened at 0530 on this freezing cold and foggy Armistice Day and by 0700 were standing shivering around their plane. The moisture in the air had condensed and frozen on the plane's surfaces, so the crew had some work to do. Using mechanics' stands and hot-air blowers, they clambered precariously over the slippery bomber for an hour or two until the ice was melted. Luckily, no one fell off and broke a limb.

Then, according to CFC gunner John Ciardi, "[Copilot Milton G. "Bud"] Orenstein broke open a box he had brought from the morning's briefing and issued each of us a .45, a shoulder holster, an ammunition pouch, three clips, and a hunting knife. ... We had a fine time strapping on the equipment and playing cowboys and Indians with our new toys."

But the field was still socked in, so most of the crew went off to get a late breakfast at the nearby civilian cafeteria. Finally in late morning the fog cleared and the planes prepared to take off. The public, which had been invited onto the base to watch an Armistice Day parade from a specially constructed grandstand, found that they were getting a special bonus -- the impressive sight of several of America's newest and most powerful bombers taking off for the war zone. The crowd cheered wildly as the big silver B-29's began to taxi out.

But then Z-27 suffered a deflating -- literally and figuratively -- setback. The right strut went flat and they had to sink back to the line to pump it back up and refill the hydraulic cylinder. They got into the air on the second try, at exactly 1108, as recorded by Ciardi.

Once airborne, everything went fine, and the crew settled back for the long trip, sleeping, playing cards or, later, listening to the Army-Notre Dame football game on the radio.

Aboard as a passenger, and not enthused about it, was the plane's crew chief, M/Sgt Sydney Smith, inevitably nicknamed Smitty. Smith was prone to air sickness. He complained, "A good crew chief belongs on the ground. If I'd wanted to fly, I'd've asked for it. I don't go for it," But somebody well above Smith's pay grade had decreed that the crew chiefs would fly overseas with their planes, taking the place of one of the gunners, which in the case of the Cordray crew was right gunner Thomas J. Moore. Moore would fly to Saipan via ATC and rejoin the crew there.

Over Arizona, the 500th planes on their way to Mather received a radio message. There was bad weather ahead, so all planes were ordered to land at Kingman, Arizona, which they did.

Ciardi wrote that the big B-29's caused quite a stir when they came in to Kingman. Probably few if any men on the base, which hosted a gunnery school, had ever laid eyes on a B-29 before, and they wanted to see one up close. But the B-29 was still a very secret item, so the curious couldn't be allowed too close. The enlisted men of the crew were left to guard the plane with their .45's, with Ciardi in charge, while Capt Cordray and the officers headed off for parts unknown. Ciardi wasn't too happy about that, and his anger grew as the minutes stretched into hours, but finally Cordray showed back up and by way of amends handed Ciardi a fifth of whiskey to be shared with the rest of the EM. A base guard soon showed up for the plane, so they locked it up and the crew went to get some chow and overnight accommodations.
There were now probably only five flyaway planes of the 500th back at Kearney. Four of them belonged to the 883rd Squadron -- Z-41, 42-24675, Ashley crew (#343); Z-43, 42-63441, Setterich crew (#346); Z-44, 42-65218, Hansen crew (#351); and Z-45, 42-24657, McClanahan crew (#353). The fifth was Z-22, 42-63429, Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd. Z-22 was the plane which had had to be taken back to the factory in Atlanta for structural repairs. But all these planes and crews would be leaving soon. In fact, the McClanahan crew took Z-45 up this afternoon for a "test hop after modification and 100 hour inspection."

The looming date of departure weighed heavily on some men. Soon they would be leaving their homeland and all their loved ones behind, with no idea when, or if, they would return. Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew, released the tension by making phone calls to relatives and pouring out his feelings in letters to his fiancée, Marie Sisco. Tonight he wrote Marie for the last time from the States. He tried to end on an upbeat note. "Well, honey, I can't think of any more to write tonight. Goodnight honey. Don't worry about me for I'll be back soon. I love you. Always yours, Ken"

12 Nov 44

Today on Saipan the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, continued cleaning their plane, Z-8, 42-24692. The officers also made the first of many planned improvements to their quonset hut this afternoon -- a tarpaulin stretched across the front as an awning.

Today, after a lengthy delay en route, Z-2, Irvin crew of the 881st, finally arrived at Saipan.

Across the Pacific, two planes, Z-23, Hays crew, and Z-30, LaMarche crew, took off from Mather Field and landed at John Rodgers Field on Oahu today. Z-23 left Mather at midnight last night. Bombardier Hal Towner wrote that the crew "had a thrilling view of San Francisco and the Golden Gate. Our ship flew beautifully and easily at 205 [probably mph] indicated for 10-1/2 hours till we landed at John Rodger[s] field at Oahu...." 

The flock of B-29's that had taken refuge at Kingman, Arizona, yesterday was still stuck there through today. According to John Ciardi, CFC gunner on the Cordray crew: "The field is still closed. There are terrific black clouds in the west, louring and immense." As for the base, Ciardi's considered judgment was that Kingman was "a miserable place in which to be stationed."

13 Nov 44

This morning there was an air raid on Saipan, but it wasn't much of one. Copilot Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew, 881st Squadron, saw many friendly fighters in the air -- F4U's, TBF's and P-47's -- diving at something on the other side of the island, but not a single Japanese plane was in sight.

No planes of the 500th Bomb Group arrived at Saipan today, but Z-30, LaMarche crew of the 882nd, took off from John Rodgers Field on Oahu for Kwajalein. After crossing the International Date Line, Z-30 would arrive at Kwajalein on the afternoon of 14 Nov.

Z-6, Field crew of the 881st, reached John Rodgers from Mather Field in California. Already at John Rodgers were Z-3, Samuelson crew; Z-23, Hays crew; and Z-29, Savage crew. The Samuelson crew had been there for eight days getting an engine change, but that was completed today and they expected to take off for Kwajalein in the morning.

While waiting for their plane to be repaired, the Samuelson crew had taken care of one important item. They had already decided on the irreverent name "Snafu-perforl" for their plane, Z-3, in recognition of the many little things that were constantly going wrong. The next step was to get that name painted on the plane, with some appropriate artwork. So they hired some "sign painters" in Honolulu and got it done.
Before leaving Hawaii, Samuelson and his navigator decided to stock up on some items, and they knew exactly where to go: "As was expected, the Navy had everything. Charley Kingsley and myself loaded up on Kodak film at one of the Navy ship stores. They had all types and sizes of film stacked all over the counter."

Today was also Samuelson's first wedding anniversary, and he wished deeply he could be with his wife. "Never realized I could miss anyone as much as I do my wife." Sadly, Stanley Samuelson would not live to see his second anniversary.

The five or six 500th planes that had been grounded at Kingman, Arizona, due to weather successfully got off today, but not without a hiccup. Z-27 got airborne but had some sort of a problem with the #1 engine, so Capt Cordray circled the tiny town and landed back at the field. Whatever the problem was, it didn't take Smitty - crew chief Sydney Smith -- long to fix it. Then they were off again and all went well for the three-hour flight to Mather. The other planes -- Z-26, Grise crew; Z-28, Gerwick crew; Z-46, Holmes crew; Z-47, Adams crew; and possibly Z-50, Braden crew -- also apparently made it safely to Mather.

As much as he had been repelled by Kingman, John Ciardi, CFC gunner on the Cordray crew, was captivated by Mather -- the efficiency, the grounds, the food, the barracks, everything. As soon as they rolled to a stop, there were trucks there to take them to their quarters and guards ready to take over the plane. For dinner they had pork chops, or the mess sergeant offered to fry up some lamb chops if they wanted. Ciardi opted for the lamb. They were issued clean sheets and assigned to a spotless barracks. And then there were the lush, green grass and the flowers -- in November. According to Ciardi, "Smitty swore the grass looked good enough to eat, and to prove it he chewed a mouthful."

Also arriving at Mather today, but by the direct route from Kearney, were two more 500th B-29's. One of these was Z-22, 42-63429, Hurlbutt crew (#222) of the 882nd. The other was Z-45, 42-24657, McClanahan crew (#353) of the 883rd. Z-45 made it to Mather in eight hours and fifteen minutes, landing at 1830. Z-22 presumably made it in about the same time.

14 Nov 44

Today on Saipan the recently arrived Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron cleaned their plane Z-8 again, including the guns. Copilot Bob Copeland wrote that "the guns are a little screwed up," but it's unclear what he meant by that. Possibly they were not harmonized with the central fire control system. More importantly, Copeland learned today of "a big mission coming up in the next few days with the choicest target of all as our destination, TOKYO." He was very much looking forward to this. They had been told that they would carry 10 x 500 lb bombs, 500 rounds of ammo per gun and 8,000 gallons of gasoline.

Also in the 881st, airplane mechanic George Hughes wrote home today to let his parents know that he had already received three Christmas packages. "We have been polishing off lots of fruit cake around here the last few days. It seems funny to be thinking of the winter holidays over here. One day is just like another and I'm sure this will be the greenest Christmas I have ever seen. The sun is really bright all the day long." Hughes also noted that the rains had slackened off recently. As for work, all he could say was that he was working days, which was good, and that they had been "quite busy" lately.

Z-30, LaMarche crew of the 882nd Squadron, landed this afternoon at Kwajalein from Hawaii.

Taking off from John Rodgers Field on Oahu this morning bound for Kwajalein were at least two B-29's -- Z-3, Samuelson crew of the 881st, and Z-23, Hays crew of the 882nd. Z-29, Savage crew of the 882nd, may also have departed John Rodgers today. But none of these planes would reach Kwajalein today. Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", was an hour past Johnston Island when she was ordered to turn around and land at the tiny island due to bad weather farther west. Z-3, "Snafu-perfort", was also ordered to stop at Johnston. The landing was a little tricky, as the runway at Johnston was only 6000 feet long, but the B-29's managed it.
As usual, the B-29 crews found that the Navy, which ran Johnston, knew how to live right. The quarters were nice and the food was very good. Stanley Samuels wrote that there were also pool tables, a big PX and "hard and soft drinks ... served from the bar." The crew took advantage of today's remaining daylight to go to the beach to fish and swim.

In California, Z-50, 42-24696, Braden crew of the 883rd, left Mather for Hawaii on about this day, arriving safely at John Rodgers Field on Oahu probably in the afternoon.

Going through overseas processing at Mather today were several 500th crews, including the Hurlbutt (#222), Cordray (#239) and Gerwick (#233) crews of the 882nd and the Holmes (#354) and Adams (#358) crews of the 883rd. John Ciardi, CFC gunner on the Cordray crew, wrote that "Like all processings it repeated most of every other processing that ever was: a squint at our teeth, eyes, ears, and noses; a finger in the scrotum, a forced cough, and an O.K. for overseas duty." They drew some final items from supply. Ciardi was proud of himself for having "wangled an illegal pair of sun-glasses for Smitty [crew chief M/Sgt Sydney Smith] and a semi-illegal GI wristwatch for myself." Then there were lectures on emergency kits, and tropical and venereal diseases. And finally a little talk from the chaplain.

But there was some extra work to do today. According to Ciardi, during the three weeks they had lingered at Kearney "the ships were turned over to base personnel for maintenance, and crewmen were forbidden to work on the planes. The base didn't bother to touch the guns and in three weeks of wet weather the barrels dissolved away in rust. Our ship makes four coming in from Kearney needing an all around change in barrels," which came to about $2500 per plane. Fortunately, the crew were able to save the moving parts of the guns through "a long session of scrubbing off rust."

Two more 500th planes and crews arrived at Mather today from Kearney -- Z-43, 42-63441, Setterich crew (#346), and Z-44, 42-65218, Hansen crew (#351), both of the 883rd. This left only one of the original 30 flyaway aircraft and crews back at Kearney -- Z-41, 42-24675, Ashley crew (#343).

The air crews weren't the only element of the 500th Bomb Group flying overseas today. The Operations Section personnel who had arrived at Hamilton Field near San Francisco from Kansas on 7 Nov were finally alerted for their flights today. From the Operations Journal:

"14 Nov 44 - Last seven (7) days were spent processing etc., and today we were alerted for shipment at 0900 PWT [Pacific War Time]. This shipment is assigned Shipment no. 9159-7I. Our APO number (temp) is 17159-7I.

All personnel 'weighed in' baggage at 1100 and reported to ATC office at 1300 ready to leave. Take off finally was accomplished at about 1630. Within 35 minutes no land was visible."

15 Nov 44

On Saipan today 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, got in some good flying time. "This afternoon we test hopped our ship [Z-8, 42-24692] for 45 mins. I got to make both the takeoff and landing from the left seat. I enjoyed this flight more than any I've made in a long time. We got a good look at Tinian. It seems to be well cultivated. There are about 3 strips on the island. It is rumored that we'll make a milk run up to the Bonin's [Iwo Jima was in the Bonin Islands] before the big raid. Probably the day after tomorrow."

Today Z-30, LaMarche crew of the 882nd Squadron, landed on Saipan. This made 15 aircraft on hand for the 500th Bomb Group, half of the original 30 flyaways. Arriving as a passenger on Z-30 was Col George E. Schaeftzel, A-4 (Supply) of the 73rd Bomb Wing.

The planes and crews which had been forced to land on Johnston Island yesterday due to weather tried again.
today to get to Kwajalein but with little success. Z-23, Hays crew of the 882nd, did get off but soon had to return with a stuck #3 prop governor. This meant another day on Johnston while the problem was fixed. bombardier Hal Towner summed up the crew's feeling: "Navy is a good host but we're terribly impatient to get to Saipan." Z-3, Samuelson crew of the 881st, didn't even get off the ground. True to the plane's name, one of the engines on "Snafu-perfot" acted up, and crew chief M/Sgt Lyle Way and flight engineer 2/Lt Elwyn Shinn went to work on it. They found and fixed the problem but by then it was too late in the day to take off for Kwajalein, so like the Hays crew they had to spend another night on Johnston.

Presented with more leisure time, most of the Samuelson crew headed for the beach again. But not their AC. Samuelson had a special task to complete. "No one in our crew liked the way the sign painters at Honolulu put the name on our ship so I repainted it.... Three hours later it was finished and so was I." Samuelson had underestimated the effect of the tropical sun and ended up with a nasty sunburn. Samuelson, who had graduated from an art institute before the war, had skill. Later on Saipan he painted the nose art on many other B-29's.

Arriving in an Air Transport Command C-54 early this morning at 0200 at Hickam Field, Hawaii, after an 11-1/2 hour flight from Hamilton Field, California, were the personnel of the Operations Section. They were given no time to see Hawaii. They had an early breakfast while the plane was being checked and refueled, then at 0630 it was off for Johnston Island, which they reached at 1150. Here they had a quick meal at a large Navy mess, then at 1250 it was off for Kwajalein. On the way, they crossed the International Date Line and passed into 16 Nov.

Back in California, as many as five B-29's of the 500th left Mather Field today for Hawaii -- Z-22, Hurlbutt crew; Z-27, Cordray crew; Z-28, Gerwick crew, all of the 882nd; and Z-46, Holmes crew; and Z-47, Adams crew, both of the 883rd. According to John Ciardi, CFC gunner on the Cordray crew, his crew was awakened at 0330, only to spend "four hours shivering on the ramp waiting to take off." Finally at 0803 they got clearance and off they went. At 0827 the plane crossed San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. Attempting to project a sophisticated level of cynicism, Ciardi wrote that the scene "was very dramatic because we had all wanted it to be." As they flew out to sea, Ciardi had intended to watch the land fade away to the very last, but this took a while, and a combination of lack of sleep and the droning of the engines put him to sleep before the awaited moment arrived. About ten hours later they came in past Hawaii's lush, green mountains and over Diamond Head and landed at John Rodgers Field, which Ciardi described as "a dusty sprawled out ATC strip." Here they were assigned a barracks and drew bedding, ate dinner out of their mess kits, and then there was nothing to do but wait for tomorrow.

At Hamilton Field, CA, today, Capt Ferd Curtis and most of his crew (the rest would follow soon) boarded an ATC transport plane and began their journey to Saipan.

Far away in Nebraska, the last of the 30 flyaway aircraft of the 500th Bomb Group, Z-41, 42-24675, Ashley crew (#343) of the 883rd, left Kearney AAF today for Mather Field, where she arrived in the afternoon. However, this wasn't the last of the 500th personnel in Nebraska. There were still 30 full crews there, 15 at Kearney and 15 at Lincoln, awaiting B-29's to fly overseas. Their time would come.

16 Nov 44

There was a good deal of excitement in the 500th Bomb Group area today. The crews were briefed for their first mission against Japan, which was scheduled for tomorrow. Target would be the Nakajima Aircraft Factory in the Tokyo suburb of Musashino. This factory produced 30-40 percent of all Japan's aircraft engines. However, the excitement was soon dampened by the announcement that the mission was postponed due to weather.

With the rest of the day free, 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, went with three friends in a jeep to take a tour of the island. They drove through the towns of Charan Kanoa and Garapan, both of which "were beaten up horribly during the fighting." They saw detachments of Marines out hunting down Japanese hold-outs. They even went swimming at the beach at Charan Kanoa, which Copeland pronounced "the nicest beach I've ever seen." He enjoyed the excursion very much.
After crossing the International Date Line, the Air Transport Command C-54 on which the personnel of the 500th Bomb Group Operations Section were traveling touched down on Kwajalein today at 1800. Here there was a 4-1/2 hour lay-over, which gave the men time to eat in the ATC mess hall and then to catch half of the movie being shown in an outdoor theater nearby. They were even issued a ration ticket good for one can of 3.2 beer. By 2200 they were back on the plane and taking off for their final destination, Saipan.

The anonymous author of the Operations Section journal took time to praise the ATC for its conduct of the trip from California to Saipan:

"This flight over has been very enjoyable to what we had expected. Lunch boxes made up by the American Red Cross were aboard ship for the entire trip. Coffee & hot soup was [sic] also carried in Thermos jugs, and the stewards furnished by A.T.C. were more than courteous and helpful to all aboard, regardless of rank. They are to be commended for their intelligent service."

Both Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Hays crew of the 882nd, and Z-3, "Snafu-perfort", Samuelson crew of the 881st, got off from Johnston Island successfully this morning, although the latter plane lived up to its name again with another minor snafu. AC Stanley Samuelson wrote that he had been given priority for take-off over six transports and seven B-24 bombers and was just ready to rev up for take-off when "a naval officer came buzzing up in a jeep waving a piece of paper. It seemed that Cpl. Janecek and Sgt Evans [left gunner and radar operator, respectively] had checked out rods and reels while they were there and gave them to a sailor to turn in. When we were ready to go, the sailor hadn't turned them in so it cost my two gunners seventy dollars. The hold-up cost the government over a thousand dollars in gasoline that was burned up, for all the planes that were waiting for us to take off had their engines going. We were disgusted with the Navy when we left Johnston."

Both Z-23 and Z-3 crossed the IDL on the way to Kwajalein and passed into 17 Nov. Also flying to Kwajalein today, either from Johnston Island or straight from Hawaii, were three more B-29's of the 500th -- Z-29, Savage crew of the 882nd; Z-9, Field crew of the 881st; and Z-50, Braden crew of the 883rd.

Three B-29's of the 500th departed Mather Field, California, today and flew to John Rodgers Field on Oahu. These were Z-26, Grise crew of the 882nd; Z-43, Setterich crew of the 883rd; and Z-45, McClanahan crew of the 883rd.

17 Nov 44

Early this morning at 0200 the Air Transport Command C-54 carrying the personnel of the 500th Bomb Group Operations Section landed at Isley Field. Also on the plane were Group S-4 (Supply) Maj Harry Weber, Group S-2 (Intelligence) Capt William Marmion, and an unknown number of 500th personnel not assigned to the Operations Section. It was very dark and the men had a little difficulty locating all their baggage. The last two pieces were finally found wedged on either side of the C-54's large auxiliary tank. The officers and their baggage were transported to the 500th Headquarters area, where they were assigned to Quonset huts. Then the enlisted men and their baggage were transported to the enlisted area, where they were assigned to six-man pyramid tents. An early breakfast was served in the 883rd Squadron mess hall. By then it was starting to get light, and even though everyone was very tired, most men stayed awake long enough to get a first look at their new surroundings.

Strange things can happen under confusing conditions, as in the case of Sgt Edwin Enstad, radar operator on the Cheney crew of the 883rd. For some reason Enstad had been detached from his crew back in the States, probably at Walker, and ended up flying overseas with this large group that had just arrived by C-54. He apparently got mixed up with some 881st personnel and was erroneously entered on their morning report as one of their own. It took until 11 Dec before the 881st Orderly Room caught their error. So what was Enstad doing for those 24 days? Best guess is that early on he just moved over to the 883rd area on his own and didn't think to say anything to the Orderly Room. Anyway, he probably got to surprise his buddies on the Cheney crew when they finally showed up on 10 Dec. You can imagine him saying with a grin, "Hey, where have you guys been?"
While the Operations personnel were getting settled, the air crews of the 500th Bomb Group on Saipan received the specialist briefings -- navigation, bombing, air/sea rescue, etc. -- for the planned Tokyo raid. Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, was a little daunted to hear that they could expect to be met by 400-500 enemy fighters in the Tokyo area. These would be a mix of Zekes, Oscars, Nicks, Franks, Jacks and Ivings. But Copeland was reassured a bit by the air/sea rescue plan, which provided for a line of submarines along the flight route, up to a few miles off the Japanese coast, plus a "Dumbo" comms and rescue plane.

With some free time today, Copeland made a trip to get some bananas and discovered that "they do grow upside down." He also passed some of the US military cemeteries, which reminded him of the high cost paid to take Saipan.

Landing at Kwajalein this afternoon, from either Johnston Island or Hawaii, were five B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group -- Z-3, Samuelson crew of the 881st; Z-6, Field crew of the 881st; Z-23, Hays crew of the 882nd; Z-29, Savage crew of the 882nd; and Z-50, Braden crew of the 883rd.

According to Stanley Samuelson, they made it to Kwajalein ahead of schedule despite flying through a dozen storms. Samuelson thought Kwajalein looked like "hell on earth... The reef looked like the Japs had left yesterday instead of five or six months ago. There wasn't a whole palm tree on the island. Bullet riddled pill boxes, tanks and landing boats were strewn all over creation."

Bombardier Hal Towner of the Hays crew took note of the battle damage too, but he was also impressed by the number of planes on the field at Kwajalein, "lots of Corsairs and B-24s about as well as transports and B-29s."

Leaving John Rodgers Field on Oahu this morning for Kwajalein were three more planes -- Z-27, Cordray crew of the 882nd; Z-28, Gerwick crew of the 882nd; and Z-46, Holmes crew of the 883rd. Later in the day they would cross the International Date Line and pass into 18 Nov.

On the eastern side of the Pacific, the last two of the 500th's original 30 flyaway aircraft, Z-41, Ashley crew, and Z-44, Hansen crew, both of the 883rd, took off from Mather Field and about ten hours later landed at John Rodgers Field on Oahu.

Meanwhile, back in Nebraska, most of the 30 reserve crews of the 500th were still cooling their heels in Kearney and Lincoln waiting for new B-29's to arrive from the factories or for transportation via ATC.

18 Nov 44

2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, was really anxious to be off to Tokyo -- "I wouldn't miss being on it for the world" -- but that first mission kept getting postponed. So Copeland spent the day touring the island again, this time all the way to the far end at Marpi Point.

Today, after getting some sleep, the members of the 500th Bomb Group Operations Section who had arrived on Saipan by ATC early yesterday "inspected their new Opns Office and found it to be satisfactory." The S-3 clerks who had arrived a couple of months ago with the Ground Echelon had done a very good job setting up the Operations quonset, including building several desks "from an assortment of boxes formerly used for shipping our files etc. across."

Also today, the Ferd (yes, Ferd) Curtis crew, most of it anyway, of the 881st Squadron arrived on Saipan via ATC. Due to the mysterious workings of Army personnel administration, 1/Lt Curtis, his four 2/Lt's -- CP 2/Lt Henry Standridge, B Carl Taylor, N Louis Dreher, and FE James Klock -- and three of his EM -- Radar Op Sgt James Anthony, CFC Gunner John Dillavou and LG Cpl Howard Clos, showed up today, but the remaining three EM would not arrive until 20 (Radio Op Sgt Harry Tammen), 21 (Ring Gunner Walter Aufmuth) and 23 Nov (TG
Sgt Paul Privitera), respectively. The Curtis crew was one of those left behind in Nebraska without a B-29 to fly over. Things were even more disjointed for other crews flying in courtesy of ATC. The 11 members of the Harlan Jackson crew of the 881st for example dribbled in on seven separate days between 15 and 24 Nov. But eventually these crews were all reunited and eager to fly a mission. They just needed an airplane.

Major Frank Roberts, 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, was still Acting Group Operations Officer pending the arrival of the regular in that job, Lt Col Marcus Mullen, but as it happened, Mullen would arrive in only a few more hours.

During the afternoon a total of five B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group landed on Isley Field from Kwajalein. This was the greatest number of aircraft to arrive in a single day. The planes and crews were Z-3, Samuelson crew, 881st; Z-6, Field crew, 881st; Z-23, Hays crew, 882nd; Z-29, Savage crew, 882nd; and Z-50, Braden crew, 883rd. Arriving as passengers on these planes were several key command and staff personnel, including Group Operations Officer Lt Col Marcus Mullen with the Savage crew; 882nd CO Lt Col Joseph Brannock with the Hays crew; 881st Operations Officer Maj Gerald Mosier with the Field crew; and Group Bombardier Capt Charles Mc Clintick with the Samuelson crew.

However, before the Samuelson crew was able to leave Kwajalein this morning, the aptly named "Snafuperfort" had another small problem. Someone in the ground crew had noticed a small crack in the wing, so when the air crew arrived at the plane they found some maintenance men busy riveting a piece of sheet metal onto the wing. Samuelson and crew had to wait until they were finished, so they weren't able to take off until a little before 1100.

When he finally reached Saipan, Samuelson was "pleasantly surprised" by the "grand job" that the Ground Echelon had done. And the Ground Echelon was pleasantly surprised to see Z-3 and the Samuelson crew. They had been 16 days in transit from Kearney and "most of the fellows were wondering if we ever would get there."

Samuelson described their new quonset quarters as "semicircular, steel roof buildings that held about ten to twenty men." The number depended largely on whether you were officer or enlisted. Officers and enlisted were housed separately, with the officers from two crews, ten men total, sharing a quonset, while the enlisted men from three crews, eighteen men total, were crowded into a single quonset. Still, the quonsets were better housing than the tents in which the ground personnel lived.

Now that two-thirds of the Group's aircraft and most of the command and staff had arrived on Saipan, CO Col Richard King decided it was time to close the books on the Ground Echelon and merge the morning reports of the Ground and Air Echelons. The 500th Bomb Group was officially whole once again.

The Ground Echelon Historian, 2/Lt Richard Cutler, thought it appropriate to mark the end of this phase of operations by recognizing the efforts of certain personnel:

"The Historian cannot close this Chapter of an Interest-experience [sic] without paying particular tribute to the efforts of Major Wolcott as Commanding Officer of the Ground Echelon of this Group. Likewise the acting Squadron Commanders, Captain Maust, 1/Lt Roach, Captain Johnston, and Lt Chase 'carried the ball' for their respective units. The efforts of Lt. Judell as Group Adjutant, T/Sgt. Gordon Groby as Sergeant Major of the Group; First Sergeant Ritnour; First Sergeant Bellete and First Sergeant Thompson of the respective Squadron[s] must have bouquets handed in their direction. There were many others; each man did his part, but these listed were under the gun and had the particular responsibility of making the machinery operate."

This historian agrees with his predecessor, 2/Lt Cutler. The Ground Echelon of the 500th Bomb Group accomplished an amazing amount of work with very limited resources in less than two months, and that could not have been done without excellent leadership.

This afternoon, two B-29's of the 500th Bomb Group -- Z-27, Cordray crew of the 882nd Squadron; and Z-46,
Holmes crew of the 883rd -- arrived at Kwajalein.

On the other side of the International Date Line in Hawaii, two more B-29's of the 500th Group -- Z-43, Setterich crew, and Z-45, McClanahan crew, both of the 883rd Squadron -- took off from John Rodgers Field en route for Kwajalein. About an hour out from Hawaii, Z-45 developed an oil leak in one of its engines and the crew had to feather it and return to Oahu. But Z-43 kept on going, to Kwajalein and into 19 Nov.

19 Nov 44

On Saipan, the air crews of the 500th Bomb Group got up at 0300 today, hoping this would be the day they bombed Tokyo, but “the mission was called off because the wind was blowing the wrong way,” as 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, put it. Also, the weather on the route to Japan and around Saipan itself was not good. "It rained considerably harder today than it ever has before." So Copeland spent part of the day building himself a shelf in his quonset. Later in the day he saw the first helicopter he had ever seen. "It flew along quite nicely."

This afternoon, despite the weather, two more B-29's of the 500th made it to Saipan from Kwajalein -- Z-27, Cordray crew, 882nd; and Z-46, Holmes crew, 883rd.

One good thing about the weather delays was that the 500th was growing stronger every day. The Group now had 23 planes available to send against Japan. Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew, which had arrived yesterday, was excited about the opportunity: "Are we lucky! We will get to participate in the first raid on Tokyo from Saipan. The boys didn't take off this morning so as our ship will be ready today we will go along tomorrow." In the meantime, the crew busied themselves improving their new living quarters -- building furniture, adding front and back steps to the quonset, laying out paths, etc.

Also this afternoon, two more 500th B-29's -- Z-28, Gerwick crew of the 882nd; and Z-43, Setterich crew of the 883rd -- landed at Kwajalein from Hawaii.

On the other side of the International Date Line, four more B-29's -- Z-22, Hurlbutt crew, 882nd; Z-41, Ashley crew, 883rd; Z-44, Hansen crew, 883rd; and Z-45, McClanahan crew, 883rd -- departed John Rodgers Field on Oahu this morning for Kwajalein. This was Z-45's second try -- she turned back due to an oil leak yesterday -- but everything went well today. Later in the day the four planes crossed the IDL and passed into 20 Nov.

The last two B-29's of the 500th -- Z-26, Grise crew of the 882nd; and Z-47, Adams crew, 883rd -- were delayed at John Rodgers for unknown reasons.

20 Nov 44

Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew, 881st Squadron, was becoming frustrated with the repeated delays of the first mission to Tokyo. "Getting up at these ungodly hours just to bomb Tokyo is getting very monotonous. We arose at 0430 this morning and after we got all prepared they called the mission off." It rained hard most of the day. Copeland didn't get much done today except for writing some letters.

It was a similar story for the Hays crew of the 882nd. Bombardier Hal Towner wrote, "Our schedule[d] raid on Tokyo was cancelled before we finished breakfast to everybody's great disappointment." And it rained. "Lots and lots of rain today."

All this rain was affecting more than just missions and morale. AC Stanley Samuelson, who had arrived on Saipan on 18 Nov, wrote that for his first three days on the island "it rained off and on all day and all night. Leather began to get moldy after the first few days and most everything took on a musty odor." Stuck indoors with time on their hands, the men turned mostly to card games, with poker being the game of choice, until you lost all your money, in which case it became bridge or rummy.
Despite the wet weather, Z-28, Gerwick crew of the 882nd; and Z-43, Setterich crew of the 883rd, made it from Kwajalein to Saipan today. Arriving as passengers were Group Navigator Capt Berry Thompson with Gerwick and 883rd Squadron CO Lt Col William McDowell with Setterich. Farther back along the route, Z-22, Hurlbutt crew, 882nd; Z-41, Ashley crew, 883rd; Z-44, Hansen crew, 883rd; and Z-45, McClanahan crew, 883rd, all made it to Kwajalein this afternoon. Bob Schurmann, right gunner on the McClanahan crew, recorded the flight time from Hawaii to Kwajalein as 9 hours and 40 minutes.

A few thousand miles away at Lincoln AAF, Nebraska, the 15 reserve crews of the 500th Bomb Group that had been sent there from Walker AAF, Kansas, back in October finally received orders today to proceed tomorrow to Kearney AAF, where they would either receive B-29's to fly to the Marianas or orders to travel there by Air Transport Command. Jim Wride, flight engineer on the Clinkscales crew (#350) of the 883rd Squadron, remembers Lincoln as no more than a "warehouse" stop. There was no training. The crews just reported every morning for roll call and then were free until the next morning. The routine was broken only by the occasional weekend pass. The men were undoubtedly glad to be leaving the place.

21 Nov 44

This morning the crews of the 500th Bomb Group actually made it into their aircraft before the Tokyo mission was called off once again. The word was that there would be no mission tomorrow either. A disgusted Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, wrote in his diary, "I'm getting slightly bitter about this whole thing." Copeland passed the day by writing letters. The highlight of his day was dinner. "We had pork chops for dinner and boy did they taste good." In the evening navigator Bob Nelson checked Copeland out on the A-14 sextant.

The officers of the Hays crew of the 882nd likewise spent the day writing letters, or censoring enlisted men's mail, or reading. Some of them managed to do their laundry in the Squadron's Maytag washer that the command had had the foresight to purchase in the States and ship over with the unit.

This afternoon three more B-29's of the 500th arrived on Saipan after about a six-hour flight from Kwajalein -- Z-41, Ashley crew; Z-44, Hansen crew; and Z-45, McClanahan crew, all of the 883rd Squadron. Arriving with the McClanahan crew was 883rd Squadron Operations Officer Maj John Gay, and with the Ashley crew Group Air Inspector Capt Prescott Martin.

On about this day, back at Mather Field, California, with the last of the 30 original flyaway planes of the 500th having passed thru on their way overseas, the mixed group of ground maintenance personnel under 2/Lt Maurice Pearce of the 882nd Squadron packed up their baggage and moved on to Hamilton Field near San Francisco, where they would travel to Saipan via Air Transport Command planes.

22 Nov 44

Today was a full day off for the air crews of the 500th Bomb Group on Saipan. In the morning Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, went over to East fighter field, where he ran into a couple of old friends from flight school who had been on Saipan since D + 12. They had a nice chat. In the afternoon he went swimming at Blue Beach, where he observed something really noteworthy: "I saw a woman down there for the first time since I left the states. She was a nurse."

But the ground crews did not have a day off. They were working around the clock to make sure as many planes as possible were ready for that first mission, whenever it might come. Today airplane mechanic George Hughes had the first opportunity in over a week to write home:

"November 22, 1944
'Somewhere in the Pacific"
Dear Mother & Dad,

I received a package today from you. It came in very good shape. Everything was very useful.

We have had about a week of rainy weather. It has been cloudy all the time. The sun came out today and it was really hot. I have been on nights lately so the cool weather was just right. It is almost impossible to sleep when the sun is bright. ...

We will probably have a big spread for Thanksgiving [tomorrow]. I certainly hope so. I can stand lots of good meals but it looks as though I will have to go to the States to get them. ...

... If you can get some film some place I wish you would. A couple fellows in the tent have some coming.

There isn't much more to write about now. When I get off the night shift I will have more time to write. ...

Love
George"

This afternoon two B-29's of the 883rd Squadron, Z-43 and Z-45, had to be moved temporarily from their hardstands to avoid potential damage from flying coral fragments created by blasting in connection with ongoing construction activity. This was not excessive caution. Significant damage did occur from the daily detonations during this time. Aircraft Z-50 of the 883rd would be damaged by flying coral fragments on 4 Dec. Living quarters were not safe either. One day upon his return from guard duty, Sgt Curtis Burchfield of the 330th Air Service Group, which provided maintenance support to the 500th Bomb Group, found his tent a wreck. A large chunk of blasted coral had landed squarely on his bunk and gone on thru the wooden flooring. Burchfield believed that if he had not been on guard duty that day he would have been killed.

Also this afternoon, Z-22, Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd Squadron, arrived on Saipan from Kwajalein. The arrival of this plane made 28 of the Group's 30 aircraft now on hand. Only Z-26, Grise crew of the 882nd; and Z-47, Adams crew of the 883rd, were missing, probably still held up in Hawaii.

At the Air Transport Command base at Hamilton Field near San Francisco, Sgt Clyde Barnhart, propeller specialist in the 883rd Squadron, got his overseas travel orders. Funny thing, though, they were sealed. He was told not to open them until after he was on his way. Barnhart didn't have to wait too long for that. He was on a flight out tonight. After they got into the air, Barnhart opened the envelope and confirmed that his destination was Saipan.

23 Nov 44

This was Thanksgiving Day on Saipan. No mission again today. In the 500th Bomb Group there was apparently no turkey, but according to Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron, they still had a nice dinner, "with chicken, potatoes, peas, fresh butter, and pumpkin pie." Not everybody got a nice meal. George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, pulled airplane guard today and missed holiday dinner.

Copeland also went to church today and enjoyed the sermon. Then in the afternoon he helped clear rocks out of a recreation field they were laying out next to their hut.

Copeland got a piece of unwelcome news today. His AC, Maj Robert Fitzgerald, told him that their crew might be made a lead crew. The problem with this from Copeland's point of view is that he would have to give up his right seat to whichever command or staff officer led the mission. In that case, Copeland would be allowed to bump the tail gunner from the mission and ride back there. But of course he'd much rather be up front. "Why
did they give me wings?” he wondered.

Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd, wrote his fiancee today for the first time since leaving the States. Due to censorship rules, he couldn't tell her much, “except things are as I expected they would be. I really enjoyed the trip over as it was different from anything I'd seen or run across so far.” Fine also took note of the hot weather, writing, “You should have seen me sewing today. I cut the sleeves on a shirt so it has short sleeves and then sewed it up. I cut the legs off a pair of pants so that they are shorts now but I haven't sewn them up.”

24 Nov 44

On this day, after repeated daily delays due to bad weather, the 73rd Bomb Wing launched its long-anticipated strike against Japan, the first bombing raid on the main island of Honshu since Doolittle's raiders in April 1942. It also happened to be exactly one year since the activation of the 500th Bomb Group. They had come a long way since Gowen Field, Idaho. Primary target for this first mission was the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory, designated Target 357, in Musashino near Tokyo; secondary target was the dock and industrial area of Tokyo. The Nakajima factory was an important target, estimated to produce 30 percent of all Japanese aircraft engines. Tokyo of course was Japan’s capital and largest city and full of industrial targets.

As its contribution to this mission, the 500th Bomb Group scheduled 27 of its 28 aircraft on hand, and 26 of those 27 were airborne. The plane that failed to take off was Z-30, “Slick Dick”, which lost power in #3 engine, later determined to be due to fouled spark plugs.

The participating aircraft and crews were as follows:

Z-1, “The Rosalia Rocket”, Goldsworthy
Z-2, Irvin
Z-3, “Snafu-perfort”, Samuelson
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Oswald
Z-5, “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, Luman
Z-6, “Draggin' Lady”, Field
Z-7, “Hell's Belle”, Sullivan
Z-8, “Wabash Cannonball”, Fitzgerald
Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Hatch
Z-10, “Punchin' Judy”, Thompson
Z-21, “Devils' Delight”, Pierce
Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, Hays
Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, Tackett
Z-25, “American Beauty”, Van Trigt
Z-27, Cordray
Z-28, “Old Ironsides”, Gerwick
Z-29, Savage
Z-41, Ashley
Z-42, “Supine Sue”, Moreland
Z-43, Setterich
Z-44, Hansen
Z-45, “Mustn't Touch”, McClanahan
Z-46, “Su Su Baby”, Holmes
Z-48, “Million Dollar Baby”, Black
Z-49, “three Feathers”, Feathers
Z-50, “Fancy Detail”, Braden

Since this was their first combat mission, it's not surprising that the planning staff of the 73rd Bomb Wing developed an overly complicated field order. Perhaps the worst mistake was trying to form evenly divided “Combat Groups”, which required breaking up the integrity of the Bomb Groups and Squadrons. An excerpt from
the 500th Bomb Group Mission Narrative Summary illustrates the problem: “Broken down by squadrons, ten planes from the 881st, six from the 882nd, and five from the 883rd Squadron made up [the] 5th Combat Group. Four planes from the 883rd Squadron and one plane from the 882nd Squadron, a total of five (5) planes, were directed to form the third flight of the 1st Squadron (Combat) of the 6th Combat Group.” The staff would have to learn.

The plan meant that the 500th would go in to the target after the 497th, 498th and 499th Groups, in that order, except for the 6th Combat Group, which was a composite created from at least three Bomb Groups. Which would get the hottest reception? The lead elements, or the tail-end charlies?

Take-off for the planes of the 5th Combat Group was from 0740 to 0805. For the 500th planes assigned to the 6th Combat Group it was from 0819 to 0825. For this long trip, all planes carried auxiliary fuel tanks in the forward bomb bay, which reduced the bomb load to 7 x 500 lb M64 GP (General Purpose) and 3 x 500 lb M76 incendiary bombs in the rear bomb bay. The idea behind the mix of high explosives and incendiaries was that the latter would set the roofs of the factory buildings on fire.

Another problem with the field order was that it called for the planes to assemble into their formations shortly after take-off and maintain those formations all the way to the target. Flying 1500 miles in formation across multiple weather zones was simply unrealistic. Even if you were able to maintain your formation, it was tiring to the pilots and wasteful of fuel. In fact, some pilots would complain after the fact that the formation leaders had not adhered to the briefed cruise control plan. Again, the staff would have to learn.

The 500th Bomb Group Consolidated Mission Report does not explicitly identify the positions of individual aircraft within the formations, but some conclusions can be drawn from fragmentary information. Leading the first combat squadron of the 5th Combat Group, which was probably composed of the ten B-29’s of the 881st Squadron, Z-1 thru Z-10, was Z-1, Goldsworthy crew, with Group CO Col Richard King aboard as Group Leader. Lt Col Ralph A. “Pete” Reeve, CO 881st Squadron, was flying in the No. 2 position on Goldsworthy’s right wing, probably in Z-5, Luman crew.

The composition of the second combat squadron of the 5th Combat Group is a little more difficult to determine. Leading the first element and the squadron was apparently Z-25, Van Trigt crew. Probably riding on Z-25 as squadron leader was 882nd CO, Lt Col Joseph “Toby” Brannock. Z-25′s right wingman was Z-21, Pierce crew, and on the left wing was Z-24, Tackett crew. The other 882nd planes in this combat squadron were Z-27, Z-29 and Z-23, but their exact positions are uncertain. The five 883rd Squadron planes in this combat squadron were Z-42, Z-46, Z-48, Z-49 and Z-50, but again the exact positions are uncertain. For a time, V-27, straggling from the 499th Group, flew with this combat squadron as a twelfth plane.

Five planes of the 500th Group – Z-44, Z-41, Z-45 and Z-43 of the 883rd Squadron and Z-28 of the 882nd – were supposed to link up with seven planes of the 497th Group to form a combat squadron of the 6th Combat Group, but this rendezvous never took place and the five 500th planes proceeded to Japan on their own.

Soon after assembly the B-29’s began climbing to altitude. The plan was to climb to 20,000 feet in about an hour, then level off for about 30 minutes, then climb to 30,000 feet for the rest of the way to Japan.

Climbing to such high altitude with such a heavy load put a great strain on the engines. A little over four hours out, Z-10 lost power in #2 engine and had to turn back. About 30 minutes later, Z-1, with Col King on board, began leaking oil from the #1 engine. Soon it was so bad the engine had to be feathered. Goldsworthy and King briefly considered trying to continue to the target on three engines but decided the risks were too great. Very reluctantly, they turned over the lead to Lt Col Reeve and turned for home. A few minutes later, Z-49 lost her #4 engine, and a half-hour after that, Z-27 also lost #4. Both turned for home.

On their way back, loath to waste their bomb load, Goldsworthy and King discussed the odds of making a surprise bombing run over Iwo Jima. But they realized that if they ran into fighters with only three engines, their goose would probably be cooked. So they jettisoned their bombs into the ocean, as did the other abortive planes. All four aborts made it home to Saipan safely.
Back with the 5th Combat Group, the aborts of Z-1 and Z-10 had reduced the first combat squadron to only eight planes, and the loss of Z-49 and Z-27 had reduced the second squadron's original eleven planes to nine. But somewhere along the way a plane of the second squadron, possibly Z-50, Braden crew, moved up to join the first squadron. Somewhere behind these 17 planes were the five 500th planes nominally assigned to the 6th Combat Group.

Six-and-a-half hours after take-off the lead planes broke out of the clouds and from 28,000 feet the crews caught their first sight of Japan, complete with Mount Fuji, the designated I.P., standing out on the horizon “like a beautiful painting done by a master”, to use the artistic words of AC 1/Lt Stanley Samuelsin in Z-3. 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew in Z-8, thought that Honshu was “very pretty with the snow on the peaks.” Beautiful or not, tall Mount Fuji made an excellent I.P. The 22 planes of the 500th Bomb Group headed straight for it, made their turn there as planned, and settled in on course 063 degrees for the primary target.

Shortly after passing Fuji, one of the engines on Z-3 quit. The bomber quickly fell behind the formation and the crew began to sweat a little. Then unaccountably the engine kicked back in. But it was too late for Z-3 to catch the others, so Samuelson decided to dump their bombs on a target of opportunity. Then a bunch of bad news arrived in quick succession. The bomb racks froze and the bombs would not release. The engine started acting up again, blew three exhaust stacks and began spitting out flame. And when the crew tried to retract the bomb bay doors, they would not completely close, creating serious drag. Z-3 began to lose altitude. The gunners nervously craned their necks searching for the expected fighters. They wouldn't have long to wait.

While Z-3 was having more than her share of trouble, the rest of the 500th planes continued toward the target. But there was now a thick blanket of clouds below and it soon became clear that visual bombing would not be the order of the day. Somebody, presumably Pete Reeve, made the decision to divert to the secondary, the Tokyo dock and industrial area. The first squadron turned onto course 071 degrees. Most of the second squadron followed... but not all.

The lead element of the second squadron, Z-25, Van Trigt crew, Z-24, Tackett crew, and Z-21, Pierce crew, possibly at the direction of Toby Brannock, continued on course 063 for Target 357 and attempted to bomb thru the undercast. Bombs away from 32,000 feet at 1444. Good try, but probably few if any of the 30 bombs dropped hit the target. The K-20 camera carried on Z-21 might have provided some confirmation except for the fact that the “bombardier accidentally fell against (the) start button on the intervalometer and ran all the film off before arriving at (the) target.” Later assessment determined that only 48 bombs from the entire Wing landed in the factory area.

At about the same time, the other thirteen 500th planes attempted to drop their loads from 29,000 feet thru the overcast on what they hoped was their secondary target, Tokyo. There were apparently a few holes in the clouds, enabling some planes to drop visually, but most dropped by radar. Bob Copeland wrote in his diary that he was told later by 2/Lt Admer Boren, bombardier on the Luman crew in Z-5, that “he saw his bombs working over docks so I guess we may have done some good.” Boren may have seen some of his bombs hit but for sure not all of them. Two of them were still in the plane, hung up on Z-5’s bomb racks, and were brought all the way back to Saipan. Z-29, Savage crew, had a much worse problem, a complete rack malfunction. It was frustrating to lug those bombs 1500 miles to Japan and then not get any of them off. The ten bombs were jettisoned later. All told, the main body of the 500th Bomb Group dropped 83 GP and 35 incendiary bombs on Tokyo.

The inaccuracy of the bombing on this mission was undoubtedly due in part to the extremely high winds the B-29's encountered at their high altitudes of 28,000 to 32,000 feet. Sgt Jack Heffner, radar operator on the McNamer crew but on this mission filling in as right gunner on the Hatch crew in Z-9, noted in his diary that their ground speed over the target was 450 miles per hour. Even the vaunted Norden bomb sight could not deal with such high speeds. This was possibly the first experience of the effect of the jet stream on aerial bombing.

Still trailing behind the main formation were the five 500th planes that were originally supposed to have been part of the 6th Combat Group – Z-44, Z-41, Z-45, Z-43 and Z-28. The leader of this small squadron, Deputy Group Commander Lt Col John Dougherty, chose for unknown reasons not to attempt either the primary or secondary, a decision which would be mildly criticized in the Group Bombardier's Report. These planes instead turned almost due south and bombed the village of Matsuzaki in Sagami Bay as a target of opportunity. That
was the official story anyway. Bob Schurmann, right gunner in the McClanahan crew on Z-45, cast suspicion on the official version of events when he wrote in his diary, "Toggled bombs on Col. Dougherty and they landed in the mts. outside Tokyo."

But by that time only the four 883rd planes were still with Dougherty. Capt James Gerwick, AC of Z-28, had either voluntarily or involuntarily become separated from the 883rd planes and decided to go on to Tokyo. He made it there and at 1515 from 30,000 feet his bombardier added insult to injury with five more GP's and another IB. Two GP's and two IB's hung up on the racks and were jettisoned later.

Due to the cloud cover, no immediate assessment of bomb damage was possible, but later observations showed minimal damage, only 1-2%, to the primary target. With regard to the secondary, "apparently bombs hit all over Tokyo.”

The 500th planes had been met with some flak over the target area but it was completely ineffective. No planes were hit. There were some Japanese fighters in the air but they seemed tentative and disinclined to press their attacks... except in one case.

When we left Z-3, “Snafu-perfort”, and the Samuelson crew, they had had some engine problems, had fallen behind and below the main formation, had been unable to salvo their bombs and then had been unable to re-close the bomb bay doors. Japanese fighters were always on the look-out for stragglers, and it didn't take them long to find Z-3. Things weren't looking too hopeful for the Americans. Capt Samuelson later described the resulting running fight:

“... [A]ll the Nips in the sky came on in for the attack. All the gunners stood by with fingers on their triggers. The interphone soon began to buzz. 'Three pursuit – five o'clock low. Four pursuit two o'clock high. Two pursuits twelve o'clock level!' Things got hotter than hell and the guns began to crackle in all directions. Jap single and twin engine fighters came in raking us over with machine guns and cannon. Our new gun sights were really doing their stuff, for every time one of our gunners cut loose at a Nip, he and a few others would turn tail and run. Cpl. Goulooze [ring gunner John J. Goulooze] was the first to nail one for sure. Three of the gunners saw it spin down into the clouds trailing black smoke. Many of the enemy pursuits were hit in some degree or other. All the gunners were so busy keeping them off that no one was particular whether he definitely knocked one down or not. This battle between 'Snafu-perfort' and forty Japanese fighters lasted for almost thirty minutes. We came out without a scratch. How this happened we'll never know and neither will the enemy.”

Ten B-29's including Z-3 reported fighter attacks, but none was hit. As for the B-29 gunners, in addition to Cpl Goulooze's claim of a Zeke probably destroyed, 2/Lt Boren in Z-5 claimed an Irving damaged.

But even after the fighters gave up and turned for their home fields, it was still a long way home, especially for the Samuelson crew. About an hour out to sea, flight engineer 1/Lt Elwyn M. Shinn crawled into the rear bomb bay and manually released the bombs. Shedding these 5,000 pounds increased the plane's speed by about 10 mph, and with careful flying Z-3 was able to make it home to Saipan.

All other 500th planes made it home safely as well, landing all thru the evening. The McClanahan crew had a little problem with the landing gear on Z-45 and had to use the emergency landing gear motors but the gear then came down all right.

The Group had suffered no losses on its first mission but it had been a long and tiring one. Stanley Samuelson and Jack Heffner gratefully accepted the double shot of liquor that was handed out at debriefing, and they certainly weren't the only ones.

One footnote to this mission. Some people recall it as taking place on Thanksgiving Day. But 24 Nov was actually the Friday after Thanksgiving. The confusion probably results from the fact that because of the International Date Line, it was still 23 Nov, Thanksgiving Day, back in the States.

Some crews of the 500th missed today's mission. One of those was the Hurlbutt crew, which had arrived on Saipan only on the 22nd. Their plane, Z-22, must have had some minor problems and was not ready in time.
Navigator Ken Fine passed the time doing a little sight-seeing with bombardier Glen Aitken and flight engineer Glenn Truesdell, and then they went swimming for a while. In the afternoon, Fine wrote some letters.

25 Nov 1944

The 73rd Bomb Wing crews who had flown the first mission against Tokyo the day before were physically fatigued but mentally exhilarated by the experience. But it was recognized that if the air offensive against Japan was going to be successful, bombing procedures and accuracy would have to be much improved. Here is the Group Bombardier's Report for the 500th Bomb Group:

GROUP BOMBARDIER'S REPORT

Par. 53.

a. The 500th Bomb Group attacked the Musashino Aircraft Engine Factory with three (3) aircraft; the docks and urban area of Tokyo with thirteen (13) aircraft; and four (4) aircraft attacked an opportunity target believed to be a camouflaged steel mill at Matsuzaki, Japan.

b. Bombing was accomplished at the secondary target by means of radar; all other bombing was visual. All releases were made on the leader with the deputy leader sighting for range only in the event that he might necessarily have to take over the lead position.

c. The actual bombing was not accomplished according to plan. The element which picked out a target of opportunity made no attempt to bomb the secondary target as briefed.

d. The biggest factor which prevented precision bombing was the undercast condition over the target.

e. In as much as very few bomb impacts were spotted and only one photograph taken, which was capable of being interpreted, it is impossible to conjecture as to possible causes of errors.

f. No estimate of bombing results are [sic] now available.

g. Conditions at the target were fine for bombing except for the undercast. Visibility was fair, and flak and fighters only meager.

h. Only two aircraft reaching the target area failed to bomb. Rack malfunction was the trouble in both cases.

i. Ship No.   Malfunction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ship No.</th>
<th>Malfunction</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[65]221  [Z-29]</td>
<td>Rack malfunction</td>
<td>unconfirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[63]435  [Z-3]</td>
<td>Bomb doors failed to close and bombs failed to release</td>
<td>confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[63]436  [Z-28]</td>
<td>4 bombs in L.H. rack failed to release</td>
<td>confirmed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bombsight and C-1 cut out</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>[65]218  [Z-44]</td>
<td>Rack malfunction</td>
<td>unconfirmed</td>
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</table>

j. Thirty-six (36) arming wires were not returned due to the bombs being salvoed.
Navigator Ken Fine of the Hurlbutt crew had to censor some enlisted men's mail today, after which he wrote some of his own. He told his fiancee in Houston about living conditions on Saipan (although he wasn't allowed to name the island yet): “Living conditions here aren't the best in the world. I have a canvas cot but no mattress. I sent over some sheets and pillow cases but I don't have any pillow. It's not too bad, at least I'm not living in a tent. We have showers but have to shave and wash our faces in our steel helmets. We keep water in our canteens to drink and although all our water is warm, we have gotten so we don't mind it. We have an allotment of three cans of beer and three cans of fruit juice a week.” Fine decided that since it was Saturday he would go see the movie tonight.

The fresh water for the troops came from sources up in the hills. It was purified and transported down by truck to distribution points in the Groups and Squadrons. Each tent or quonset had a water can, and a man was detailed each day to keep it filled.

There was a critique of yesterday's mission late today. It may have been only for officers or it may have been voluntary. Both Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew and Ed O'Hara of the Cordray crew attended. O'Hara passed on a story that John Ciardi recorded. Seems that on the way back a tail gunner in another Group [499th Group, V-45, Hamilton crew] had died of anoxia when the AC, unable to raise the gunner on the interphone — probably just a bad connection — decided the gunner might be wounded and ordered the plane depressurized so someone could go check on him. Trouble was, the plane was at 28,000 feet, and by the time his would-be rescuer got to the tail compartment and opened the hatch, the tail gunner was dead — with no mark on his body except for a bump on the head, probably caused by banging his head when he passed out for lack of oxygen. Ciardi lamented, “I suppose there will always be stupidity, but I wish there were some arrangement for stupidity to kill off the stupid instead of the innocent bystander.”

Arriving today on Saipan was the Grise crew (#231) in Z-26, the last plane of the 882nd Squadron, with 1/Lt Arthur Rand, the Squadron Flight Engineer, as a passenger.

26 Nov 44

Most of the crews spent the day getting their planes ready for a mission scheduled for tomorrow morning. Two planes which would not be going were Z-27, which was in the middle of an engine change, and Z-8, which had “a blister out and screwed up bomb racks.”

The mission briefing was this evening, when the crews found out that it would be the same target and the same basic plan as on the first mission. This made Bob Copeland uneasy. “I'm not particularly anxious to go back there.... sooner or later someone is going to get it.” Little did Copeland know that they would be going back to Target 357 many times. But he was certainly right about the last part. Someone was going to get it.

27 Nov 44

A few minutes after midnight two to four (reports vary) Betty medium bombers, staging thru Iwo Jima and evading radar detection, caught Isley Field entirely by surprise. Making three quick strafing and bombing runs, they woke everybody up and set off a stampede for foxholes, ditches and the caves in the coral cliffs along the shore. Aircraft V-26 in the 499th Group, loaded with 5,000 pounds of bombs for today's mission and in the process of being fueled, was set afire by the strafing or a bomb, and when the B-29's bombs cooked off the huge boom rocked the island. The B-29's on either side were badly damaged and initially thought to be beyond repair, but the miracle workers of Service Center B would bring them both back to life. The Betty's quickly made their getaway and the alert was lifted after about an hour. The 500th got off lucky. Their only casualties were some cuts and scrapes from falls on sharp coral... and a lot of lost sleep.

Some men may have been able to get back to sleep but many didn't. Those going on the mission today had to
get up at 0300 to wash, dress, eat breakfast, draw their gear, get to their planes up on the hardstands, inspect them, run thru the checklist and start them up... which they did, tired or not.

One man who certainly did not get much rest tonight was Sgt Clyde Barnhart, propeller specialist in the 883rd Squadron. After a long three-day trip by Air Transport Command C-54 from Hamilton Field, California, Barnhart had arrived at Kobler Field on Saipan close to midnight, just in time for the air raid. When it started, everything was blacked out. No lights anywhere. After a while, a driver in a jeep picked up Barnhart to take him to the 883rd area, but with the blackout still in force, the driver could use only his dim blackout lights... and there were certainly no streetlights on Saipan. At one point the driver took a wrong turn and wound up driving down onto the beach and actually into the water. Fortunately, he was able to back out. Eventually, they found the 883rd Squadron orderly room and Barnhart gratefully hopped out. But there was no one there; the building was empty. Not knowing what else to do, the dead-tired young NCO lay down on the floor in his OD uniform and got what little rest he could until somebody showed up in the morning and assigned him to a tent. It was a hell of a welcome to Saipan.

This morning, the 500th Bomb Group put up 17 aircraft of 18 scheduled to participate in another attack on Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory in Musashino near Tokyo. Secondary target was again the dock and industrial area of Tokyo.

The briefed plan was basically the same as on the previous mission, but there were a couple of important changes. First, there were no more mixed combat groups. Instead, each Bomb Group was simply directed to form a combat group. On this mission the 500th formed the 3rd Combat Group, following the 498th and 499th Groups and ahead of the 497th. Second, most of the route out would be flown at low altitude, 1,000 feet, in order to burn off more fuel before beginning the climb to altitude. This should lessen strain on the engines when the climb to bombing altitude of 31,000 feet began about five hours out.

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

**First squadron**
Z-25, "American Beauty", Van Trigt  
Z-30, "Slick Dick", LaMarche  
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Hays  
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett  
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce  
Z-1, "The Rosalia Rocket", Goldsworthy  
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald  
Z-2, Irvin

**Second squadron**
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Moreland  
Z-6, "Draggin' Lady", Field  
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Luman  
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Gerwick  
Z-49, "Three Feathers", Feathers  
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", McClanahan  
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Hatch  
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden  
Z-48, "Million Dollar Baby", Black

Take-off was between 0657 and 0716 Local, except for one plane, Z-48 (Black crew), which got off a half-hour late due to a minor problem and joined the following 497th Group. Bomb load was the same as on the previous mission, 7 x 500 lb GP's and 3 x 500 lb incendiaries.

About 40 minutes after take-off, the planes from the 500th assembled at a point north of Saipan and formed into their two combat squadrons, then it was off to Japan in a loose "route formation".
There is no information in the Consolidated Mission Report as to which command officer led this mission or which staff officers went along, except that 881st Operations Officer Maj Gerald Mosier flew as an observer with the Irvin crew in Z-2. We know from Maj Goldsworthy that Col King did not fly this mission. This time Z-1 was leading only the third (left) element in the first squadron, and copilot 2/Lt Robert Sollock didn't have to give up his right seat for a change. We know that the first combat squadron was led by Z-25 of the 882nd Squadron and the second combat squadron by Z-42 of the 883rd, and some documents refer to the two combat squadrons as the 882nd and 883rd Squadrons, so perhaps they were led by the respective Squadron commanders, LtCols Joseph Brannock and William McDowell. But that is only speculation.

The flight out was routine except for one abort. Z-4, Oswald crew, had to turn back about 90 miles before the I.P. when she lost her #4 supercharger. She jettisoned her ten bombs. Z-6, Field crew, dropped out at the I.P. when her #4 engine failed, but since she bombed a last resort target near the I.P., she was not classified as an abort. (The policy on this would change later.)

The 14 planes remaining in the 3rd Combat Group reached the target area as planned but found it completely covered by clouds. Even 12,000-foot high Mount Fuji, once again the I.P., was not visible. Bombing would have to be by radar, which meant that Target 357 would escape again today. The factory complex was not a good radar target – it was too small and there was no suitable terrain feature nearby, such as a lake or mountain, that would stand out on a radar screen. It could only be accurately bombed visually. Tokyo on the other hand was an excellent radar target – large in area with many buildings to reflect radar signals, and right on Tokyo Bay, which provided excellent contrast on the screen. So the secondary would become the target for today.

From the I.P. the formation took up a heading of 077 degrees for Tokyo. Twenty minutes later, according to the radar operators, they were over the target and dropped their bombs thru the clouds below, the second squadron first at 1435 from 30,400 feet, and the first squadron second at 1440 from 31,500 feet. The 5-minute variance can probably be explained by differing interpretations of the drop point by the radar operators. Either that or the second squadron somehow moved ahead of the first squadron after the I.P. In any case, 34.5 tons of bombs, 97 GP's and 41 IB's, fell on the capital city courtesy of the 500th Bomb Group. One aircraft, unidentified, experienced a partial rack malfunction over the target and had to jettison two bombs later.

If its bombing report is correct, Z-48, flying with the 497th Group due to a delayed take-off, bombed Tokyo about 20 minutes before the 500th formation. This indicates that the 497th passed the 500th somewhere along the way to the target. In any case, Z-48 added another 2.5 tons of bombs, 7 GP's and 3 IB's, to the Group total.

Probably due in part to the extensive cloud cover, the 500th Bomb Group planes met no opposition at all on this mission – no flak, no fighters.

On their way home the 500th crews picked up radio transmissions from Saipan informing them that while they had been off bombing Tokyo, the Japs had been attacking Isley again, and with success. The 73rd Bomb Wing command was concerned. They were losing more B-29's on the ground than over Japan. Orders went out to the returning B-29's to divert to Guam. This would disperse the bombing force and hopefully cut losses. Guam was 135 miles south of Saipan but for missions they could stage back thru Saipan. However, only three B-29's out of the returning force – Z-6, Z-21 and Z-30 – flew on to Guam. The rest either did not hear the transmission or were low on fuel and opted to land at Isley anyway.

Also on the way home the 500th Bomb Group suffered its first combat loss. Z-2, Irvin crew, had bombed the target on the wing of Z-1, Goldsworthy crew. After leaving the target area, Maj Goldsworthy “pulled over on Irvin's wing to fly a little formation. Later we gradually grew apart. I remember seeing the sun reflecting off the airplane for a while. Then I didn't see him again...” It was the last time anyone would see Z-2.

Later, Sgt Charles Maples, radio operator on Z-6, “Draggin' Lady”, Field crew, also on their way home and only about an hour out of Saipan, attentively picked up transmissions from Z-2, which was sending out distress calls and unsuccessfully trying to contact the ground station at Isley. Maples established contact with Z-2, took down their final position report, then transmitted all the information to base. When Z-6 landed on Guam at 2115 after they had been diverted from Saipan, the crew found an officer with a jeep waiting for them. Maples, Capt Field
and the navigator, 1/Lt Francis Merrick, were whisked off to probably XXI Bomber Command Headquarters, where they were interrogated by a Colonel. Probably because the ditching location Maples had reported was about 200 miles east of the expected course, the Colonel questioned whether the Sergeant had copied down the numbers correctly. Maples stood his ground, looked the Colonel in the eye, and insisted that he had accurately copied what was transmitted. As it turned out, the AC of Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, 1/Lt Hale Hays, had also heard Z-2 send the same coordinates, so Maples was later vindicated.

At least three Dumbo search and rescue aircraft and two destroyers were assigned to search for the Irvin crew but nothing was found. Since there was no enemy opposition over the target, the most likely reason for Z-2's loss was a mechanical problem of some sort. Cpl William Eilers, a ground crewman in the 881st, listed the cause as “engine trouble” in his diary, but he didn't say where he got this information.

The crew of the lost plane were:

AC          Capt Joseph R. Irvin  
P            2/Lt Robert B. Clore  
B            2/Lt Clay D. Shannon  
N            2/Lt William L. Moores, Jr.  
FE           2/Lt Myron C. Bjerva  
Radio        Sgt Alfred J. Morton  
Ring G       Cpl Clifford M. Fleming  
RG           Sgt Richard L. Connell  
LG           Sgt Verdal Brown  
Radar        Sgt Everett L. Abernathy  
TG           Sgt Marion E. Beery  
Obs          Maj Gerald L. Mosier

When they got back to base, the air crews learned details of the latest air raid. Today it had been more dangerous on Saipan than over Tokyo.

Shortly after noon 13 to 17 (reports vary) Zero fighters again caught Isley completely by surprise. John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew, which had not gone on today's mission, was in the 882nd mess hall “halfway through the second of the three bites [of roast beef] the Mess Sgt. had doled out to me” when the excitement started. There was a shout outside and the sound of rapidly approaching machine gun fire. Everyone scattered for cover, Ciardi among them, but not before helping himself to a couple of extra slices of roast beef from the suddenly unattended serving line.

In repeated and bold strafing attacks the Zero's swept back and forth across the runways and hardstands, destroying or badly damaging three B-29's and putting holes in many more. One of the badly damaged planes belonged to the 500th – Z-8. According to copilot Bob Copeland, “They shot up the cockpit badly and the center wing section, tanks and bomb bays and all the gas leaked out but the ship didn't catch fire.” It wasn't just luck that the plane didn't catch fire. The man responsible was the crew chief, M/Sgt George Lucas. Flight engineer 1/Lt Herschel Connor was up at the hardstand today checking on the plane when bullets suddenly zipped past him into the wings and body of the B-29 and started a fire in the #2 engine. The quick-thinking Lucas pushed Connor behind some cover, possibly saving his life. Then the crew chief bravely grabbed a fire extinguisher and, ignoring the danger, put out the fire that had been started in the engine before it could spread.

The neighboring 499th Group was hit hard again, suffering another B-29 destroyed and several more badly damaged. Ciardi heard that a crew chief “drove a tractor out in the middle of the strafing and towed his plane away from one that was burning.” The man to whom Ciardi referred here was almost certainly M/Sgt Gurden B. “Pappy” Swain, a crew chief in the 497th Group who under fire helped put out a fire on one B-29 and then towed another to safety. Swain was awarded the Soldier's Medal for his heroism.

The winged marauders also gave the troop areas a going over, putting bullets indiscriminately into buildings and tents. When the enlisted men of the McClanahan crew of the 883rd Squadron got back to their quonset tonight, they found it had been aerated by a 20mm shell.
As Zero's zoomed past left and right, the antiaircraft guns around the airfield tracked and blasted away at them, and not without success. Ciardi abandoned what he realized was his futile shelter behind some crates of canned goods and ran out of the mess hall in time to see a Zero bank over the hardstand area, straighten out and seemingly head directly for him. "I jumped under the no-protection-whatever of the officers' mess and it all began again, but worse. I could see the fifties kicking up the ground to one side at a distance of what looked like 3/8 of an inch, but was probably about 20 yards. ... The colored boys on the ridge were pouring a terrific barrage after him." Some of the AA gun emplacements around Isley were manned by troops of the 1894th Engineer Aviation Battalion (Colored), and it was one of their gunners who got the Zero strafing the 500th area. The fighter was hit over the 882nd area and burst into flames, then slammed into the ground in the 883rd area and bounced to a stop against a sand-bag revetment sheltering men from Group HQ. Burning fuel flowed into the shelter and men began screaming. A number of men were badly burned, and some of them in their haste to escape the flaming fuel suffered further injuries when they jumped off the nearby cliff onto sharp coral on the beach below.

1/Lt Stanley Samuelson, AC in the 881st Squadron, not assigned to fly the mission today, had decided to go sight-seeing around the island this morning in a jeep with Capt Eldon Shupe, 882nd Squadron Bombardier. As lunchtime approached, they headed back to Isley and motored unwittingly right into the middle of the attack:

“We drove by the remains of the bomber that had been destroyed the night before. Suddenly, without warning, the frightening sound of Jap machine guns pierced the air and bullets hit the dirt right in front of our jeep. The next thing I knew we were both in a ditch flattened out against the earth. I ran back to the jeep just to get my camera, and less than a second after I got back into the ditch, the Nips came back again, all five of them, with their guns blazing. I tried bravely to raise my head to get a picture, but when the dirt kicked up in front of my face, I forgot about pictures and practically buried my face in the dirt.

“After the Japs made their second attack, we figured they had left so Shupe and I ran for the jeep and went racing up the taxi strip. We hadn't gone two hundred yards when back they came again. Shupe flew out one side and I went out the other while the jeep went on down the road and into a ditch on its own accord. By this time two B-29's were burning. Three enemy fighters had already crashed in flames – shot down by our anti-aircraft. We had to give the enemy plenty of credit for his ability to fly and for his guts. ...”

In addition to the Zero's brought down by the AA gunners, P-47's from the 318th Fighter Group based at Kagman Field shot down four more as they tried to make their getaway.

The souvenir hunters came out almost before the shooting stopped. Men swarmed to the downed Japanese planes, scooping up pieces as mementos. According to Ciardi, the colored gunner who had shot down the Zero over the 500th area came racing down the slope in a jeep, jumped out and cut the parachute off the dead pilot's body -- or rather the biggest piece of the body that was left -- as his personal trophy.

The final casualty toll was 2 men in the 882nd wounded by strafing and 2 officers and 40 men from Group HQ seriously burned by fuel from the crashed fighter. The 40 enlisted men from Group HQ represented about half of its EM strength. The temporary loss of these personnel specialists would negatively affect the workings of Group Headquarters for several months. To fill the holes, the Group took some men from its three Squadrons and borrowed a few from other Groups.

Any men who had not been sufficiently motivated to dig air raid shelters by the first attack at midnight were certainly convinced by the second one at noon. The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st had been one of the more diligent crews. They completed their shelter this morning and were able to put it to good use during the second raid. A little less diligent were the Savage crew of the 882nd. By noon they had completed only one wall of their shelter and during the attack were reduced to jumping back and forth semi-comically from one side to the other, depending on which direction the bullets seemed to be coming from at the time. But now all afternoon around Isley dirt flew as picks and shovels were put to good use and sandbags were filled. Only about two feet down was coral, so shelters were built up partly above ground with sides and roofs of sandbags reinforced with scrounged wood. Very soon nearly every quonset or tent sported its own air raid shelter.
With two effective air attacks in one day, and another expected at any time, the 73rd Bomb Wing had to act. The B-29's were simply too crowded on Saipan and were sitting ducks on their open hardstands. So General O'Donnell ordered all flyable planes to Guam as soon as possible. Most of the planes which had gone on today's mission were not back yet (landing times for them at Isley were from 2000 to 2100), so the first batch to leave consisted of those planes and crews that hadn't gone on the mission. The mission planes would follow later. Z-8 wasn't flyable, so the Fitzgerald crew flew Z-1, Maj Goldsworthy's ship, to Guam this evening at 2230. The Goldsworthy crew presumably stayed on Saipan and got some badly needed rest. Likewise, the Hatch crew upon landing turned Z-9 over to another crew (unidentified) and remained on Saipan.

Those crews which had flown today's mission got a late supper on Saipan when they got home. Sgt Jack Heffner, who had again flown as right gunner with the Hatch crew in Z-9, had steak with french fries, as presumably did the other 881st crews. By contrast, those who had flown to Guam earlier in the day were fed a hastily prepared dinner of "fried K rations" in a huge empty hangar at Depot Field, according to a disgusted John Ciardi. But Ciardi and his friend and frequent conspirator, bombardier 1/Lt Lynn "Doc" Grow, were nothing if not resourceful. They quickly made friends with some engineers building a road nearby and got invited (or maybe invited themselves) to late chow at 2200. They discovered that the engineers ate considerably better than the fliers on Saipan. They had "a spectacular meal – real fried eggs sunny side up, real ham (ham, not spam), good coffee, cake, bread, real butter – and ice water." Ciardi was especially impressed to find ice on Guam in contrast to the "forever tepid water" on Saipan. He also came away from the visit to the engineers with a precious light bulb and socket that he could use to rig up a desk lamp in his quonset back on Saipan.

The two sated 500th men returned to their temporary sleeping quarters in a big hangar at Depot Field, found their bunks among the 500 or more cots set up inside, and lay down to sleep... that is, as much as you could sleep with the constant noises of road construction and taxiing planes outside the hangar. At one point during the night a late-arriving B-29 taxied in and made a turn near the hangar, blasting its prop-wash (and sand and dirt) straight thru, evoking a torrent of profanity from the men trying to sleep. Ciardi wished that he had a dictograph cylinder (an early recording device) of that awakening.

It was overshadowed by all the other events of this very long day, but sometime today the Adams crew of the 883rd Squadron flew in from Kwajalein in Z-47. This was the last of the original 30 flyaway planes of the 500th Group. Now all that was left to arrive were the remaining extra air crews left back at Kearney in Nebraska.

28 Nov 44

According to 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson, those men who had managed to get back to sleep in their hangar on Guam were awakened by "some crazy sergeant" at 0500 for breakfast. Guam was a new locale for most of the 500th men, and that meant exploring. They found Guam flatter than Saipan, and with more vegetation. Many were fascinated by the numerous coconut palms around Depot Field. There were hardly any of those on Saipan. Last night Ciardi had tried to find a coconut to eat but discovered that the ones lying on the ground were all rotten and exuded a nauseous stench when split open. A good coconut had to be taken directly off the tree... which is what Bob Copeland did, that is, he climbed a tree and picked one. His verdict was that "the meat tasted good but it sure was [a] job husking it."

Ciardi and crewmates copilot 2/Lt Milton "Bud" Orenstein and left gunner Cpl Richard "Tiger" Johnson made a very important find – the Navy BX (Base Exchange). Ciardi was able to purchase a new fountain pen and some ink, neither of which was available on Saipan.

Late in the day some of the crews got the alert to return to Saipan. The Cordray crew was probably not the only one that had to wait for a crew member to show up from his wanderings. In this case it was Orenstein, who drove up a half-hour late in a jeep he had "found". But the wait was made less irksome by two cases of cold beer that Capt Cordray had procured somewhere.

Finally they were off for the 45-minute flight to Saipan. Some crews would wait and fly back tomorrow. The consensus of the 500th air crews was that Guam made for an interesting visit but their quonsets on Saipan were...
much preferable to a noisy hangar on Guam. When they got back home, they learned that there had been another air raid last night, but this time the enemy planes had been detected and driven off, with one shot down.

Sometime today, or possibly during all the confusion yesterday, the Amos crew (#363) of the 883rd Squadron showed up on Saipan in a new B-29, 42-24766. The Curtis crew (#119) of the 881st had been the first of the 30 alternate crews left behind in Nebraska to arrive on Saipan, but they had come in by ATC. The Amos crew were the first to bring in a replacement B-29.

The trip of the Amos crew from Kearney AAF had been fairly smooth, with only one bump. They left Kearney probably on 22 Nov and arrived at Mather Field in California the same day. That's where they hit the bump. During the physical exam the tail gunner, John Bowen, was found to have venereal disease, the dreaded “clap”. Since this would require several weeks' treatment, he would not be going overseas with the crew. The crew received orders to leave for Saipan late on 23 Nov, Thanksgiving Day, or early the following day, but before doing so they all visited Bowen in the hospital and ate Thanksgiving dinner with him. It was a sad final meal together, but there was nothing to be done.

The rest of the trip to Saipan was apparently routine for the Amos crew. As for Bowen, he repeatedly requested to rejoin his crew but the Army had a different idea as to where he should be assigned, and he eventually ended up on a photo reconnaissance crew.

29 Nov 44

The 500th Bomb Group, and especially the 881st Squadron, had not given up on the Irvin crew, which had ditched on the 27th. Today the McNamer crew flew their first mission from Saipan, and it was a search mission for Irvin. Capt Arthur S. Miller, Squadron Navigator, went along. The plane they flew is not recorded, but they took off at 0955 and returned seven hours later at 1655, unfortunately with no success.

This morning the Fitzgerald crew flew Z-1 back to Saipan from Guam. Copilot Bob Copeland got to do the flying and make the landing. Copeland noted the presence of some battleships in Tanapag Harbor.

With their planes back from Guam, the 500th Bomb Group could prepare for their next mission, which would be tonight. The 73rd Bomb Wing was trying something new -- night radar bombing. Target would be the “light industrial portion” of Tokyo.

Nine aircraft were scheduled for this mission, but Z-28, Gerwick crew, could not get her #3 engine to pull to take-off power (the problem was later found to be a burnt out amplifier fuse), and Z-45, McClanahan crew, burned out a bomb bay motor while prepping for take-off, so only seven planes got off:

Z-5, “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, Curtis
Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, Hays/Brannock
Z-25, “American Beauty”, Savage
Z-41, Ashley
Z-44, Hansen
Z-49, “Three Feathers”, Feathers
Z-50, “Fancy Detail”, Setterich

Take-off was at twilight, between 1810 and 1828 local. Bomb load for most planes was 3 x T4E4 fragmentation clusters and 17 x M18 incendiary clusters. Z-41 carried 2 x T4E4's and 18 x M18's, and Z-49 carried 3 x T4E4's and 15 x M18's.

There was no formation; each plane flew to the target and bombed individually. The briefed route was apparently generally from the east across the Chiba Peninsula. Three radar AP's (Aiming Points) had been designated along the route to the target, and these worked very well to keep the planes on course for those planes which had working radars. Unfortunately, that was only two of them.
This mission was not an auspicious beginning for night radar bombing. The radars failed on four of the six aircraft for which there is a report. This left those planes to bomb on dead reckoning as calculated by the navigator... and dead reckoning is notoriously inaccurate.

Curiously, the possibility of radar failure had been covered in the mission briefing, but not at all realistically. According to the Consolidated Mission Report Summary, “if the radar equipment was inoperative in any aircraft that aircraft was directed to fly on the wing of any aircraft whose radar equipment was operative and drop on that aircraft.” How you would go about finding another plane on a dark, cloudy night after flying to the target individually is not explained. Moreover, trying to fly in formation in such conditions was downright dangerous.

Six of the seven 500th aircraft are known to have reached and bombed the target, dropping between 0118 and 0147 from various altitudes (17,500-33,200 feet). Z-23 and Z-49 were the two planes which successfully bombed by radar, while Z-5, Z-25, Z-41 and Z-50, with inoperative radars, dropped their bombs by dead reckoning. Due to darkness and cloud cover, no observation of bombing accuracy was possible.

Flak was very light on this mission, and there was minimal fighter opposition. Z-49 was the only plane that reported a fighter attack, and it was ineffective.

Exit from the target area was down Tokyo Bay, past Yokohama and Yokosuka and out thru the Uraga Channel.

2/Lt Harold Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew, had high praise for the skill of their navigator, 2/Lt Wilbur Weksler, who “navigated with pinpoint accuracy to Tokyo, bombed the city by Radar and navigated back to Saipan – 13 hours of man-killing toil. We had a beautiful radar run and feel sure all our bombs fell within the target area.” This was all accomplished under the approving eye of Squadron CO Lt Col Brannock, who flew with the Hays crew as copilot on this mission.

One airplane, Z-44, Hansen crew, failed to return from this mission. The plane and crew were not seen or heard from after take-off. Since there were no Japanese claims of shooting down this aircraft and no wreckage has ever been found on land, it is almost certain that Z-44 went down at sea, probably due to a mechanical problem of some sort, somewhere in the long 1500 miles between Saipan and Japan.

The members of this crew were:

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Maj Harold M. Hansen</td>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>2/Lt Robert T. Battell</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1/Lt Kenneth F. Hodson</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1/Lt Charles Van Amburgh</td>
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<td>FE</td>
<td>1/Lt Eugene B. Reynolds</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
<td>T/Sgt Martin V. Taylor</td>
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<td>Sgt Paul E. Bussell</td>
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<td>RG</td>
<td>T/Sgt George W. Hunt</td>
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<td>LG</td>
<td>Sgt Lawrence E. Lindgram</td>
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<td>Radar</td>
<td>Sgt Thomas J. Burns</td>
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<tr>
<td>TG</td>
<td>Cpl Donald P. Flynn</td>
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In addition, 1/Lt Paul Steger of the 11th Combat Camera Unit was along as an observer.

The returning aircraft landed at Isley Field between 0630 and 0819 on 30 Nov.

The Group Radar Officer extensively reviewed the radar failures in his mission report. He wrote that, “Of the four systems that were inoperative two were known to be weak before take-off. The decision was made however, to send these planes and to have them use the emergency procedure in the event of failure of the system.” He didn't clarify what he meant by “emergency procedure”. Did that mean trying to bomb on another B-29’s wing – if you could miraculously find one – or did it mean bombing by dead reckoning? Another inoperative set was found to have “a bent fuse holder in the range unit.” No problems could be found in the last set. It worked just fine on the ground on Saipan. Of course, it might not at 20,000 feet over Japan. Or maybe there was operator
error.

A less detailed section report was submitted by now Acting Group Gunnery Officer 1/Lt Frank A. Carrico. The regular Group Gunnery Officer, Capt Leroy English, had for some reason still not arrived from the States, and whoever had been temporarily carrying out English’s duties had apparently been suddenly hospitalized, so Carrico had been thrown into the breach. Carrico wrote an abbreviated report in his usual direct, no-nonsense style and added the following explanation: “[This] Group Gunnery Officer's Report is limited due to the fact that no one was present [to conduct] a gunnery interrogation. … The previous gunnery officer was in the hospital and I was not assigned as yet, therefore the gunners did not receive thorough interrogation. A new system has been put into effect.”

Even though this mission with a total of only 24 B-29s bombing the primary was not considered very effective by XXI Bomber Command, the Japanese were impressed by it. A post-war monograph prepared for the US Office of the Chief of Military History and based on interrogations and interviews of former Japanese military personnel had this to say:

“On 30 November 1944, when B-29’s made the first night raid on Tokyo and started fires in the Kanda district, the attack was not only carried out at night but also in bad weather. The 10th Air Division commander and his staff became greatly concerned because the Division was unable to take any defensive action due to the double handicap of bad weather and darkness. While the 10th Air Division, unable to operate under the adverse conditions, stood helplessly by, the enemy clearly demonstrated its superior equipment, training and coordination.”

30 Nov 44

Pay day. There wasn't much on Saipan to spend your money on, so most men either sent much of it home or lost it in craps or card games, except of course for the few winners. The true currency on Saipan was turning out to be alcohol. You could get almost anything with a couple of bottles of liquor. More on that later.

By the end of the month all 30 original flyaway aircraft of the 500th Bomb Group and their crews had arrived on Saipan, the last two to report in being the Grise crew (#231) of the 882nd in Z-26 on 26 Nov and the Adams crew (#358) of the 883rd in Z-47 on 27 Nov. However, two planes and crews had already been lost, the Irvin crew of the 881st in Z-2 on 27 Nov and the Hansen crew of the 883rd in Z-44 on 29 Nov, which knocked the number of planes and crews down to 28. Moreover, two planes, Z-8 42-24692 of the 881st and Z-29 42-65221 of the 882nd, were in long-term repair, the former due to severe damage suffered in the 27 Nov air raid and the latter probably for the same reason. On the plus side, the Amos crew (#363) of the 883rd had brought in a replacement aircraft, 42-24766, on or about 28 Nov, and the Curtis crew (#119) of the 881st had arrived by ATC about 18 Nov. These accessions brought the number of aircraft on hand up to 29, of which 27 were in commission and available, and the number of crews to 30, presumably all available. More planes and crews were on the way.

In terms of total personnel, the 500th Bomb Group as of today counted 403 officers and 1695 men assigned, of which 270 officers and 1515 men were present on Saipan. This left 133 officers and 180 men en route, almost all of them air crew.

As the Amos crew discovered, flying a B-29 in to Saipan did not mean you got to keep it. Maj Hurlbutt, a senior pilot in the 882nd, had apparently developed an animus toward his assigned aircraft, Z-22 42-63429. You may recall that in October Hurlbutt and crew had had to take this Bell Atlanta-manufactured plane back to the factory for repair of structural defects, and maybe that had something to do with it. In any case, Hurlbutt somehow succeeded in trading 42-63429 for the brand-new Wichita-built 42-24766, which now became the second Z-22. The then up-for-grabs 42-63429 was quickly claimed by Capt Joe Savage and crew, who with their Z-29 42-65221 in long-term repair needed a replacement. And so 42-63429 was renumbered Z-29. (It appears that at this point in time the Z numbers were assigned more by crew than by plane.) This shuffling left the Amos crew once again an alternate crew without a regular plane.

By the end of this month the 500th had flown three missions. Even though two planes and crews had been lost
and the bombing results had been less than satisfactory, the men felt they had struck back at Japan and their morale was generally very high. The Japanese air raids of 27 Nov had put some men on edge but made most of them even more determined.

Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew spent most of this day visiting friends at East (Kagman) Field, where the fighters were based, and Kobler Field, from which the B-24's operated. In fact, he found that several of his friends were away in their B-24's plastering Iwo Jima, as they did regularly.

Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew, wrote his fiancee a letter today. In a sort of code, he hinted about the recent air raids and working on their air raid shelter: "I was getting in shape for the W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration, a Roosevelt administration program to provide jobs to the unemployed – JEB] yesterday afternoon so you can figure what I was doing. It was about like the deal of locking the stables after the horse was stolen because I had my hair raised [apparent close call] so that I was willing to work." Fine had also started to grow a mustache. He had still not received any mail from home since arriving on Saipan.

1 Dec 44

Since the big air raids of 27 Nov, the defenses of Saipan had been on hair-trigger alert. There had been an alarm nearly every night, sometimes false, sometimes not. No Japanese planes had got thru but the men had been spending a lot of time in their air raid shelters and losing a fair amount of sleep. The harassment was deliberate. Bob Copeland recorded in his diary that Tokyo Rose had dedicated the song "I Didn't Sleep a Wink Last Night" to the B-29 men on Saipan... and the tension was having the desired effect on some. Copeland wrote, "Saw a man yesterday who is scared to death of these air raids." It may have been the same poor wretch that John Ciardi described sitting outside an air raid shelter in full equipment all afternoon, "a weird, unwashed bundle of panic hugging the sandbags."

According to 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson of the 881st, Tokyo Rose had threatened that "if we didn't stop using fire bombs, they might start playing with gas." The men on Saipan took this threat seriously. "Now most of us have one eye on our job and the other on our gas mask."

Effective this date the prohibition on mentioning the unit's location as Saipan was lifted, so many men rushed to write letters home to let their loved ones know exactly where they were. One of the men who wrote today was Charlie Maples, radio operator on the Field crew of the 881st. In addition to telling his mother he was on Saipan, Maples revealed that he had already been over Tokyo twice. He also told her that "we eat hash one meal and stew the next", but then joked, "It never gets monotonous, however, because they don't feed us enough."

John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew of the 882nd and a devotee of the finer things in life, decided today that civilization was impending on Saipan. He could tell because they had real eggs for breakfast. Also, plans were under way to procure a refrigerator. First they had to get a better power source because the old Japanese generator they were now using wasn't reliable enough, but Ciardi was already contemplating ice cubes in his drinks. He now had a working electric light, on an adjustable swinging arm no less, for his homemade desk. And perhaps the best part was that even though the power to the enlisted quonsets was shut off at 2200, Ciardi's light could keep going because he had cleverly tapped into the officers' power line, which stayed on all night.

December 1944 saw the flowering of nose art on Saipan. A few planes, such as Z-3, "Snafu-perfort", had arrived on the island already decorated. Now every crew wanted to pick a name and have some snazzy nose art painted on their plane. Those men with artistic ability found themselves in great demand, and the price for their services escalated rapidly, from two bottles of liquor to three, four or more. There were some Marines stationed on Saipan who had skills other than killing Japs, and they hired themselves out for some of the artwork, but the 500th was lucky in having at least two artists in its own ranks. The 881st Squadron's 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson, an art school graduate and a talented artist who had already painted "Snafu-perfort" on his own plane, applied nose art to several other planes in the Group until he ran out of paint. Cpl Henry C. Johnson, a draftsman in the 882nd Squadron who signed his work "The Drowsy Swede", was also good and quite prolific, numbering among his works "Pacific Queen" (Z-29 42-63429), "Pride of the Yankees" (Z-24 42-24676), "Homing De-Vice" (Z-31,
With no limits established by the command, names and nose art ran the gamut, from "Ramblin Roscoe" (Z-23 42-24664) and "Old Ironsides" (Z-28 42-63436) to "20th Century Limited" (Z-2 42-24792) and "Holy Joe" (Z-11 42-63489). Some names were plays on the AC's name, such as "Adams' Eve" (Z-47 42-24600) and "Booze Hound" (Z-6 (2nd) 44-69746). Brand names of liquors such as "American Beauty" (Z-25 42-24686) were popular, as were comic strip or cartoon characters, such as "Li'l Abner" (Z-36, 44-69657). But by far the largest category comprised nude or semi-nude female figures with a catchy name – "Million Dollar Baby" (Z-48, 42-24660), "20th Century Sweetheart" (Z-52, 42-65251), "Draggin' Lady" (Z-6 42-24694), "Leading Lady" (Z-22 42-24766), "Tail Wind" (Z-51 42-24761), "Su Su Baby" (Z-46, 42-24721) and "Supine Sue" (Z-42 42-24653), to name only some.

Besides much excellent artwork, the 500th unquestionably boasted the B-29 with the longest name. Z-5, 42-24643, "There'll Always Be A Christmas" featured a flying (and shapely) female figure above the name and a 16-line poem beneath it:

"As we stir a Toddy this Heavenly Body
Is winging her way through the sky.
Her pose is a sign that the going is fine
And America's still flying high!
The pace has been hot and we've been through a lot
And none of us look any younger,
But "Mussy" is sunk and Tojo feels punk
And Hitler is strictly from hunger!
So lift up your glasses, you lads and you lasses,
And let's drink a toast to the crew
Who showered their eggs on those arrogant yeggs
Who boasted that free men are through,
As she visits our barracks or shanty.
For now it's our inning, America's winning –
And that means there must be a Santy!"

The author of the poem is thought to be 2/Lt John W. Easterling, copilot on the Kappil crew.

Since there were usually two crews to each plane, disputes over naming rights sometimes arose. In early January 1945, the Reeves and Farrell crews were assigned to share a newly arrived aircraft, Z-30 (2nd) 42-63487, so AC's John Reeves and Jim Farrell flipped a coin to see who got to name it. Reeves won, so Z-30 became "Constant Nymph". But later Farrell, a San Francisco native, got another opportunity with Z-34 42-93889, which he named "Frisco Nannie".

Despite the initial high enthusiasm, not all planes in the 500th were named. The first Z-43, 42-63441, apparently never had a name, and several later replacement planes were also not named. Some crews actually thought naming a plane was unlucky.

**2 Dec 44**

Today George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, got around to writing his parents about being on Saipan. He was also now permitted to tell them how he got there – via Honolulu, Pearl Harbor and the Marshall Islands. Then he updated them on his duties. "I am working mostly days now [George was a ground crewman on Z-1] but once in awhile I get caught for a few nights work. I have been getting plane guard quite regularly." Other than that, "You can read about the B-29 raids in the papers and there isn't anything else to write about."

Even though they were on a friendly base, the planes had to be guarded, partly because there were still a few
Japanese soldiers on the island who would roam around at night foraging for food and other items, and partly because you had to guard against other air and maintenance crews who might make "moonlight requisitions" for parts and items of equipment they needed.

Like George Hughes, Bob Copeland didn't have much of substance to record either. "I didn't do a thing that was exciting today. I did try to dig a foxhole though and would have succeeded except for the coral. ... [Navigator 2/Lt Robert] Nelson was an eager beaver today and did his laundry. I'll try to do mine tomorrow." Copeland did however find out that the air raid last night was actually a B-24 with its IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] switched off.

John Ciardi the poet-gunner was not happy with military regulations, specifically today the one that required guns on parked planes to be unloaded. If a plane had been prepped for a mission but then the mission had been called off, all the ammo that had been laboriously loaded into the turrets and guns had to be just as laboriously taken out. The ammo belts of .50 caliber shells were heavy and cumbersome and it was hot inside the planes. Ciardi didn't see why it all couldn't be left in place. After all, "There's just no way of firing the guns accidentally." Ciardi was probably right that the guns wouldn't fire just sitting there, although they could go off accidentally while being loaded and charged. But the command was probably thinking that if a plane on the ground was hit in a Japanese air raid and set afire, the ammo would cook off and do a lot of damage.

Ciardi saw a couple of new things today. The first involved an ingenious wind-operated washing machine, a contraption consisting of fan blades connected to a bicycle sprocket, which moved wooden arms, which moved a plunger up and down in a tub full of dirty clothes. The second thing he learned was how to get a beer cold. One of the ground crew poured some 100 octane gas into a bucket, dropped in two cans of beer, then put in an air hose. The gasoline quickly evaporated and left two frosted cans of beer. Amazing.

3 Dec 44

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing mounted another major attack against -- yep, you guessed it, and so did the Japanese -- the Musashino Aircraft Engine Factory near Tokyo. This would be another daylight, high-altitude mission. Secondary target was again the industrial and dock areas of Tokyo.

The 73rd Wing mission planning staff had definitely learned. Again, no complicated Combat Groups this time. Each Bomb Group would form its own combat group, thus maintaining unit integrity. The 500th would be second in the Wing order this time, behind the 499th Group.

The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 23 aircraft for this mission, but one, Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce crew, failed to take off due to excessive RPM on #4 engine. The 22 planes which made it airborne were divided into two combat squadrons, as follows:

First squadron
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Moreland/McDowell
Z-48, "Million Dollar Baby", Black
Z-46, "Su Su Baby", Holmes
Z-47, "Adams' Eve", Adams
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", McClanahan
Z-41, "The Baroness", Amos
Z-30, "Slick Dick", LaMarche
Z-49, "Three Feathers", Setterich
Z-22, "Leading Lady", Hurlbutt
Z-26, "Tokyo Local", Grise

Second squadron
Z-1, "The Rosalia Rocket", Goldsworthy/King
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Luman
Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, would lead the first squadron, riding with Capt Charles Moreland and crew in Z-42. Deputy Lead of the first squadron would be Maj John Gay, 883rd Squadron Operations Officer, flying with Capt Vance Black and crew in Z-48. Col Richard King, Group CO, would lead the second squadron and the Group, occupying as usual the right seat in Z-1 with Maj Robert Goldsworthy and crew. Also riding with Goldsworthy would be Col Byron Brugge, 73rd Wing Chief of Staff. There is some evidence that Brugge was originally scheduled to fly with Deputy Lead Maj Robert Luman in Z-5 but at the last minute decided to go instead with his good friend and old West Point football teammate Dick King. If so, it would prove to be a fateful decision.

The first squadron took off from 0833 to 0844, the second from 0845 to 0854. Bomb load would be the same as on the 24 Nov mission, 7 x M64 GP’s and 3 x M76 IB’s in the rear bomb bay, with auxiliary fuel tanks in the forward bomb bay. Each plane carried a full ammo load of 6000 rounds of .50 caliber and 125 rounds of 20mm in the tail cannon. Two planes carried special receivers for collecting information on Japanese radars, but they are not directly identified. However, since 2/Lt Norman Garrigus, the 882nd Squadron RCM (Radar Counter-Measures) Officer, went on this mission in Z-24, we can safely assume that Z-24 was one of the specially equipped planes.

Not participating in today’s mission to Japan were the Samuelson crew. Their plane, Z-3, the aptly named “Snafu-perfot”, had required extensive repairs after experiencing multiple malfunctions including a bomb rack failure on the 24 Nov mission. Finally today she was back in commission but needed a test flight to properly check everything out, and that’s what the Samuelson crew did today. They turned it into a practice mission to still Japanese-occupied Rota Island between Tinian and Guam. Samuelson: “Our bomb racks were loaded to capacity and we really had fun. Lt. Wright dropped some on the airfield, the town and the docks. The island was already a total wreck, however, we may have done some good.”

While the Samuelson crew were working over Rota, the rest of the 500th planes were well on their way to Japan. That is, except for Z-4, Harlan Jackson crew, which had to return to the field shortly after take-off due to a burned out propeller governor on #4 engine. The loss reduced the second squadron to ten planes.

The plan called for the formations to assemble a short distance north of Saipan and fly at low altitude, under 1,000 feet, for about half the way out, which would burn off some fuel before beginning the climb to 30,000 feet. As it happened, the second squadron began its climb earlier than briefed, probably to get over some bad weather. This decision, along with a variation in navigation, meant that as the 500th planes approached Japan, the second squadron ended up about ten minutes in front of the first.

About 30 minutes from the I.P., which was again Mount Fuji, the second squadron, now the lead squadron, was reduced by another plane when Z-6, Field crew, lost an engine and aborted. On the way home she would lose a second engine but made it back to Saipan. King and Goldsworthy now had only nine planes. Z-6 had been on Z-1’s left wing. At about this time Z-5, Luman crew, for unspecified reasons relinquished the Deputy Lead position on Z-1’s right wing and switched positions with Z-10, Thompson crew, which had been filling in the diamond in the lead element. This switch of planes probably indicates a technical problem on Z-5, possibly with the C-1 autopilot or maybe the radar. The autopilot was necessary to hold the plane steady on the bomb run, and the radar would be necessary if the target was covered by clouds. The switching and the drop-outs disrupted the squadron’s formation. Maj John Van Trigt, until this point leading the third element in Z-25, tried to move up onto Z-1’s left wing.
The weather over the Tokyo area this day was unusually clear. Good news for the attackers. A visual run. But at 30,000 feet the B-29’s again experienced extremely high winds from the west, estimated at up to 200 knots, which made it very difficult even to reach the I.P. The squadron leaders crabbed many degrees to the left to try to compensate, and the other planes tried to follow, but in the end most planes had to turn before reaching the I.P.

The heading from the I.P. to the primary was supposed to be 63 degrees, but the squadrons were already off that course due to the early turn east of Fuji, and the strong winds continued to push them eastward. It would have been easier to give up on the primary and go for the secondary target, Tokyo, but most pilots tried hard to make the aircraft factory.

The formations had been drawing sporadic antiaircraft fire ever since landfall. As they approached the target area, the flak picked up in intensity but still remained generally ineffective. A few planes were hit but none seriously.

As for fighters, the 500th had been fortunate in not encountering any on its previous missions. Today would be different. With plenty of warning, the Japanese had assembled dozens of fighters at high altitude, by some reports as many as 70. As the bombers neared the drop point, the fighters waiting above picked their targets and dove down in their firing passes. Showing a healthy respect for the heavily armed B-29’s, the fighters generally zipped thru the formations from ahead and above, throwing quick bursts and breaking away below and to the rear.

Sgt John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew in Z-27 on the left rear of the lead squadron, was mostly a frustrated observer during this time. Up front, bombardier 1/Lt Lynn “Doc” Grow was “spraying at planes all over the sky”, while simultaneously trying to keep an eye on Z-1, the lead plane, on which he was supposed to toggle his bombs. Up in the ring seat, Sgt T.J. Moore was blazing away with the two upper turrets. Ciardi was left to share the lower aft turret with left gunner Cpl Richard C. “Tiger” Johnson, and Tiger seemed to have the better chances. Ciardi never got a shot away. Sgt Clyde Salaz in the tail likewise didn’t have much to do, catching only fleeting glimpses of fighters zooming past at relative speeds of about 600 mph.

The Japanese scored first. Z-7, "Hell’s Belle", McNamer crew, on the far right of the lead squadron, took a 20mm round below her nose which caused the bomb bay and wheel well doors to open and the landing gear to come down. The drag slowed the plane immediately and she began to drop behind. Men on other B-29’s who saw the nose wheel come down thought at first that the crew were preparing to bail out, since normal emergency exit from the front compartment was via the nose wheel hatch. But the crew weren’t ready to abandon their plane yet.

Sensing a kill, the fighters closed in. The McNamer crew were able to get the landing gear back up but the doors would not close, and the bombardier, 2/Lt Robert J. Wittwer, was unable to salvo the bombs. All the while this was going on, the fighters were shooting Z-7 full of holes. As radar operator Jack Heffner described it, the fighters “sent 20’s thru our tail, making huge holes, and knocking out the tail guns. Another tore a huge hole in the side of the fuselage, back of the radar compartment, and shot up a lot of control cables. One also nipped off part of the rudder.” Things didn’t look good for Z-7.

Unexpected relief for Z-7 came at the expense of another B-29. Just before bombs away, Z-1, out in front leading the formation, was attacked by several fighters. A Tony flown by Capt Teruhiko Kobayashi, the youngest group commander in the Japanese Army Air Force and a reputed hot pilot, made an accurate head-on attack and hit Z-1 in her left wing tanks, which immediately caught fire. Flaming gasoline quickly began to flow over the wing and into the plane. Z-1’s gunners shot back. Kobayashi was hit, probably by the ring gunner, Cpl Robert Abel. The Tony dove away smoking, but Kobayashi made it back to base. Goldsworthy saw several other fighters hit and one of them explode. But the fighters had knocked out at least two of the bomber's engines. As she dropped out of formation on fire, most of the fighters followed her down. Ciardi on Z-27 watched as “first one and then another broke off and dove at No. 1 for an easy kill. When I saw her last fighters were swarming all over her.” With most of the fighters drawn away to Z-1, the crew of Z-7 were finally able to salvo their bomb load, then McNamer put on full power and successfully pulled away.
Not so lucky were the crew of Z-1. As the plane was going down, airplane commander Goldsworthy gave the order to bail out but stayed at the controls himself, straining to hold the big bomber level in order to give his crew time to get out. But there was an immediate problem. The men up front had to go out thru the nose wheel hatch but the landing gear controls had been shot up and the nose wheel wouldn't go down. Quick-thinking flight engineer Hank Warde jumped into the nose wheel well and kicked at the wheel until it went down. This allowed King, Brugge and Warde to exit. The bombardier, Walter J. “Pat” Patykula, seemed to be in a daze and in no hurry to leave the plane. By this time, the rear of the front compartment where the navigator and radio man were stationed was fully afame and the fire was spreading forward. With “flames licking at the seat of my pants,” Goldsworthy finally gave up the controls, grabbed Patykula, dragged him to the exit hatch and pushed him out, then jumped out himself. The radio operator, John Wright, somehow made it out of the plane, possibly through the forward bomb bay, but he was badly burned. The navigator, Benjamin Franklin Edwards, apparently did not make it out. This may have been a deliberate choice on Edwards’ part, as he had vowed to his family that he would not bail out over enemy territory.

Two of the men in the rear of the plane also apparently did not get out. Just before he jumped out himself, left gunner Harold Schroeder noticed that ring gunner Abel had been wounded. Nobody knew what happened to the tail gunner, Corrigan; the interphone system had been shot up and there was no contact with him. But neither Abel nor Corrigan were seen on the ground. Schroeder, right gunner Goffery and radar operator Wells did make it to the ground, although Wells was injured.

Upon leaving the plane, Goldsworthy saw a parachute, which he believed was Patykula’s, open up below him, quickly turn brown and burst into flames. Goldsworthy would never forget the sight of Patykula, “a fine boy, a grand friend and one of the best bombardiers in the Air Force,” dropping to his death. But Goldsworthy did not have much time to grieve. He had been in too much of a hurry to get out of the plane to hook up his emergency oxygen and he was at almost 30,000 feet. Also, there were still Japanese fighters around and he didn’t want to chance being machine-gunned in his parachute. So he fell free for what he estimated to be about 15,000 feet before pulling the ripcord. As he did so, he wondered if his chute would flame up like Patykula’s... but it opened all right and he drifted slowly down into the uncertainty of captivity.

Here is the crew of the ill-fated Z-1:

AC Maj Robert F. Goldsworthy
P Col Richard T. King
B 1/Lt Walter J. Patykula
N 1/Lt Benjamin F. Edwards
FE 1/Lt Henry H. Warde
Radio Sgt John A. Wright
Ring G Cpl Robert R. Abel
RG Sgt Thomas M. Goffery
LG Cpl Harold O. Schroeder
Radar S/Sgt Carl T. Wells
TG S/Sgt James P. Corrigan
Obs Col Byron E. Brugge

When Z-1 was first hit and dropped out of formation, Capt Donald Thompson in Z-10, then flying in the Deputy Lead position on Goldsworthy’s right wing, slowed down and tried to stay with the crippled plane. Z-24 apparently followed suit. But Z-1 was going down so fast that all this maneuver did was put Z-10 behind the rest of the squadron.

Stunned and sickened, the other crews watched Z-1 with their Group CO and the popular Goldsworthy go down in flames. From 30,000 feet no one saw any parachutes, and the consensus was that the whole crew had perished. Since the Japanese did not report the names of prisoners of war, it was not learned until the end of the war that there had been survivors.

But the Group still had a mission to finish. With Z-10 having fallen back, Maj Van Trigt in Z-25 quickly assumed command of what was left of the squadron. His bombardier, 1/Lt William Mayes, released bombs at 1513, with
Z-5, Z-9 and Z-27 toggling on him. Z-10 and Z-24 released about 90 seconds later, but by that time they were clearly past the aircraft factory and over the outskirts of Tokyo. Z-28 also tried to release at about this time but had a complete rack malfunction. The bombardier, 2/Lt Howard McBride, had to crawl into the bomb bay later and trip the shackles manually. Z-7, as already related, had been badly shot up and had salvaged her bombs.

About ten minutes behind the second squadron, the first squadron under Lt Col McDowell in Z-42 had even more problems with the high winds aloft. They made their turn at the I.P. too soon, which put them in a position from which they could not recover. In fact, they were trying futilely to turn against the wind to reach the primary target when they let their bombs go from 29,000 feet. One plane, Z-47, experienced a partial rack malfunction and got only half its bombs away. Two planes of this squadron, Z-30 and Z-41, waited until they were over Tokyo to drop. This squadron was also heavily attacked by fighters.

In addition to Z-1 lost and Z-7 badly shot up, four other B-29's suffered minor damage. Z-5 had some cracked nose glass panels from .50 caliber shell casings ejected probably from Z-1. (B-29's flying in the No. 4 position in an element would learn not to follow too closely behind and below the leader.) Z-46 had some bullet and flak holes in the fuselage and wing tank, and Z-48 and Z-50 both had flak holes in the fuselage and wings.

B-29 gunners made a lot of claims on this mission – 1 destroyed, 6 probably destroyed and 9 damaged.

The destroyed claim, a Zeke, was by the ring gunner on Z-49, probably Sgt Edward Jojczyk.

The six claims of probably destroyed were:
An Irving by Z-45's right gunner, probably Sgt Robert E. Schurmann
An Irving by Z-28's tail gunner, probably Sgt Eugene B. Wood
An Irving shared by the left and tail gunners of Z-24, probably Cpl Eugene D. Kidrick and Cpl Albert M. Pasternack
A Tojo shared by the right and tail gunners on Z-22, Sgt Edwin D. Levin and Sgt Harold T. Hedges
A Tojo shared by the ring and tail gunners of Z-26, probably Cpl Joseph A. Kehrler and S/Sgt Jessie Irvine
A Zeke claimed by the right gunner on Z-28, probably Cpl James A. Bailey

And the nine claims of damaged were:
A Tojo by the left gunner of Z-42, probably Cpl Donald C. Hetrick
An Irving shared by the left and tail gunners of Z-47, probably S/Sgt William W. Stacy and Sgt Edmond L. Riley
A Tony by the bombardier of Z-45, probably 2/Lt Charles L. Smader
A Zeke by the tail gunner of Z-30, probably T/Sgt Walter V. Kinneman
A Tony by the left gunner of Z-25, probably Cpl Peter A. Sanchez
A Tony by the ring gunner of Z-5, probably Sgt Francis M. Corbett
A Tony by the bombardier of Z-9, probably 2/Lt William B. Wallace
A Tony by the tail gunner of Z-9, probably Cpl James D. Duggins
An Irving by the left gunner of Z-45, Sgt August O. Renner

These claims do not include any from the downed Z-1. On that plane, at least ring gunner Abel should be given credit for a Tony damaged. AC Bob Goldsworthy also saw a fighter explode, but there's no way of knowing who got it.

As the bombers passed land's end and headed out to the relative safety of the sea, the Japanese fighters turned back and the crews breathed a sigh of relief. Sgt Jack Bennett, tail gunner on Z-45, McClanahan crew, badly needed a smoke. He nervously lit up a cigarette but then fumbled it and it dropped it down into the insulation padding lining the tail compartment. He groped for it but couldn't find it. The insulation began to smolder, then caught fire. Bennett began to shout in panic over the interphone. With the plane pressurized, he was trapped in the burning tail compartment. McClanahan immediately dove from almost 30,000 feet down to 10,000 so the plane could be depressurized and the door to the tail compartment could be opened. Bennett's fellow gunners dragged him out but he had been badly burned and would spend the next 70 days in the hospital. Bennett was administered a shot of morphine for the pain and even recovered enough to start up the putt-putt, a normal responsibility of the tail gunner prior to landing. But Jack Bennett would never return to flight duty, at least not with the 500th. He would in time be replaced as tail gunner by Robert Cassidy after the Haley crew was disbanded in Jan 45. For the rest of the way home to Saipan, one of the other gunners had to stay in the tail...
compartment with a fire extinguisher to keep the smoldering padding from flaring up again.

The McNamer crew on Z-7 were having their problems too. Shot up and low on fuel, the crew lightened the plane by throwing out everything that wasn't firmly bolted down. The radar was out but they luckily picked up a bearing to Saipan. Then it was a matter of sweating out the fuel situation. Flight engineer 2/Lt James Bond didn't think they had enough to make it back to Saipan but somehow they did, the last plane in the Group to land. Not trusting the damaged landing gear, AC McNamer wisely decided to set down on Kobler Field, the B-24 strip. That way, they would not foul the runway at Isley for any other late-returning B-29's. Sure enough, when they touched down the nose wheel collapsed. The gear pushed up thru the hatch and the bomber scraped down the runway on her nose, with all four propellers bent back at the tips from striking the asphalt. "Hell's Belle" was dragged off the runway and would undergo long-term repair, but there were luckily no personnel injuries.

McNamer's status went way up with the crew. He was even congratulated on his landing by Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Dougherty, who with the loss of Col King was now in charge of the Group. Jack Heffner added a P.S. to his diary entry tonight: "Those double shots hit the spot exceedingly well for some reason tonight."

The rest of the planes landed without incident on Isley #1, even though the landing lights were turned off due to the continuing threat of air raids. The crews were exhausted. Ciardi was so tired he turned down the offer of drinks in the officers' quonset and didn't even bother to eat before crashing into his bunk.

A war correspondent from a St Louis newspaper showed up from nowhere to interview the McClanahan crew of the 883rd. He put information about the fire in his report home but apparently little else. As a result, ring gunner Bill Agee's parents went thru some anxious days until Bill could get word to them that he was all right.

It had been a tough mission with the heaviest opposition to date, and the 500th Bomb Group had lost its CO. Several planes had suffered damage. And damage assessment photos showed no hits within 3000 feet of the primary target. It was a sad night in the 500th Group.

Sad though it was on Saipan, back in Japan the surviving members of the Goldsworthy crew were having a much worse night.

They came to earth separately in Chiba Prefecture east of Tokyo, near the town of Tonosho. Col King landed in an open field, Maj Goldsworthy in a rice paddy, and Col Brugge somewhere not far away. It was only after reaching the ground that both King and Goldsworthy discovered that they had been burned, the former on the leg and face, the latter severely on the back of his hands. All three officers were quickly rounded up without resistance. King had lost his .45 getting out of the plane. Goldsworthy still had his and briefly contemplated using it but quickly realized the futility of doing so. Goldsworthy was badly beaten by a mob of villagers who might have killed him except for the intervention of a local leader. Then soldiers took charge, tying him up and blindfolding him. Later a truck arrived to take him away, then he was transferred to another truck containing two other bound prisoners. Still blindfolded, Goldsworthy did not find out until later that the other two were King and Brugge. After a long ride over bad roads, during which the prisoners were beaten, burned by cigarettes and otherwise abused, they were unloaded at a police station for a brief interrogation. Then it was back on a truck for another long, uncomfortable ride to the Kempei Tai (Military Police) Headquarters in Tokyo. Here they were interrogated and slapped around again, made to sign forms written entirely in Japanese (these were probably confessions to having committed war crimes by bombing Japanese civilians), stripped of their clothing and thrown into separate cold, bare cells, followed by a final beating administered by a guard with a kendo club. A short time later their clothing and four small blankets were thrown in to them, and the men curled up on the cold, bare floor to try to rest their burned and bruised bodies as best they could. As he shivered, Goldsworthy now very much regretted having worn only his summer uniform under his flight suit. Winter in Japan was a far cry from sub-tropical Saipan.

A second group of survivors from Z-1 comprised flight engineer Warde, radio operator Wright, radar operator Wells and left gunner Schroeder. These men ended up on a truck together, tied and blindfolded, but Schroeder recognized the voices of the other men. He also learned that Wright was burned and Wells had an injured arm. When the Japanese asked about injuries, Schroeder said he was not injured and was removed from the truck. Schroeder eventually ended up at the Kempei Tai prison with King, Goldsworthy and Brugge, but the other three
men were never seen again. Japanese records claim that these men died of their wounds on 4 Dec but given the non-life-threatening nature of their wounds that is not credible. The extensive website Allied POWs in Japan confirms that the men were taken to Chiba Hospital but concludes that they were probably poisoned there.

Details are not known, but right gunner Goffery was apparently picked up separately. He ended up at the Kempei Tai prison with the other four survivors.

4 Dec 44

After the loss of Col King and the Goldsworthy crew yesterday, the mood in the 500th Bomb Group was somber and tense today. Many men were getting edgy and a few had already reached their breaking points. Group Bombardier Capt Charles "Chili" McClintick was in the hospital with the "jitters" after one of the Japanese planes shot down in the raid of 27 Nov crashed too close to him. And last night Capt Richard Field, an experienced and respected AC in the 881st, suddenly cracked in his quonset. According to Robert Copeland, "Capt. Field started for the cliff last night before he was stopped and taken to the hospital." Field had dropped out of formation early with a bad engine on the 27 Nov mission, and he had had engine trouble again on yesterday's mission, this time having to make it back to Saipan on two engines. The overall stress and the loss of King and Goldsworthy were apparently too much for him. McClintick would return to duty with the 500th but Field was medically evacuated to the States on 6 Dec. He would not be the only one to leave this way.

Field had previously flown numerous anti-submarine patrols in the Atlantic, enough to be awarded the Air Medal. According to his radar operator, Robert Cookson, Field had been “forced down in the ocean 3 times so he ought to be pretty good at ditching.” I don't know if you could ever get good at ditching. One such event was enough to shake the nerves of most men. Fortunately, Richard Field would recover and remain in the Air Force.

In the British Royal Air Force, airmen who could no longer take the immense stress of combat were relieved from duty and officially labeled LMF – lacking moral fibre. To its credit, the US Army Air Forces treated its personnel more humanely. A man who felt he could not take it any more simply had to say so. He would generally be relieved from combat duty and reassigned to non-combat duty with no punishment or harm, except possibly to his promotion chances. This was a sensible policy. Better to have a man on the edge ground himself voluntarily than to take a chance on having him panic in combat, with potentially fatal consequences to his crew. However, in defense of the RAF, the USAAF had a much greater pool of manpower on which to draw and could afford to pursue such a policy.

Nerves in the 500th were not helped by the regular blasting carried out by engineers as part of daily construction activity. Anything being dug deeper than a couple of feet – foundations, drainage ditches, latrines – required blasting into the coral. Stanley Samuelson wrote, “Every time the engineers blast the coral on the hill, someone always jumps.” Sometimes the explosions damaged more than just nerves. Today a blast near the hardstand of Z-50 of the 883rd Squadron put “one hole in underside of fuselage size of fist and several smaller holes in fabric of tail surface.” Normally, planes were moved from their hardstands when blasting was scheduled in the vicinity, but someone must have miscalculated this time.

Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew, went up to the line today to see “Old 692”. That would be Z-8, 42-24692, which had been badly damaged during the big air raid of 27 Nov. “They're rapidly patching it up and getting it ready to fly.” “Old 692” would not return to duty as soon as Copeland thought. She wouldn't fly another mission until February, and then it would be as Z-12, because well before that time a replacement plane would have had the designation Z-8 painted on its tail.

Yesterday's mission to Tokyo had been the first one for the Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd Squadron and their first view of Japan. After spending most of today sleeping off the fatigue, navigator Ken Fine sat down to write his fiancée, Marie Sisco, a long letter. With censorship slightly relaxed, he could say more than before:

“... We went visiting yesterday and visited the home of the Yellow people. I always had a better idea of the Japan homeland than I do now. I was surprised to find it so mountainous as the part I saw of it was. Mount Fuji is rather pretty though. ...

“We had several air raids last week. When we first got here, I thought it foolish to worry about air raids and to
go to the trouble of building an air raid shelter. But the first two I got caught in bed with the planes flying (or so it seemed) right over us and bullets flying every way. Well, after that, I was plenty glad to help build an air raid shelter. I hate to be aroused in the night by an air raid for it certainly makes me mad."

Some enterprising soldiers had been around trying to sell necklaces made of sea shells. Fine thought they were beautiful but also thought the asking prices of up to 35 dollars were "way too high", so he passed on them.

He also told Marie about the local Chamorros, who he thought were "a lot like Japs in appearance." The American boys were shocked to find that the women often went around topless, which resulted in much gawking. For the Chamorros' protection, their living areas were generally made off limits to American troops.

Also sleeping late after yesterday's mission was John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew of the 882nd. He spent the afternoon cleaning guns and in the evening went to see the movie "A Guy Named Joe", which was "all about how to die in an airplane, but too noble.... I resent the Hollywood touch in it." Ciardi knew that dying in an airplane was more like "the Jap our guns shot down a few days ago.... a piece of jaw here, an arm there, and a dismembered torso smoking like a charred roast." Ciardi was not opposed to the war, because he realized aggression had to be confronted, but the results of combat were not pretty and could only be justified by necessity.

Sgt Ed Levin, CFC gunner on the Hurlbutt crew and occupant of the cot next to Ciardi's in their quonset, may also have slept late today but at some point got a wake-up call of a sort – a statement of charges in the amount of $130 (over a month's pay) for two burnt out gun barrels. This seemed especially outrageous considering that Levin and tail gunner Harold Hedges had scored a fighter probably destroyed in yesterday's action. Apparently someone in S-4 wanted to make a point. Gunners had been told repeatedly in training to fire no more than ten rounds per burst and to count to three between bursts, just to avoid this very thing. If the barrels got too hot, they would warp and become useless. But training is a far cry from combat, where everything happens very fast and there is no time to think. No doubt Levin and Hedges were counting to three too rapidly. But in any case, in the remote control gunnery system a turret could be controlled by more than one gunner, so there was no way to tell who really burned out the barrels. The statement of charges was simply silly. But the story has a happy ending. The Group Gunnery Officer went to bat for Levin and Hedges and got the charges dropped.

Capt. Horace "Hod" Hatch of the 881st, when returning from yesterday's mission, had spotted a life raft apparently in the general area where the Irvin crew was thought to have gone down on 27 Nov. Joe Irvin and fellow 881st AC Ferd Curtis had known each other for three years, ever since flight school. Hearing this latest news, Curtis requested permission to take a plane out to search for his good friend. The command would not spare a B-29 for this duty but offered the Wing B-24. Curtis had not flown a B-24 in over a year and most of his crew not at all, but this morning they gamely took the B-24 out anyway and conducted a nine-hour search. It was fruitless, though. They found no raft and no trace of Z-2 or the Irvin crew.

Today the Standen crew (#349A) of the 499th Squadron flew in a new B-29, 42-24773, but they didn't get to keep it. The plane went to the 499th Group. The Standen crew had been assigned to the 883rd as a replacement for the Cooper crew lost in training (see 18 Sep 44 entry).

In Tokyo's Kempei Tai prison Maj Goldsworthy and the other B-29 prisoners awoke to their first full day as guests of the Japanese. This morning they were taken to another part of the prison known as "the stables" because it had formerly housed horses and were thrown, or rather kicked into individual cells. The men from Z-1 occupied five of the six cells there, all in a row, Schroeder – King – Goldsworthy – Brugge – Goffery. But they weren't able to find out for a while exactly who of the crew was there because talking wasn't allowed. Any transgressions were punished with beatings. During the day the men were required to sit cross-legged in the middle of their bare 8 x 10 feet cells with eyes straight ahead. They were not allowed to wear their socks or shoes in the unheated cells nor allowed to wrap themselves in blankets during the day. Only at night were they permitted to lie down and use the pitifully small blankets. The latrine was a hole in a corner containing a wooden bucket that had to be emptied on a regular basis. Guards checked on the prisoners frequently and any man not exactly following the rules received a beating. Beatings were plentiful. Food was not. Goldsworthy received no food or water all day long. He had had neither since being shot down yesterday. How long could a man last?
5 Dec 44

On this day Lt Col John E. Dougherty, former Deputy Commander of the 500th Bomb Group, was appointed Group Commanding Officer to replace Col Richard T. King, lost in action two days previously.

The officers and men of the 500th were still digesting the results of the 3 Dec mission. In his report, the Group Bombardier, Capt Richard E Hale, tried to put the best face on things: “The bombing was accomplished according to plan with the exception of the 1st Sq which was unable to make the IP against the terrific winds that prevailed.” But even he had to admit, “No damage was done to the primary target.”

The gunners, having faced more fighter opposition than on any previous mission (269 distinct attacks), had learned a number of things. Acting Group Gunnery Officer 1/Lt Frank A. Carrico dutifully recorded their suggestions: “The general consensus of opinion seemed to be that more ammo should be carried in the lower turrets than the uppers because at the altitude we fly the missions most of the attacks come from below. Harmonization should be accomplished on all ships in this Group as soon as possible. The selzten [sic] and lamphouse screws in the ring sight should all be painted black. The hot wires in the rear end of the ship as well as in the tunnel should all be painted in a color code so the gunners would be able to splice them in case of accidents. The phone switch in the blisters should be made more convenient. When pilots try to adjust the airplane heating system for comfort of the men in the front compartment, the boys in the blisters and ring sight burn up. It should be brought to the pilots’ and engineers’ attention. Some sort of a safety harness should be rigged up for the blister gunners when they are on their knees using their sight.”

But Carrico noted that overall the CFC system, turrets and guns generally worked well. There were no major problems. He concluded, “The mission came off fine. Of course the boys were jumpy and trigger happy but the information gained was invaluable. The haphazard attacks of the Japs bothered them no little but they learned.”

Poet-gunner John Ciardi observed that while there were a lot of Japanese fighters zooming around in “fancy acrobatics”, they acted as individuals and did not coordinate their attacks. The gunners could fire on only one attacker at a time, so if the Japanese had overloaded one quadrant, only one fighter would have been targeted and the rest would have had free shots.

On this day Group Operations received 73rd Bomb Wing Field Order No. 26. An explanation of this FO and an at least partial copy of it were laboriously hand-copied into the Operations Journal:

“Purpose of this Field Order is to prepare this Gp as well as the others in 73d Wing for running of Weather Strike Missions against Japanese Mainland. The 500th Group will run these wx [weather] missions over a period of ten (10) days beginning 20 Dec 44. The 497th is running them just before we take it over. Three A/C will be dispatched daily. (Total of 30 Weather Strikes [in those ten days])

“Details to be followed include the following: –
-----a. Time over target will be during hours of darkness for all participating aircraft.
-----b. Bombing altitudes will be staggered from 25,000 ft to 32,000 ft.
-----c. Targets will be selected by Gp C.O.
-----d. K-19B cameras will be carried by all A/C for purpose of taking strike photos.
-----e. Radar scope pictures will be taken during entire flight over land.
-----f. Bomb load will be the maximum load possible to carry. Type depends on construction. & product of target selected & Gp C.O. Will use his own judgement as to type of bombs expended.
-----g. Each Gp will publish a daily F.O. To give complete details of each mission. Two (2) copies of this F.O. Will be sent to Wing Control when regular distribution is made.
-----h. Blank form (WSM Schedule) titled WSM MISSION REPORT will be initiated daily for a day in advance & will be submitted (dupl) to Wg Control by 0730 as confirmation of current Mission Schedule.
-----i. Lead crews are to be given preference for scheduling.”

Weather Strike Missions sprang from an idea of W/O Jasper E. “Jack” Grantham, an Army Air Forces weather officer. The summer of 1944 found Grantham on Tinian assigned to the 55th Weather Detachment. There really
wasn’t much for the Army weathermen to do on Tinian. They were there to support the B-29 wings which were going to fly out of the Marianas and bomb Japan, but the B-29’s wouldn’t be arriving for months. Being self-motivated, Grantham looked for something useful to do. He managed to talk his way onto some Navy patrol missions in PB4Y1’s (the Navy equivalent of the B-24 Liberator), which gave him some valuable experience. Other than that, he had a lot of time to think.

In October 1944 the first B-29’s of the 73rd Bomb Wing began to arrive on the neighboring island of Saipan. Grantham knew the B-29’s would desperately need to know the weather over Japan, 1500 miles away, in order to conduct effective bombing missions. But how to get that data? It was known that the weather patterns over Japan moved from roughly NW to SE, coming off the Siberian landmass. Find out what the weather was over Siberia and you would have a good idea what it would be over Japan the next day. But the Russians were maintaining a scrupulous neutrality at the time and refused to supply weather data to the US. Submarines could get near Japan, but the weather at sea level is nothing like the weather at 30,000 feet, the altitude at which the B-29’s intended to bomb.

The 73rd Bomb Wing’s first mission to Japan on 24 Nov 1944, to the Nakajima Aircraft Engine factory near Tokyo, was a failure, primarily due to adverse weather conditions – heavy cloud cover over the target and a cold front along the way which partly broke up the formations. If the Wing had known about the bad weather ahead of time, they might have been able to pick a better day to bomb. Grantham, a lowly Warrant Officer, caught a hop to Saipan and went to see the brass at the 73rd Bomb Wing. He presented his idea, which was to send a single plane out ahead of the main force to determine and report back the weather. Due to the great distance, that plane would have to be a B-29. The plane should also have a trained weather officer on board so that accurate readings and interpretations could be made. Grantham volunteered to be the first.

The 73rd liked the idea, but there were some details that had to be worked out. First, they needed more than one weatherman. Grantham went back to his weather detachment on Tinian to get more volunteers. This would be dangerous duty, flying 1500 miles to Japan and back in a single, unescorted plane. On the other hand, it would be of great help to the war effort, would certainly not be boring, and would secure each man an additional $60 per month in flight pay, a significant amount of money at the time. Grantham managed to talk all of the other officers in the detachment except one into volunteering. That made six, Jack included, and they picked up two more from elsewhere, which made eight total, enough to start with. Here are the original eight weathermen:

Capt Edward A. Everts
1/Lt Stanley J. Kimball
2/Lt Alexander H. “Ham” Howard
2/Lt Alfred H. Louchard
2/Lt Robert J. Moore
2/Lt Julian M. “Juke” Nielsen
2/Lt Frederick R. “Dick” Worthen
WOJG Jasper E. “Jack” Grantham

While Grantham was rounding up volunteers, the staff at the 73rd had made some changes to Jack’s idea. They decided to send out three weather planes a day, spaced several hours apart and on slightly different routes, so as to obtain systematic daily observations over a wider area. And they decided that each weather plane would also carry a load of bombs to harass the Japanese by dropping them either on designated targets or targets of opportunity. Thus was born the weather strike mission.

Grantham and his fellow seven weather officers, referred to as Weather Observers by the 73rd Bomb Wing, were placed on a 90-day TDY, 1 Dec 44 thru 28 Feb 45, and transferred to Saipan. During these 90 days the weathermen would on average fly a WSM every three or four days. They were pretty lucky, none was killed, but at least three of them including Grantham were involved in ditchings, which were always dangerous.

The 73rd Bomb Wing decided to rotate WSM duty among its four Groups. As the 500th Operations Journal noted, the 497th Group would go first, beginning on 7 Dec. The 500th would pick up the duty on 20 Dec.
Capt Robert Cordray of the 882nd called a meeting of his crew today to decide on a name for their plane, Z-27. John Ciardi wanted something different from the Petty Girls that other crews were going for but he was outvoted. The winner was "Heavenly Body", presumably to be accompanied by a Petty Girl. However, for some reason it appears no such name or artwork was ever painted on Z-27. Did the crew lose interest, or did they balk at the cost of a few bottles of liquor? Ciardi doesn't say.

Cordray also gave his crew some straight scoop from the top. The Group had not been doing well in its bombing. Their target for three of the first four missions had been the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory near Tokyo but the plant was still very much in operation. Their next mission would be a closer target, Iwo Jima, and this would be a good chance to work on their bombing accuracy. Because Iwo was much closer, they would not need auxiliary fuel tanks and could carry a full 20,000-pound bomb load, 40 x 500-pound GP's. In fact, right after the meeting the crew piled in a jeep to go up to their plane to help the ground crew take out the fuel tanks from the forward bomb bay.

While the Cordray crew were working at their plane, the air raid alert sounded. The men scanned the sky but could only see a couple of parachutes. Puzzling. Had a Japanese plane been shot down? It was later learned that the parachutes supported not human bodies but wreaths dropped in memory of the Japanese fliers who had lost their lives in earlier raids on Saipan. An impertinent move by the enemy.

On or about this day, Bill Agee, ring gunner on the McClanahan crew, went to the hospital with some of his crew mates to visit Jack Bennett, who had been badly burned in the tail compartment on the 3 Dec mission. Also occupying hospital beds were the men from Group HQ who had been burned by the flaming fuel from the Japanese fighter that had been shot down in the 500th area on 27 Nov. Agee wrote, "They were all a bundle of bandages. It was a depressing sight, especially in the heat."

Bob Copeland went to East (Kagman) Field today for a local reunion of his pilot training class, 43-K. He saw a lot of his old buddies there and had a good time.

Ken Fine of the Hurlbutt crew and Hal Towner of the Hays crew, both of the 882nd, were happy men today. Their mail finally caught up with them. Fine got 13 letters, including six from his fiancee! He immediately wrote back to let Marie know he'd received her letters.

Towner confided to his diary that a mission to Iwo Jima was scheduled for tomorrow. The men were very much looking forward to hitting back at the place from which the Jap fighters were staging to attack Saipan.

Today at the Kempei Tai prison in Tokyo the interrogation of the Goldsworthy crew began in earnest. It had apparently taken the Japanese a day to put their plan together, but now they were ready. They already had some B-29 prisoners from the 58th Bomb Wing operating out of China, including Col Richard Carmichael, CO of the 462nd Bomb Group, captured when his plane was shot down over Yawata on 20 Aug. But the Goldsworthy crew were the first prisoners from the 73rd Bomb Wing on Saipan. The Japanese probably couldn't believe their luck in bagging in the first batch two Colonels and a Major – a Group Commander, the Wing Chief of Staff and a Senior Pilot. (It's an interesting coincidence that Carmichael and King both led Groups that had trained at Walker AAF in Kansas. A jinx?)

Goldsworthy was apparently the first man to be interrogated. An English-speaking lieutenant came to his cell in the morning, the guards handcuffed and blindfolded him, and he was led to the main building in the complex. Interestingly, before being led into the interrogation room, Goldsworthy was first shown how to bow properly to his interrogators. He was treated nicely at first, being given a blanket to stop his shivering and offered a cigarette, but when he refused to answer anything more than name, rank and serial number, he got a rifle butt to the side of the head and a cigarette ground out on his already burned hand. Then he was taken back to his cell and Col Brugge was led in. Goldsworthy realized later that he had gotten off very lightly. Not so Col Brugge. It is uncertain if the Japanese somehow knew about Brugge's important staff position or if he just provoked their ire in some way, but whatever the case, he was subjected to especially harsh treatment during his captivity.

Back in his cell later, Goldsworthy was given his first food since being shot down, a small cup of rice for the evening meal. The guards were much amused by the American's attempt to eat using the chopsticks provided,
but Goldsworthy didn't mind. He reasoned that a laughing guard was better than an angry one. At nine o'clock came bedtime and Goldsworthy was able to roll out his four small blankets and lie down on the cold floor. But sleep did not come easy. He shivered all night.

Several thousand miles away from both Japan and Saipan, the Warren Parsons crew (#238) of the 882nd Squadron departed Kearney AAF, Nebraska, for Mather Field, California, in a B-29 replacement aircraft, 42-65247. They arrived at Mather without incident after a flight of six hours and 25 minutes.

6 Dec 44

The Iwo Jima mission was postponed, most likely for weather reasons. It was rescheduled for tomorrow, with the briefing tonight. Lt Col John E. "Jack" Dougherty, new Commanding Officer of the 500th Bomb Group since Col King had been lost on 3 Dec, took advantage of the now open morning to speak to all the EM in the unit. John Ciardi thought it was "a pretty fair talk — all of it sounding very straight and above board." But Ciardi could not overcome the resentment he felt for Dougherty stemming from an incident during training in Kansas in which two enlisted men were killed. (See 25 Aug 44 entry.)

Other than the meeting, Ciardi and his crewmates cleaned guns and otherwise prepared for the rescheduled mission. In an egalitarian gesture based on the theory that the ship's guns protected the entire crew but one that was definitely not shared by everyone, Capt Cordray had ordered the officers to assist the gunners in cleaning the guns. Bombardier 1/Lt Lynn "Doc" Grow showed up and went to work with a will. Copilot Milton "Bud" Orenstein also showed up but quickly found a reason to disappear, apparently without touching a gun.

Cleaning the 12 x .50 caliber machine guns and the one 20mm cannon on a B-29 was an onerous, time-consuming task which had to be done before and after every mission. While the four gunners were sweating their way thru this duty, it was only human nature for them to imagine the rest of the crew lounging around enjoying themselves. Maybe they were, and maybe they weren't. The radio and radar operators had to study up on their equipment from time to time, and the officers sometimes had extra duties to perform too.

The Cordray crew was not the only one in which the issue of cleaning guns became a bone of contention. Radio operator Charles Maples in the Field-Calhoun crew of the 881st got into an argument with the CFC gunner on his crew about it. Maples' position was that as radio operator he had to continually monitor his equipment during the entire mission, meaning he could not take breaks as could the gunners. Also, he had to perform preventive maintenance on his equipment and effect repairs as necessary, with no help from anyone else. Maples presented his case to his AC, 1/Lt Patrick Calhoun, who heard him out and supported him. The radioman did not have to clean any guns.

Bob Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew, learned today that he would be bumped from the right seat on the Iwo Jima mission because they would be flying Group Lead and Lt Col Dougherty would take his seat. Copeland would in turn bump the tail gunner and ride back there. (You have to wonder, how much training did Copeland have on the remote control gunnery system?)

Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew, spent part of the day censoring mail, a job of which he was getting heartily tired. In the evening he went to see the movie "Jane Eyre" with some friends, after which they went to the Officers Club for a beer. But all they had at the O Club was warm beer, so Fine and friends returned to their hut without imbibing.

At the 2030 briefing that evening it was announced that tomorrow's mission was again postponed.

Maj Robert Goldsworthy would no doubt have appreciated a postponement of his interrogation today but he did not get one. The only new twist was that he didn't go first this time. That honor went to Col King. But Goldsworthy then got his turn. After a lengthy beating and some inventive torture involving a pencil inserted between bound fingers, Goldsworthy finally told them his Group and Squadron. Then they started asking questions about the B-29. Goldsworthy resisted again. More beatings. At one point the major was knocked unconscious.
against a cabinet, out of which fell what appeared to be an apparently complete copy of the Technical Orders for the B-29. The Japanese knew all about the plane already! So why the charade? From then on Goldworthy answered their questions but with as much misleading information as he thought he could get away with. Sometimes they appeared to buy it, but sometimes he got caught, like the time he drew a map of La Guardia Airport to represent Isley Field (the Japanese already had detailed aerial photographs of Isley), and then of course he got a beating. This became the pattern for almost two months. Sitting cross-legged in the cell most of the day, except for an hour or two of interrogation (with the inevitable beatings)... while gradually starving to death on only three small cups of rice a day.

The Japanese considered captured B-29 crewmen "special prisoners." This meant not only harsher treatment than ordinary prisoners but also only half of the usual food ration. Since ordinary prisoners were already treated quite badly and fed very inadequately, you can imagine what the consequences were for the B-29 men.

7 Dec 44

The Japanese did it again. This morning in the thick darkness of 0400 everyone on Saipan was jolted awake by the sounds of Japanese machine guns and answering anti-aircraft guns. There had been no warning. Men tumbled out of their cots, grabbed helmets and shoes and whatever clothing was handy, and raced for air raid shelters and foxholes. Some didn't even bother with clothing. More than one man was seen this morning stark naked except for a helmet.

In the 882nd Squadron area, John Ciardi's first instinct was to roll out of his cot and fall face down onto the floor. When he got there, he found himself face to face with Ed Levin from the adjacent bunk who had had an identical reaction. Ciardi then had the random thought that in the prone position he could be shot just as easily face up as face down, so he decided to defy instinct by turning over onto his back. "I lay there looking up and through the screening [Ciardi's bunk was at the end of the quonset] I saw the Jap go overhead at about 1000 ft. trailing fire. Seconds later there was a great flare at sea where he crashed." Cheers rose into the air from all around the Group.

But the Japanese had already done some damage. Up on the line another B-29 was burning. The unlucky 499th had been hit again.

This air raid lasted a while. There were apparently two waves of marauders. Ciardi finally got to his shelter but "found it crammed full with fugitives from other huts", so he just wandered around to see what could be seen.

Ken Fine of the 882nd made it to his shelter "in my underwear and barefooted." Later he was able to scurry back to the quonset to retrieve his shoes and a raincoat. "I hate this being awakened in the middle of the night."

Bob Copeland of the 881st had got to his shelter quickly but "without shoes, helmet or clothes." Later he left the shelter and at 0450 saw a second raider shot down, this one a Betty which crashed on a taxiway. After daylight Copeland went up to see what was left and found there wasn't much of the plane, but the bodies of the crew had been left lying there. "It was the most horrible sight I had ever seen and all my illusions as to the grandeur of war vanished."

Stanley Samuelson of the 881st counted three Japanese planes shot down. During the attack he walked around trying to get a good picture of a night raid with his camera but "so far my results have been exactly zero."

This raid spawned another batch of the usual minor injuries. The mature and reflective Samuelson could always be counted on to put the proper perspective on things: "It may seem hard to believe that after the last night raid over a hundred men were treated for cuts and bruises acquired from diving into coral fox holes, and falling over one another. That all may sound a bit foolish ... until you have looked down the flaming gun barrels of a Jap fighter, and think that he is after you personally. Until then you don't really know the meaning of fear."

The Japanese may have lost three planes and crews but they had done quite a bit of damage. In the Wing six B-29's were either destroyed or badly damaged and as many as 20 more suffered minor damage. The 500th however again got off lucky, with only slight damage to two planes.
Samuelson provided a cost benefit analysis of the Japanese air raids: “Three weeks have elapsed since we landed here and in that time the enemy has raided us about eight to ten times. So far the tally is about twenty Jap planes destroyed and ten Superfortresses put out of action. When you figure a B-29 costs $600,000.00 it seems that the enemy has done quite well for himself.”

There were three more alerts during the rest of the day but no more actual attacks. Either the alerts were false or the raiders were intercepted far from the island.

The recuperative powers of young men are remarkable. You can't keep 'em down for long. Even after everything that had happened today – abruptly truncated sleep, the terror of the air raid, the sickening sight of mangled Japanese bodies smeared across a runway, then more alerts — Bob Copeland still had the desire and energy to play four hours of baseball before dark. Meanwhile, the attention of Sgt Jack Heffner, radar operator on the McNamer crew of the 881st, was diverted by another important event: “Cokes have arrived from the States!”

Finally on this day, probably late at night, the Parsons crew (#238) of the 882nd Squadron left Mather Field, California, for Hawaii, probably in B-29 42-65247, a replacement aircraft. After a long but uneventful flight of almost 11 hours, they landed probably at John Rodgers Field on Oahu.

8 Dec 44

Finally today the mission to Iwo Jima got off. The men of the 73rd Bomb Wing were eager to strike back at the location from which the recent damaging air raids had originated. This was to be a coordinated attack involving several different forces. First, P-38's from Saipan would make a fighter sweep. Then the B-29's of the 73rd would make their bombing attack, followed by B-24's of the 7th Air Force. The Navy would finish up with a surface bombardment.

For the 73rd, this mission would also serve useful training purposes. Many new crews had reported in the last week or so and they could use a "milk run" as a training mission. Also, the command was well aware of the poor bombing accuracy in the high-altitude missions against Japan. A mission to Iwo would provide badly needed practice for the crews. A dry run on Pajores Island on the way back was also laid on for even more training.

The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 22 aircraft for this mission, divided into two combat squadrons of 11 planes each, as follows:

**First Squadron**
- Z-6, “Draggin' Lady”, Calhoun/Reeve
- Z-48, “Million Dollar Baby”, Black
- Z-45, “Mustn't Touch”, Standen
- Z-49, “Three Feathers”, Amos
- Z-43, Setterich
- Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Pearson
- Z-10, “Punchin' Judy”, H. Jackson
- Z-46, “Su Su Baby”, Holmes
- Z-47, “Adam's Eve”, Adams

**Second Squadron**
- Z-22, “Leading Lady”, Hurlbutt/Mullen
- Z-21, “Devils' Delight”, Pierce/Roberts
- Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, Hays/Brannock
- Z-26, “Tokyo Local”, Grise
- Z-41, “The Baroness”, Barron
Leading the Group and the first squadron in Z-4 with the Fitzgerald crew was newly appointed Group CO, Lt Col John Dougherty, now in command after the loss of Col Richard King on 3 Dec. First squadron deputy leader in Z-6 with the Calhoun crew was 881st Squadron CO Lt Col Ralph “Pete” Reeve. Leading the second squadron in Z-22 with the Hurlbutt crew was former Group Operations Officer Lt Col Marcus Mullen, now moved up to Deputy Group Commander. Second squadron deputy leader was 882nd Squadron Operations Officer Maj Frank Roberts, flying in Z-21 with the Pierce crew.

Other brass were on this mission as well. Two that are known were Lt Col Joseph "Toby" Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, riding in Z-23 with the Hays crew, and Maj Freeman Parsons, newly appointed Group Operations Officer replacing Mullen, flying in Z-28 with the Gerwick crew. The personnel summary lists 7 additional pilots (copilots), indicating that many regular copilots who were bumped from the right seat decided to go along in some capacity anyway. 2/Lt Robert Copeland, regular copilot on the Fitzgerald crew but displaced from his seat by Lt Col Dougherty, in turn bumped the tail gunner and flew in his place. (Copeland didn't enjoy the experience. "...[I]t's really horrible back there.") Other copilots may have done something similar. The personnel summary also indicates the presence of an additional staff bombardier, navigator and flight engineer, as well as two “observers”. No names are given in the Consolidated Mission Report, but other sources indicate that one of the “observers” was 2/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd RCM Officer, who flew on this mission in Z-21 with the Pierce crew. Overall, the amount of rank on this “milk run” probably led to some disparaging comments from the regular crews.

The 500th Bomb Group led the Wing on this mission.

Bomb load was entirely 500 lb M64 GP bombs. For this relatively short-range mission (only 700 miles) auxiliary fuel tanks were not needed and most of the B-29’s could for the first time carry a full bomb load. Eighteen aircraft carried 40 bombs; four aircraft carried only 32.

Take-off was from 0656 to 0716 local. One plane, Z-10, failed to take off on time due to a problem with the puttputt, but it was fixed and Z-10 was able to take off later with the 498th Group at 0755.

The Holmes crew in Z-46 had quite a scare during take-off. By the account of flight engineer 2/Lt Robert Sebring, everything seemed normal as they pulled into take-off position, ran up the engines to take-off power, released the brakes and began to roll down the runway. “However, as the airplane increased forward speed one engine increased the RPM, and by the time we were halfway down the runway and committed, the prop pitch had flattened out to providing no thrust and the engine was screaming with the tachometer at the high end stop.” This was every crew's nightmare, losing an engine during take-off with a fully loaded plane. You couldn't get into the air with only three engines, and if there was insufficient runway left to bring the plane to a stop, the expected result was a crash over the cliff at the end of the runway and a huge explosion. Quick action was called for and Ted Holmes, an excellent pilot, was up to the challenge. “Ted had no response from the normal prop controls but he tamed it with the feathering button and then by alternately partially unfeathering and feathering he could keep the engine speed and the prop pitch operating in a range where some thrust was contributed and we staggered into the air. When we had enough altitude and got the gear and flaps up he feathered the engine totally and I shut it down. We contacted the tower and went out to sea and jettisoned the bomb load and then flew a pattern to burn up gas and wait for the rest of the Wing to take off and clear the field so we could land.”

There were two additional aborts on the way to the target. Z-47, Adams crew, experienced continuous backfire and detonation in #1 engine, and Z-30, LaMarche crew, blew a cylinder in #2 engine. The three aborts and the delayed take-off by Z-10 left the Group with only 18 planes in its formation, 8 in the first squadron and 10 in the second.
It was very cloudy over this part of the Pacific today and somewhere along the way the second squadron (Mullen) passed the first squadron (Dougherty) and reached the target first. In fact, Mullen's squadron got there an hour before Dougherty's, which had some navigation and other difficulties. Two was cloud-covered so bombs were dropped by radar.

The ten planes remaining in Mullen's squadron made a good bomb run at 20,650 feet and apparently dropped on the target, which was the Japanese air fields. Of course, with the cloud cover no impacts could be observed, but John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew in Z-27, which was leading the third element, had a good view of the formation as the 40 or so bombs from each plane cascaded down. "The top of the overcast was at 15,000 and we were at 19,600 [20,650 according to mission records]. As the last bombs cleared the bomb bays I noticed the first bombs disappear into the clouds – a 5000 ft. ladder of them hanging below each ship." Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew in Z-23, flying No. 3 position in the lead element, thought "it was a beautiful thrilling sight to watch 400 500 pounders drop simultaneously making a pattern corresponding to our formation and gradually converging, apparently, as they dropped."

Things did not go as smoothly in Dougherty's squadron. The 500th BG Mission Summary describes it this way:

"The lead ship's [Z-4] radar went out and it was forced to change leads with the deputy. The deputy leader's [Z-6] radar went out and the lead was passed back to the original leader who was able to operate his radar at close range only. The bomb run was made on a heading of 59 degrees instead of the scheduled heading of 39 degrees. At the same time, the bomb release line in the radar scope was mistakenly identified and the lead ship failed to release bombs at the correct time. The deputy leader, whose radar was partially operative and who was also sighting for range and deflection, then dropped his bombs at 0118Z [1118 local], about three seconds after the indices crossed, and all but two ships in the formation dropped on him. From reports of observed bomb hits, all bombs dropped on the deputy leader struck in the target area and slightly to the east along the coast.

"The leader did not drop his bombs until about one minute later and one ship dropped on him. These bombs are reported to have landed in the water beyond the target area."

The above account appears to be a somewhat sanitized version of events. Lt Col Dougherty apparently saw nothing to be gained by sharing embarrassing details with higher headquarters. In particular, the summary doesn't say anything about two runs over the target, but other documents confirm that that's what happened. In fact, it was even a bit worse than that. The most accurate and detailed description is in the Group Radar Officer's Report:

"The Navigator in the lead aircraft [Z-4, Fitzgerald crew] had difficulty in recognizing the target on the scope [the navigator had a small radar scope at his position] and made a dry run on the wrong island. When he finally located the target, he made a bad run. The squadron then made a 360 degree turn and came out on a heading of approximately 55 degrees. This was off course but the lead aircraft nevertheless continued on the bomb run. [The Radar] Operator in the lead aircraft was probably nervous and set his BRL [Bomb Release Line] incorrectly. The deputy leader [Z-6, Calhoun crew] followed thro [sic] on the bomb run and when he had waited four seconds after the AP [Aiming Point] crossed the BRL in his scope, he dropped his bombs. The rest of the squadron dropped on the deputy leader. It is believed that these bombs fell near the east shore of the target. The leader's bombs were dropped about five seconds after those of the Deputy Leader. It is believed that the Leader's bombs dropped in the water after the squadron had passed over the island."

The radar operator on the Calhoun (formerly Field) crew in Z-6 was Cpl Robert D. Cookson, and he was good at his job. Despite having only a partially functioning system, Cookson coaxed it into working well enough so he could see what was going on... and he didn't like what he was seeing. He could tell that the lead plane was waiting too long to open its bomb bay doors and warned his AC, 1/Lt Patrick Calhoun, that it looked like they were going to miss the target. Calhoun, who had just been promoted from copilot on the Brown crew to take over Field's old crew, had the good judgment to rely on Cookson's judgment. They dropped on his say-so and so did most of the other planes; otherwise they would have missed the island entirely, like Fitzgerald in Z-4.

There was an interesting consequence to this incident. Maj Robert J. Fitzgerald could not have been very happy with the performance of his crew, particularly his radar operator. Since the rest of the squadron dropped on the
leader, a lead crew needed the best people available. Cookson's performance had clearly stood out. Major Fitz apparently requested that Cookson be transferred to his crew, and he got him. Three days later Cookson was radar operator on the Fitzgerald crew.

In summary, of the 19 planes which made it to the target (including Z-10 with the 498th Bomb Group), 18 successfully dropped their bombs. Z-28 could not open her front bomb bay doors and did not drop over the target. Later the doors were opened with the emergency motor and the bombs were jettisoned. Z-9 had a partial rack malfunction and got off only 36 of her 40 bombs. Z-43 brought one bomb back to base that had hung up on the rack. A total of 683 bombs were dropped but the undercast made it impossible to know how many hit the target. Of the 18 planes which dropped all or most of their bombs, it was thought that 16 hit on or near the target.

There was no enemy opposition. There was no flak at all. A few fighters were observed – from his tail gun position Bob Copeland reported seeing four of them – but none attacked.

After the planned dry run over Pajores Island on the way back, all B-29's returned safely to base, landing between 1330 and 1510 local.

Getting back so early, Ciardi had ample time to get a haircut from Cpl Frank Reynolds, a CFC ground maintenance man who was also a decent barber. In the evening Ciardi and some of his friends went up to the 303rd Air Service Group theater, Pendleton Bowl, to watch a program of native dancers, Chamorros from the Marianas and Kanakas from the Carolines.

2/Lt Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbut crew, which had led the second squadron on today's mission, tried to write his fiancee Marie Sisco every day but he was too tired tonight to write much. He did mildly complain about receiving no mail today. He also noted that he didn't go to the show tonight since he'd already seen it twice. But he was looking forward to tomorrow night's movie, "Up in Arms" with Dinah Shore. "I saw it in Atlanta but I want to see it again as I really did enjoy it."

While the mission against Iwo was going on, the Tull McGuire crew of the 881st Squadron arrived on Saipan after their long journey from the States in B-29 42-24792. This plane would be designated Z-2, to replace the first Z-2, which had been lost with the Irvin crew back on 27 Nov.

9 Dec 44

This morning on Saipan at about 0430 there was another air raid alert but it was apparently false, as no Japanese planes appeared.

AC Capt Robert Cordray of the 882nd wanted to check out various systems – the AFCE (Automatic Flight Control Equipment, also known as the autopilot), bomb releases, the turbo super-chargers, and more – on his plane, Z-27, so he got permission to make a practice run to Pagan Island north of Saipan. He had even arranged for some civilian technicians to come along to check and calibrate the equipment. One of these civilians was probably Mr David C. Gerrish of Honeywell, which produced both the AFCE and turbo-supercharger regulators used on the B-29. Unfortunately, according to CFC gunner John Ciardi, somebody had forgotten to tell the crew chief, M/Sgt Sydney Smith, about the planned check-out flight, and when the group arrived at the hardstand they found that Smitty had the #1 engine all broken down trying to find an oil leak. Mission scratched.

At 0930 there was a critique of yesterday's mission to Iwo Jima. According to the unit narrative history, "The critiques were conducted by the Group Commander with each squadron leader over the target giving the complete story of his squadron on the mission. During these critiques many suggestions and experiences were brought forward which helped each succeeding mission being accomplished with a tighter formation, more air discipline, and a better bombing procedure. Also, in these critiques the 'buddy system' of trying to protect planes crippled over the target, the staying with injured planes to determine their ditching position, and the result of their ditching was developed."

2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, attended today's critique and thought that
“yesterday’s mistakes were quite thoroughly discussed.” He also wrote approvingly that “Col. Dougherty seems to be making progress on the errors present within this group. The formation problem is being attacked in particular.” Copeland also recorded that later in the day there was a chemical warfare lecture by a Lt. Craig [probably 881st Armament Officer 1/Lt James M. Craig]. Lastly, Copeland got the word that they had a new plane assigned, although he hadn’t seen it yet.

Two more 500th crews, Schmitz (#241) of the 882nd Squadron and Mahoney (#362) of the 883rd, brought two more new B-29’s to Saipan today. Both planes would go to Groups that had suffered heavier losses than the 500th.

In his daily letter to his fiancee, 2/Lt Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd, also referred to today’s mission critique. The Group Navigator, Capt Berry Thompson, had rated Fine’s navigation as excellent in his official report, and navigation had certainly been a topic of discussion at the critique. Fine allowed himself to say, “I guess I did a pretty good job yesterday....”

10 Dec 44

Today the 882nd Bomb Squadron mounted a training mission to Pagan Island about 200 miles north of Saipan. Pagan was still Japanese-held but pretty much cut off and not a threat. However, it served as a useful practice target for planes from Saipan. The Japanese garrison must have been driven crazy by the regular pounding. (Tomorrow they would be bombed by the 499th Group.)

One source says that six planes and crews participated in the training mission: four designated lead crews of the 882nd – Hurlbutt in Z-22, “Leading Lady”; Van Trigt in Z-25, “American Beauty”; LaMarche in Z-30, “Slick Dick”; and Cordray in Z-27 – plus two newly arrived crews – Schmitz, probably in Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”; and one unidentified plane and crew. Take-off was scheduled for 1000 with expected return by 1300. One of the planes may have aborted, for another source lists only the five identified planes above.

Sgt John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew in Z-27, wrote that they leisurely dropped a half dozen bombs on Pagan from 25,000 feet in separate bombing runs. He observed that the island’s airstrip was “pockmarked with bomb craters.” There was no opposition. After the bombing, the planes made their way home.

Separately visiting Pagan today was at least one more 500th plane. The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron received their replacement Z-8 today, 42-24743, which they may have also named “Wabash Cannonball”. The first order of business was to give it an inspection and a flight check. As part of the latter, they flew up to Pagan and dropped a few bombs. Then on the way back to Saipan they calibrated the airspeed indicators.

On this day the Bricker crew (#113) of the 881st Squadron arrived on Saipan in B-29 42-24762, which was also assigned to the 881st and became the new Z-1, replacing the first Z-1 shot down with Goldsworthy and King on 3 Dec. Arriving with the Bricker crew as a passenger was Group Gunnery Officer Capt Leroy English.

The Bricker crew had left Kearney AAF in Nebraska on about 1 Dec in their new, shiny B-29 and flew to Mather Field in California. A few days later it was off for Hawaii, which they reached without any problem and landed at John Rodgers Field. However, taking off the next day for Kwajalein, AC Capt Linden Bricker, normally an excellent pilot, made the mistake of hitting the brakes just after lift-off to stop the wheels from spinning, as he was used to doing in a B-24. The trouble was, this was not a B-24. The heavier B-29 dropped back down onto the runway with the brakes still applied and the two right tires both blew. Bricker immediately applied full power and just managed to get airborne, in the process forcing a terrified construction worker at the end of the runway to duck for his life. But now there was the problem of how to land with two blown tires.

Bricker circled the field and discussed the situation with the tower, which advised him that facilities at Kwajalein were limited and it would be better to land at John Rodgers and have the tires replaced there. However, to lessen the danger of explosion, Bricker needed to burn off most of their fuel. So they flew around north of Oahu for several hours killing time, while Bricker let his crew take turns flying the plane. Finally, it came time to land.
Flight engineer 2/Lt Clifford Smith described the landing: “Two meat wagons, the Air Force term for ambulances, were on each side of the runway waiting for us. Bricker came in slow, holding the right side up and off the runway until his speed let it come down. Then he braked hard on the left, allowing [him] to hold a straight line. We threw rubber 300 feet in the air and dented the underside of the right wing. The meat wagons had no business due to Bricker’s skill.”

After getting new tires, the crew had a thankfully uneventful take-off the next day, and it was off to Kwajalein. The flight went well, but Smith was surprised when just after landing on the small atoll “GI's ... began to appear at the nose wheel door even before we could get out. They wanted to know if we had any oranges, apples or uneaten sandwiches. Their appearance was sad. They had made shorts by cutting off their pants, were unshaven and desperately needed haircuts.” The lack of discipline and evidence of food shortages disturbed Smith. If it was this bad here, what would things be like on Saipan?

Today they found out, and to Smith’s relief things seemed to be in fairly good order on Saipan.

In terms of arrivals, today was a banner day for the 500th Bomb Group. In addition to the Bricker crew, four more crews – Mather (#108) of the 881st; and Cheney (#348), Gregg (#355) and Schmidt (#356) of the 883rd – arrived in brand-new B-29’s. Mather’s B-29, 42-63486, would stay in the 881st as the second Z-7, replacing the original plane damaged badly on the 3 Dec mission, and Schmidt’s B-29, 42-42-24761, would remain in the 883rd as Z-51. The two other planes would go to other Groups.

The Cheney crew arrived one man short. Navigator 2/Lt Paul Beck had been held back at Mather Field due to a bout of prostatitis. Fortunately, he would soon recover and rejoin his crew on 2 Jan 45, but in the meantime they would have to operate without him. To balance out the picture, the crew also enjoyed a reunion of sorts. They were probably quite surprised when their radar operator, Sgt Edwin Enstad, who had been detached from the crew somewhere back in the States, showed up to greet them. Enstad had flown over via ATC and had been on Saipan since 17 Nov.

For the Cheney crew’s flight overseas, Enstad had temporarily been replaced by Sgt Joseph Barovian from the 881st Squadron. Barovian's arrival today completed his own crew, the 881st's Harlan Jackson crew (#102), which had been dribbling in by ATC two or three at a time since 15 Nov. The Jackson crew had already completed one mission (plus an abort) with a replacement radar operator, so Barovian had a little catching up to do.

Other alternate crews left behind at Kearney AAF, Nebraska, had gradually been arriving on Saipan since late November, and about half were on the island by this date. At least five crews, all of the 881st Squadron – Curtis (#119), Harlan Jackson (#102), Brown (#104), Pearson (#116) and McNamer (#114) – had already arrived via Air Transport Command, while nine others – Bricker (#113), Mather (#108) and McGuire (#107) of the 881st Squadron; Schmitz (#241) of the 882nd; and Amos (#363), Cheney (#348), Gregg (#355), Mahoney (#362) and Schmidt (#356) of the 883rd – had already flown B-29’s in. As we have seen, some of those new B-29’s remained with the 500th as replacement aircraft, while some were reallocated to other Groups. As for the crews, the math left 16 still to report.

The 500th Bomb Group had also been assigned two replacement crews, both of which brought over new B-29’s in December. The Standen crew (#349A) was assigned to the 883rd as a replacement for the Cooper crew lost in training (see 18 Sep 44 entry). Standen brought in B-29 42-24773, which was turned over to the 499th Group, on 4 Dec. The Engle crew (#105A), which was assigned to the 881st as a replacement for the Irvin crew lost in action on 27 Nov, would also soon arrive on Saipan.

Supper tonight in the 881st featured turkey. To Charlie Maples, radio operator on the Calhoun (formerly Field) crew of the 881st, it was “the best meal that I've had since I've been here.” Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew liked the turkey too.

Copeland added this sad note to his diary tonight: “McKinney seems to be more or less going on the rocks since he got the news that his wife and mother-in-law were murdered. He hasn't eaten in three days.” This was 1/Lt Charles H. McKinney, navigator on the Thompson crew of the 881st. When you’re overseas involved in risking your life for your country, you don’t expect to get news like that from home. McKinney must have eventually
recovered enough from this tragic blow to serve, because he continued on the 500th's rolls.

Today 2/Lt Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew, finished up a letter he had started last night but hadn't been able to finish then because the lights went out. He wrote his fiancee Marie that he had gone to church today, it being Sunday, and after that he went sight-seeing around the island with some buddies. They even brought back a bunch of bananas and hung them up to ripen. The movie tonight was "In Our Day". “Remember, we saw it in Hays [Kansas] last spring at that small theater down by the railroad tracks. I got disgusted though and left before it was over.”

The Warren Parsons crew of the 882nd Squadron had been kept in Hawaii yesterday due to bad weather, but today they departed Oahu in their new B-29 and flew ten hours and 45 minutes to Kwajalein. Since they lost a calendar day due to crossing the International Date Line, they actually arrived at Kwajalein on the 11th.

11 Dec 44

This was a quiet day on Saipan. 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew, 881st Squadron, didn't do much except help clean guns, and in the evening he went to a movie.

William Eilers, a ground crewman in the 881st, was promoted to Sgt today.

Sgt Charles Maples, radio operator on the Calhoun (formerly Field) crew of the 881st and an admitted infrequent writer, did manage to compose a letter to his mother today. Among other things, he wrote that the air raids they had been having had eased off quite a bit. He mentioned the turkey for dinner yesterday and in general tried to reassure his mother, “Altogether this is a pretty nice set up.” Maples also revealed that the crew had finally decided on a name for their plane, Z-6. They were going to call it “The Albatross” and have a big white bird painted on it. “You know, the Albatross is the largest of all flying birds & is supposed to be a lucky bird, too.” [The crew must have changed their minds later because Z-6 was eventually named “Draggin’ Lady”, with a nearly naked female figure as nose art… or maybe Maples didn’t want to scandalize his mother with the naked truth.] Finally, Maples asked for some cookies as a Christmas present.

Late in the evening the 73rd Bomb Wing issued Field Order 29, which directed a mission against the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory in Nagoya, Japan.

12 Dec 44

The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron washed their new plane this morning. Removing the dirt and grime from the plane's surfaces could actually add a few miles per hour to its speed, so most crews performed this task periodically. In the afternoon copilot Robert Copeland took a nap.

Copeland recorded in his diary something he had heard today. “There's a rumor going around that the 'wreaths' the Japs dropped on Dec 5 were not wreaths but heads of some of the men from a captured crew, probably Goldsworthy’s. Wish we knew for sure, because if we did we could go up there with a vengeance from now on. I wouldn't give a dam then whether we bombed indiscriminately or not.” All evidence indicates that this was nothing more than a rumor.

After a routine flight just short of seven hours, the Parsons crew (#238) of the 882nd arrived on Saipan from Kwajalein in B-29 42-65247, which was also assigned to the 882nd. Three more B-29's and crews also arrived today. These included the Clinkscales (#350) and Irby (#361) crews of the 883rd, plus the Engle crew (#105A), which had been assigned to the 881st as a replacement for the Irvin crew lost in action on 27 Nov. The B-29's brought in by Clinkscales and Irby are uncertain, but the B-29 that the Engle crew brought over, 42-63475, was re-assigned to the 498th Bomb Group.

This evening there was a briefing for a mission tomorrow. This one would be to Japan, but to a new city.
On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing put up a maximum effort against the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory in Nagoya, Target #193. This would be another high-altitude daylight mission. Secondary target would be the city of Nagoya, last resort target was any industrial city in the area.

The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 25 aircraft for this mission, divided into two combat squadrons, as follows:

**First squadron**
- Z-22, "Leading Lady", Hurlbutt/Brannock
- Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Hays
- Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
- Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Thompson
- Z-25, "American Beauty", Van Trigt
- Z-26, "Tokyo Local", Grise
- Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Gerwick
- Z-8, Curtis
- Z-30, "Slick Dick", LaMarche
- Z-29, "Pacific Queen", Savage
- Z-27, Cordray
- Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Brown
- Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce

**Second squadron**
- Z-48, "Million Dollar Baby", Black/Gay
- Z-42, "Supine Sue", Moreland
- Z-43, Setterich?
- Z-6, "Draggin' Lady", Sullivan/Dougherty
- Z-47, "Adam's Eve", Adams
- Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", McClanahan
- Z-46, "Su Su Baby", Holmes
- Z-4, "Black Magic", H. Jackson
- Z-49, "Three Feathers", Feathers
- Z-41, "The Baroness", Barron
- Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Braden
- Z-9, "Nina Ross", Pearson

Leading the Group would be Group Commander Lt Col John Dougherty. The records are contradictory concerning with which plane and crew he flew. Group records indicate it was Z-6, 1/Lt Richard D. Sullivan and crew, while 73rd Wing records list him in Z-42, Capt Charles Moreland. It's possible that Dougherty was originally scheduled with Sullivan but switched to Moreland when Z-6 suffered a minor mechanical problem before take-off (see below). Leading the first squadron would be Lt Col Toby Brannock, 882nd Squadron CO, in Z-22, Maj Barney Hurlbutt and crew; leading the second squadron would be Maj John Gay, 883rd Squadron Operations Officer, in Z-48, Capt Vance Black and crew.

On this mission the 500th Bomb group was last in the Wing order.

Bomb load was 10 x 500 lb M64 General Purpose bombs in the rear bomb bay. The ammo load was a full 6,000 rounds of .50 caliber and 120 rounds for the 20mm cannon. Fuel load was 8,000 gallons, including two auxiliary tanks in the forward bomb bay.

Take-off was from 0851 to 0915 local. One plane, Z-21, Pierce crew, failed to take off when the #4 engine starter burned out on preflight. Z-6, Sullivan crew, and Z-29, Savage crew, both had minor mechanical problems but they were quickly fixed and the planes took off with the Group, albeit out of scheduled take-off order. In all, 24 planes, 12 per squadron, made it airborne.
Squadron assembly took place shortly beyond Marpi Point, the northernmost point of Saipan. The assembly of both squadrons was complicated slightly by rain showers, but in due course both headed off for Japan. However, only a few minutes after assembly Z-25, probably Van Trigt crew, developed a bad oil leak in #4 engine and had to turn back. This left 11 planes in the first squadron.

The Group flew at low altitude, 1,000 feet, for a little over four hours before beginning the climb to bombing altitude of 29,000 feet. The plan called for the climb to be done in two steps, first to 18,000 feet, then level off for 15 minutes, then continue to 29,000. The second squadron apparently adhered to this plan but the first squadron started its climb ten minutes early due to weather and then appears to have made the full climb in one step. The first squadron maintained a good formation the entire way, but the second squadron's formation was admittedly poor.

About an hour short of landfall, Z-28, Gerwick crew, lost her #4 engine (later determined to be due to a swallowed valve) and had to abort. This left only ten planes in the first squadron.

The 500th Bomb Group suffered its first casualty even before reaching Japan. While still about a hundred miles from landfall and climbing toward bombing altitude of 28,500 feet, the left blister in Z-45, McClanahan crew, blew out, taking the left gunner, Sgt August Renner, and his gunsight with it. Renner's parachute was seen to open about 2,000 feet below the formation. Z-49, Feathers crew, immediately sent off a message: “Observed parachute leaving plane in our formation at 0544Z [1544 local time] 110 Blue Bloomers 120.” Blue Bloomers was the covername for a lifeguard submarine stationed near Daio Saki Light. The three-digit numbers were possibly compass bearings. But it was hopeless. If Renner didn't die of hypoxia on the way down, he would certainly die of hypothermia in the cold waters of the North Pacific. His body was never found.

Back on Z-45, the explosive depressurization caused a small metal ladder stowed in the forward part of the tunnel to shoot toward the rear. Fortunately for the ring gunner, Sgt William Agee, someone had placed a flight jacket on the ladder which weighed it down and caused it to catch on some padding around the rear opening of the tunnel; otherwise the ladder would have struck Agee at knee level. As it was, he was only hit in the midsection by the jacket, which packed a significant wallop in itself. A bitterly cold wind whistled through the gunners compartment, nearly freezing Agee and right gunner Robert Schurmann. A less determined AC might have aborted, but Capt Robert McClanahan decided to complete the mission... and so they did, shivering all the way. When he checked his canteen later, Schurmann discovered that the water in it had frozen.

Due to navigational errors, the first squadron hit the Japanese coast about 50 miles to the left of planned landfall and the second squadron about 20 miles to the right. (The 500th wasn't the only Group that had this problem. The 499th was 40 miles off.) The lead navigator for the first squadron was again 2/Lt Ken Fine, who had done such a good job on the previous mission to Iwo. There are good days and there are not-so-good days. This was a not-so-good day for Fine. In his official report, the Group Navigator chalked the faulty navigation up to “inaccurate drift readings” and “lack of coordination with wing men”, which presumably meant failing to compare calculations with navigators on other planes.

Both squadrons corrected the errors by turning and flying along the coast to the originally designated point. However, before getting there the first squadron lost another plane. Z-27's #4 engine went out (later determined to be due to a swallowed valve) and she could not keep up with the formation, so AC Capt Robert Cordray picked out a fishing village on the Okubi Peninsula to receive their bomb load and then turned for home.

Cordray’s right gunner, Sgt John Ciardi, had a more critical version of events. Ciardi was already in a bad mood because two of the four guns in the upper forward turret had malfunctioned and he knew it was his fault for improperly reinstalling two of the cover cams. Ciardi wrote, “We had had lead-navigator trouble all the way and finally hit the coast about 80 miles off course. In the imperative name of SNAFU the formation went cruising about Japan for better than an hour looking for the target finally heading into Nagoya straight across the middle of a major airfield we were carefully briefed to avoid.” Intelligence thought this field contained the new twin-engine Frances, about which little was known. As it turned out, the Frances turned out to be a bomber, and not a very successful one at that, but Intelligence didn't know that at the time, hence the crews had been briefed to avoid it. Ciardi uneasily watched as two planes took off from the field below and started climbing. With Z-27 already falling behind the formation, the threat from these planes cemented Cordray's decision to head home.
According to Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew, which did not go on this mission, 2/Lt Raymond J. Rood, who was the regular copilot on the Thompson crew but may have been flying today with Jay Brown in Z-2, supported Ciardi’s version: “The formation Rood was in got nearly a hundred miles off course and spent an hour over the mainland of Japan.”

The nine remaining planes in the first squadron, now at altitude 28,800 feet, reformed into the standard V of V’s and turned onto course 260 degrees toward Nagoya and their target. They were in a “good, close formation”. Still leading the squadron and the first element was Z-22, Hurlbutt crew. In No. 2 position on Z-22's right wing was Z-23, Hays, and in No. 3 position on the left wing was Z-24, Tackett. Leading the second (right) element was Z-26, Grise, with Z-10, Thompson, on her right wing and Z-8, Curtis, on her left. Leading the third (left) element was Z-30, LaMarche, with Z-29, Savage, on her right wing and Z-2, Brown, on her left.

The second squadron was running about seven minutes behind the first. With 12 planes, the second squadron was in a V of diamonds, but the formation was “not close”. Still leading the squadron was Z-48, Black crew. Z-42, Moreland, was on Z-48's right wing. Z-43, probably Setterich crew, was on her left, and Z-6, Sullivan crew (with Lt Col Dougherty on board), was in #4 position filling in the diamond. The second (right) element was led by Z-47, Adams, with Z-45, McClanahan, on her right wing, Z-46, Holmes, on her left, and Z-4, H. Jackson, filling in the diamond. Z-49, Feathers, was leading the third (left) element, with Z-41, Barron, on her right wing, Z-50, Braden, on her left and Z-9, Pearson, completing the diamond.

The B-29's had started drawing flak at landfall. At first it was light, scattered and inaccurate, but as the squadrons passed the IP and began their bomb runs, the flak became heavier and more accurate. Several pilots speculated that a Japanese aircraft paralleling the formation out of range at the same altitude was spotting for the ground batteries. Things were not helped by the long bomb run, 12-13 minutes from IP to target. It wasn't meant to be that long but the B-29's were flying into a 100 knot headwind, which left them hanging in the air excessively long. Several planes were hit during this time but none seriously, and all got their bombs away.

Visibility was good today, although some portions of the target were obscured by smoke. Some fires caused by the preceding Groups were observed.

As the first squadron neared the bomb release point and opened their bomb bay doors, there was a problem. When the bomb bay doors on Z-10 opened, an apparent rack malfunction caused three bombs to drop right away. Then the remaining seven “were salvoed immediately thereafter.” With their bombs now gone, AC Capt Donald Thompson saw no reason to hang around and turned for home. (Z-10 was the first plane back of those which reached the target area.)

Z-10's malfunction wasn't the only problem. For some reason Z-24 failed to drop on the leader, Z-22, as she was supposed to. Instead, Z-24 dropped six seconds ahead of the leader, which confused the three planes of the third element and caused them to drop as well. This left only three other planes – Z-23, Z-26 and Z-8 – to drop with Z-22. These miscues resulted in the bombing effort of the first squadron being somewhat scattered. Still, the first squadron's drop was rated good in the official Group report.

2/Lt Harold Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew, flying in the deputy lead position in Z-23, shed some light on why the bombardier in Z-24 may have dropped early. “Bombing was fair although the bombs for the most part hit short. Apparently some of the bombardiers got scared of the small dropping angle which brought us practically above the target at bombs away. However, Lt. Aitkin [Glen Aitken, lead bombardier on the Hurlbutt crew in Z-22] and our bombardier [meaning Towner] waited for the indices to meet and scored good hits.”

Although the second squadron did not experience the same sort of dropping confusion as the first, the official report rated its bombing only fair because the formation was too spread out. Three planes in the second squadron suffered partial rack malfunctions. Z-6 and Z-45 each had two bombs hang up on the racks and had to jettison them later. Z-4 had one bomb hang up and brought it back to base.

In all, the 21 planes which reached the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory dropped a total of 80 x M64 GP’s and 190 x M18 IB’s in the vicinity of the target, the first squadron at 1631 and the second at 1638. There were apparently no good strike photos for Group bomb damage assessment purposes. According to the mission
summary written for Lt Col Dougherty, the cause for that was “insufficient cameras of proper type.” However, the 73rd Wing assessment revealed significant damage to the target, estimated at 30%. The 500th could at least feel good about its part in that.

Fighter opposition was light throughout, with only 18 attacks reported. None was pressed closely and enemy fire was inaccurate. There were no reported hits from fighters. B-29 gunners made two claims, a Tojo damaged by the right and tail gunners of Z-2, probably Sgt Bruce Gilbertson and Cpl Russell Bookman, and an Irving damaged by the left gunner on Z-50, probably Cpl Robert Cunningham.

After bombs away, both squadrons broke away to the south and passed over the city of Nagoya. Flak continued heavy here, and it was apparently at this point that Z-26, “Tokyo Local”, Grise crew, was hit. Just after bombs away Z-26 was reported dropping out of formation with her #1 engine windmilling and #3 engine smoking. At first, she headed out to sea and appeared to be under control but then began steadily losing altitude. Z-2, Jay Brown crew, dropped out of formation and followed Z-26 down. Brown could see pieces falling off the #1 engine and items being thrown out of Z-26 to lighten it. At about 2000 feet Z-26 descended rapidly thru a layer of clouds and Brown lost sight of her. He quickly dropped down and circled back and two of his gunners, Sgt Gilbertson and Cpl Bookman, reported seeing Z-26 hit the water pretty hard about 75 miles off the coast. The gunners estimated the plane stayed afloat for about two minutes, but by the time Brown reached the indicated spot, which he circled three times, there was no sign of the plane or survivors. Meanwhile, his radio operator attempted repeatedly to contact the nearest lifeguard submarine but could not get a response. All members of the Grise crew were declared dead after the war.

Here is the crew of Z-26, "Tokyo Local":

AC Capt Charles G Grise
Copilot 1/Lt Edwin P. Schmitz
B 2/Lt Morris D. Rosenthal
N 2/Lt Robert L. Rogers
FE 2/Lt Anthony J. Musil
Radio Sgt James S. Allison
Ring G Cpl Joseph A. Kehrer
RG Cpl Barry S. Campbell
LG S/Sgt Jessie J. Irvine
Radar Sgt Russell L. Kaufman
TG Cpl Hyrum P. Pringle

1/Lt Schmitz was not the regular copilot on this crew. He was the AC of a newly arrived crew, #241, and was on this mission for orientation purposes. The regular copilot was 2/Lt James O. Burpo, who had been replaced by Schmitz. Bad luck for Schmitz, good luck for Burpo.

Schmitz was not the only new AC on an orientation flight this trip. 1/Lt Warren H. “Alfalfa” Parsons, Crew #238, rode with his good friend Joe Savage in Z-29 today, but he was luckier than Schmitz and made it back. Parsons’ nickname stemmed from a resemblance to a character in the popular “Our Gang” comedy series.

In addition to Z-26 shot down, 12 other planes suffered flak damage to one degree or another. All damaged planes made it back to Saipan, but at least four of them had to do it on three engines.

One of those planes coming back on three engines was Z-27, Cordray crew. After dropping his bombs on the fishing village and turning for home, Cordray asked his navigator, 2/Lt Edwin R. O’Hara, for an ETA. O’Hara told him six hours. Cordray then asked his flight engineer, 1/Lt Robert Campbell, how much fuel they had left. Calculating remaining fuel was a complicated process. The fuel gauges on a B-29 were useless, so basically the flight engineer had to estimate how much fuel they had used, taking into account power settings, distance flown, altitude and other factors, then subtract that amount from the total fuel load. He then had to estimate fuel usage on the way home and convert that into hours and minutes. A good flight engineer who had been keeping accurate records of fuel usage could usually come pretty close. Campbell’s answer was four and a half hours. Z-27 was in trouble. The crew began throwing out things to lighten ship – ammunition, flak suits, etc. As soon
as all the fuel in them had been used up, the auxiliary tanks in the forward bomb bay were also jettisoned, incidentally tearing up the radar dome and putting the radar out of action on the way out. Then the crew could only pray for tailwinds and sweat it out.

While they waited, the crew were able to overhear voice radio transmissions from the main force over Nagoya and listened as Z-26 was reported down. Ciardi lost some good friends with that plane, including right gunner Barry Campbell and radar operator Russell Kaufman. They also heard distress calls from other 73rd Wing planes. They had already sent out their own distress call.

As the hours slowly ticked off, the crew kept expecting to hear the order to prepare for ditching, but thankfully it never came. Instead, Saipan eventually showed up. Still expecting the fuel to give out at any time, Cordray requested a straight-in approach but was redirected by Flight Control to Gardenia, which was the covername for Isley #2, also known as Kobler Field, also known as the B-24 strip. They landed safely there at 2207 and the crew breathed a sigh of relief.

Later Ciardi learned from Sgt Joe Shannon, one of the ground crew, that they still had 1400 gallons of fuel in the tanks, enough for at least two more hours of flying. The flight engineer had clearly made a mistake. But the main thing was they had made it home.

The rest of the 500th planes landed safely at Isley between 2121 and 2345. The last in was Z-2 with the Brown crew, who had lagged behind trying to help the downed Z-26.

Hal Towner marked Z-26’s loss in his diary: “We lost Tokyo Local – a toast to Captain Grise and his crew.”

The Samuelson crew of the 881st did not go on today's mission because their usual plane, Z-3, the aptly named “Snafu-perfot”, was out of commission again. But they did sweat things out for the boys on the mission, and especially for the Harlan C. “Toad” Jackson crew, who shared their quonset. The Jackson crew flew Z-4 on this mission, and the men on the Samuelson crew had wished them luck as they left this morning. Jackson and crew made it back, but with a hole in their wing and a little worse for wear. In his usual frank and honest manner, Samuelson described them as “a bunch of nervous fellows for which we can't blame them. The flak was extremely heavy and accurate, and it has been expected to get worse, sorry to say. There is no getting around it; we are all scared and scared plenty. This stuff of losing crews on every mission is a hard pill to swallow. It wouldn't be quite as bad if our losses were just because of the enemy, however planes ditch out in the middle of the Pacific at night because of engine trouble and other mechanical troubles. The thought of landing a $600,000.00 plane and twelve [sic] men on a rough ocean at night, a thousand miles from nowhere, makes men out of boys and at the same time puts gray hair on the men.”

Arriving today on Saipan from the States was the Ray Taylor crew of the 881st Squadron in B-29 42-63489, which would stay with the 881st and be designated Z-11.

14 Dec 44

New Group CO Lt Col John E. “Jack” Dougherty did not waste any time reacting to yesterday's loss of left gunner Gus Renner due to a blown-out blister. Today he ordered the establishment of a Group Modification Board to find solutions to this particular problem and also “to consider any and all proposed modifications, changes and improvements to aircraft and equipment used by the group.” Captain Robert M. Cordray, AC in the 882nd Squadron, was appointed President, and Capt Prescott L. Martin, Group Engineering Officer; 1/Lt Alvah J. Willis, flight engineer in the 883rd; and 2/Lt Ralph Shulman, flight engineer in the 881st, were appointed as members.

As its first task, the Modification Board immediately recommended the fabrication of a safety belt for the gunners. This recommendation was quickly approved by Lt Col Dougherty and work on the safety belts was started right away. For the longer term, the Board took under study the following proposals, as listed in the unit monthly history for December 1944:
1. Improved ditching stations and methods.
2. Re-wiring of the aft unpressurized compartment to prevent battle damage from activating the electric wheel motors.
3. Installation of a “jackbox” and oxygen regulator in forward pressurized compartment to take care of any extra observers and passengers in this compartment. [This would be a great relief especially to the weather observers on weather strike missions. They would be able to listen to crew communications and would no longer have to carry around cumbersome oxygen bottles when at altitude.]
4. Installation of an interphone jackbox in the aft unpressurized compartment. [This would allow the tail gunner, responsible for starting and stopping the putt-putt, to communicate while he was performing that duty. Also, the rear unpressurized compartment was often used as a ditching station.]
5. Investigation of the installation of separate switches for gun heaters.
6. Improvements concerned with gunners stations – lowering seats.

Hal Towner, bombardier on the Hays crew of the 882nd Squadron, made an entry in his diary last night that provides a rare window into 73rd Bomb Wing unwritten award policy: “We flew our fifth mission today, and thereby became eligible for the Air Medal. If we choose, however, we can fly ten more missions and receive the D.F.C. [Distinguished Flying Cross]. If we take the Air Medal now, we must fly fifteen more missions for the D.F.C.”

In the Army Air Forces, the Air Medal was usually awarded for every 100 hours of combat flight, although it could be awarded for a one-time act of skill or bravery (see for example 11 Jul 44 entry). In fact, 100 hours is the standard the 73rd eventually followed, but Towner's note shows that they at least considered awarding it for five missions, which would break out to only 65-70 hours. A reasonable argument could certainly be made for only five missions. The missions to Japan were long, harrowing and dangerous, with no place to land for 3,000 miles. This was quite different than any other area of operations. But in any case the 73rd apparently decided not to push it.

The DFC was a little different. It was roughly the air crew equivalent of the Bronze Star and was not a length of service, i.e., so many missions or hours, award. The DFC was intended to be for a one-time act of bravery. However, Towner's comment tells us that the 73rd intended to treat it as a service award. And an examination of the DFC awards in the 73rd shows us that that's mostly what they did. Not entirely – some DFC's were awarded for a single act of bravery – but in general the DFC was given for completing a certain number of missions. When most of a crew completed their 15 missions, one of those missions was selected as the most noteworthy and a citation was written up for the entire crew based on that mission. By this method, the DFC was made to appear as an award for a one-time achievement instead of for a number of missions.

Unfortunately, this method also led to some anomalies. S-1 (Personnel) or whoever was writing the citation apparently didn't check carefully, so sometimes men received DFC's when they hadn't quite met the established criteria. Not every crew member flew every mission, due to illness or other reasons. So you had situations arise in which most of the crew had completed 15 missions but one or two of the men had flown fewer. Then there is my father's situation, which is probably not unique. Like all other air crewmen who served honorably (33 missions credited), he received a DFC. But the mission that was chosen for his crew's write-up happened to be the 13 Mar 45 mission to Osaka. This was one of the night incendiary missions on which not all the gunners were taken. Dad was one of the gunners left behind that night. So tail gunner S/Sgt James E. Bowman received a Distinguished Flying Cross for a mission he didn't even go on. I wonder how he felt about that. But of course, those men were really receiving the award for completing a certain number of missions, so the specific mission cited didn't really matter.

None of this discussion should be interpreted as a disparagement of the DFC's earned by the men in the 73rd Bomb Wing, or in the other Bomb Wings for that matter. Quite the opposite. It's clear from the evidence that just taking off in a fully loaded B-29 was an act of bravery, let alone doing it 15, 20, 30 or 35 times, then flying 1500 miles to Japan, getting shot at, then flying all the way back, sometimes on only three (or even two) engines. No, every man who flew those missions merited the DFC many times over.
There was an air raid alert at noon today but it was apparently a false alarm.

Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd Squadron, got a lot of mail today, and he was happy about that. But he also had to censor more outgoing enlisted mail today, and that was getting tiresome. In a letter to his fiancee today, Fine explained why he hadn't written for the last few days. He had been busy preparing for a mission, which he flew yesterday to Nagoya. Fine poked a little fun at his navigation error: "I took our squadron on a tour of the coast so I got a good view of a small strip of Japan." He decided that he liked the looks of the country up by Tokyo better than down by Nagoya.

Fine then wrote about how he thought the Japanese were underestimated, especially in American newspapers. "... I think they are far more smarter [sic] and more cunning than most people in the states give them credit for being. I know when they say the ack-ack is moderate or inaccurate, I sure feel differently about it. That ack-ack can really scare you." Fine was far from the only one who felt that way.

The good news made the rounds on Saipan today that a couple of downed B-29 crews had been picked up by the Navy. One of them had ditched back on 3 Dec. Neither of these was a 500th crew.

Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, didn't have much to do today. He spent most of it reading The Magnificent Obsession, by Lloyd C. Douglas.

Robert Schurmann, right gunner on the McClanahan crew of the 883rd, got food poisoning today and was sent to the hospital.

Sgt Jack Heffner, radar operator on the McNamer crew of the 881st, marked an anniversary: "Two years in the good old air corp [sic] completed today."

15 Dec 44

As December wore on, the 73rd Bomb Wing continued to wrestle with the numerous problems it was encountering in trying to carry out its strategic bombing campaign against Japan. But problems had been expected. After all, nothing like this had ever before been attempted. Flying missions of 13 or 14 hours duration over 3000 miles of water was unprecedented in warfare. It placed great strain on the planes, the air crews, the ground crews, and the commanders. Most men met the challenges, doing their part and more. Some of the problems were already being overcome; others were proving more difficult.

In addition to the improvised safety belts for the blister gunners, the tail gunners started to get electrically heated suits, so that they no longer faced freezing to death alone in their small compartment if pressurization failed during action. Harmonization ranges were also being built to improve the accuracy of the central fire control system.

Changes were being made to maintenance procedures too, as described in the 500th Bomb Group Dec 1944 Narrative History, actually written in early Jan 1945:

"One factor that helped maintenance was to make a complete coordinated maintenance section out of the sections assigned to care for the airplane. Instead of having all the different sections like communications, ordnance, armament, radar, and supply operate independently, they were all coordinated into one section, with the purpose of bringing the airplanes into commission in the least possible time."

Plans were also being made to change the way new engines were built up and installed. Presently it was taking far too long, 24 to 30 hours per engine. The new procedure would be implemented in January and would pay great dividends.
Cruise control plans were developed to help the flight engineers calculate fuel consumption more accurately. Since each plane performed slightly differently, data on fuel consumption and power settings were compiled on every one.

The 500th Group and the 73rd Wing were learning. They were determined to succeed... and they would.

George Hughes, airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, wrote a long letter home today:

“Dear Mother & Dad,

I guess all of my Christmas packages have arrived. The slippers arrived about two days ago. They are very nice to wear around at night. A couple of packages with shorts and T-shirts also arrived. The stationery will be useful but the envelopes are stuck together. It is very hard to keep them here because of the heat and dampness.

It doesn't seem much like Christmas around here. The rain still pours down nearly every day. I thought the tent would float away last night. Maybe I will do better on Christmas day than I did on Thanksgiving. I was on airplane guard and missed my dinner.

We have been very busy on the planes getting them in shape. It seems as though there is always something to do on a B-29. A man will never get bored from lack of work.

We had a few air raids since we have been here but nothing too rough. They are mostly night raids but we had one daylight strafing attack around dinner time. This sort of thing doesn't improve a man's sleep. It is discouraging to be awakened in the middle of the night to hit the foxhole.

I suppose you read about the B-29 raids on Japan. It is a beautiful sight to see them taking off to give the Japs something to remember. They will get a good pounding before we start back to the States. ...

Write when you can and don't worry. Take care of yourselves.

Love
George”

John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew of the 882nd, marveled at the scrounging abilities of his bombardier, 1/Lt Lynn “Doc” Grow: “Doc went on a moonlight requisitioning spree with colossal results. He borrowed a jeep, drove the jeep into a borrowed landing craft, piloted it over to Tinian, and came back with two 15 x 20 tarps, some lumber, 55 lbs of boneless choice merchant marine steak and a smoked ham. We had a steak fry [tonight] that will do for some very long pleasant memories. And we're building a shack on the line with the tarps and lumber – a place to store guns.”

2/Lt Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st again didn't have much to do today. “Went up to the airplane and it's nearly ready for the mission to Nagoya tomorrow. Will be glad to be doing something again. It's rumored that we have to have 300 hours of combat time before we can go home or approximately 25 missions. Sure hope we make it. ...”

The Gray crew (#232) of the 882nd Squadron flew a brand-new F-13A, the photo recon variant of the B-29, in to Saipan today. Obviously, this plane did not remain with the 500th.

16 Dec 44

The Nagoya mission scheduled for today was rescheduled for tomorrow, probably due to weather, but before the day was out it was postponed again, to the 18th.
Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron helped the EM clean guns this afternoon. That was before the mission was postponed. Afterwards, he went over to East (Kagman) Field and the 30th Bomb Group (B-24’s) to visit some friends.

The McNamer crew of the 881st test flew their new Z-7, 42-63486, today. The old Z-7, 42-24680, had been badly shot up over Tokyo on 3 Dec and was still under repair... and when she returned to duty, it would be with a reassignment to the 882nd and a new designation and name, Z-37, “Belle Ruth”. The new 63486 had been brought to Saipan by the Mather crew (#108) of the 881st, arriving on 10 Dec. McNamer and crew had her up today for three hours, checking out all systems and making a bomb run on “a Japanese volcano”, probably meaning one of the Japanese-held volcanic islands in the northern Marianas. According to radar operator Sgt Jack Heffner, everything on the new plane worked well except for the radar.

17 Dec 44

Today was Sunday and Bob Copeland went to church. “... I've never seen such a large crowd before. The going is getting a little rougher over Japan and it's having a profound effect on everyone.” The big crowd certainly had something to do with the mission scheduled tomorrow to Nagoya, which had quickly developed a reputation as a tough target.

The mission briefing took place this evening. The target was the Mitsubishi Aircraft Works, a different target than the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory which was hit on the 13th. The Engine Factory was located in the northeastern quadrant of Nagoya, while the Aircraft Works was in the dock area of Nagoya, at the northeast corner of Ise Bay. Despite the different locations, the axis of approach to the target for the 500th would be roughly the same as last time, which meant it would be upwind again, hanging them once more up in the sky for anti-aircraft gun practice. Probably few of those scheduled for the mission slept well tonight.

18 Dec 44

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing went back to Nagoya but to a different target, the Mitsubishi Aircraft Works in the dock area of Nagoya at the northeast corner of Ise Bay, Target #194. This was another daylight, high-altitude mission. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 24 aircraft for this mission, organized into two combat squadrons as follows:

**First squadron**
Z-42, “Supine Sue”, Moreland/Mullen  
Z-22, “Leading Lady”, Hurlbutt  
Z-50, “Fancy Detail”, Gregg  
Z-41, “The Baroness”, Barron  
Z-47, “Adam’s Eve”, Amos  
Z-43, Cheney  
Z-6, “Draggin’ Lady”, Taylor  
Z-23, “Ramblin Roscoe”, Hays  
Z-26, Parsons  
Z-21, “Devils' Delight”, Pierce  
Z-30, “Slick Dick”, LaMarche

**Second squadron**
Z-5, “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, Luman/Reeve  
Z-8, Fitzgerald  
Z-3, “Snafu-perfot”, Samuelson  
Z-4, “Black Magic”, Oswald  
Z-9, “Nina Ross”, Hatch  
Z-1, “Pee Wee”, Bricker
Leading the Group today was Lt Col Marcus Mullen, formerly Group Operations Officer but due to the loss of Col King on 3 Dec now Acting Group Deputy Commander. Mullen flew with Capt Charles Moreland and crew in Z-42. Moreland was leading the first squadron; deputy leader was Maj Wilbur “Barney” Hulrbutt in Z-22. Leading the second squadron was 881st Squadron CO, Lt Col Ralph “Pete” Reeve, flying with Maj Robert Luman and crew in Z-5; deputy leader was Maj Robert Fitzgerald in Z-8.

Bomb load was 10 x 500 lb M64 General Purpose bombs in the rear bomb bay. Ammo load was a full 6,000 rounds of .50 caliber, plus 120 rounds for the 20mm cannon. Fuel load was 8,000 gallons, including two auxiliary tanks in the forward bomb bay.

Take-off was from 0713 to 0741. Z-6 (Taylor crew), "Draggin' Lady", had magneto trouble and did not take off, so only 23 planes made it airborne, 10 in the first squadron and 13 in the second.

As the Fitzgerald crew entered their plane, Z-8, this morning, they were greeted by a “God Bless You” written on the nose wheel hatch by the ground crew, and as they took off at 0729 there was the 500th Group Chaplain, Father George Hickey, standing off to the side as usual, blessing each plane as it headed down the runway. Extra gestures such as this definitely boosted the morale of the air crews. As AC 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson took off in Z-3, he mentally noted that today was his third anniversary in the Army. Coincidentally, it was also the third anniversary in service for his copilot, 2/Lt Jack “Marty” Martinson.

The 500th was third in the Wing order of take-off for this mission but would not exactly be third over the target. The Wing was trying something new today, two different routes to Japan and two different approaches to the target. The 498th and 500th Groups were to follow Route A to Japan and approach the target from due east. This was the upwind run. The 499th and 497th Groups would follow Route B and approach the target from almost due west. This was the downwind run. An upwind bomb run allowed the bombardiers plenty of time to identify the target and make course corrections. However, it also left the planes hanging over the target much longer and made them easier targets for AA. The downwind run left the planes over the target for a mercifully minimum period of time, but it also hurried the bombardiers and sometimes did not leave them enough time to make corrections. In case you’re wondering about a crosswind run, the winds at normal B-29 bombing altitudes of 25,000 feet and above were usually so strong, sometimes in excess of 200 mph, that even the famed Norden bomb sight could not effectively compensate. It had to be upwind or downwind.

The tactic of approaching the target from opposite directions was evidently intended to confuse and disperse the Japanese defenses. Whether that worked or not is unknown, but it also potentially subjected the B-29’s to confusion and danger. The chance of head-on collisions was theoretically eliminated by staggering the bombing altitudes of each Group by a thousand feet, but in practice some planes always straggled. Then there was the risk of bombs falling on the lower Groups from the higher ones. But Wing evidently felt the risk was worth it.

The two squadrons from the 500th assembled in good order just north of Marpi Point, but each quickly lost a plane. Z-30, LaMarche crew, of the first squadron, developed a severe oil leak in #3 engine, and Z-29, Savage crew, of the second squadron had to abort because of syncope, or fainting, on the part of the copilot, who was usually 2/Lt Leonard Hughes. In order not to totally waste his bombs, LaMarche flew down to still Japanese-held Rota Island between Tinian and Guam and unloaded there.

The remaining 21 planes, now nine in the first squadron and twelve in the second, headed off toward Japan at an altitude of 1000 feet. After about three-and-a-half hours the Group approached a weather front and it was apparently decided to start the climb at that point to get above it. According to 2/Lt Clifford Smith, flight engineer on the Bricker crew in Z-1, the climb was started early because of headwinds which “caused a miscalculation on
the proper time to climb to altitude.” Smith added that climbing early meant more time at altitude, which would consume more fuel. Fuel would be of vital importance to Smith on this mission, as we shall see.

The first squadron came out of the clouds at about 5,000 feet a little dispersed but quickly reformed and continued the climb. They also picked up here a tenth plane, Z-7, McNamer crew, which had become separated from the second squadron. (Radar operator Jack Heffner noted in his diary that their new Z-7 was a very fast ship, which accounts for the ease in overtaking the first squadron.) As Z-7 was joining the first squadron, Z-43, Cheney crew, was leaving it, temporarily at least. Z-43 simply could not keep up in the climb but stubbornly stayed in sight and was able to catch up with the squadron when it leveled off.

When the second squadron began its climb, the formation was a little ragged and several planes did not see the signal. As a result, when the second squadron broke out of the overcast, only seven planes – Z-5, Z-8, Z-4, Z-9, Z-1, Z-2 and Z-24 – were still with the leader. Z-7, as we have seen, had joined the first squadron. The other four planes – Z-3, Z-25, Z-28 and Z-49 – became separated and proceeded to Japan on their own. Regarding the seven-plane main force, the mission critique states, “The formation of the seven planes was not too good. They seemed to be waiting for the other five planes to catch up and take their original positions, so several slots were left open. Radio silence was broken by Col. Reeve to get them into close formation, and then it was OK.”

There was a planned step in the climb at 18,000 feet for 15 minutes, then the ascent resumed. Bombing altitude for today’s mission was a very high 32,000 feet, and the heavily laden B-29’s labored to get there. The wind didn’t help. According to the critique for the first squadron, “as the climb progressed, stronger winds were encountered and the drift increased steadily. … Strong winds were encountered at the 20,000’ level and the lead plane ended up crabbing enough to kill 40 degrees drift from the west.”

The strain on the engines was too much for some. Before landfall, Z-5, lead plane of the second squadron, blew a cylinder in #1 engine and had to drop out. Lt Col Reeve turned the lead over to Maj Fitzgerald in Z-8. The Group critique indicates that there was some confusion over this change: “Fitzgerald in #8 was asked if his radar was working and if he could take over the lead, his answer was negative.” Oswald in #4 was also asked and his reply was also negative because his radar was not on and he did not know whether it worked or not. Reeve left the lead without knowing who was going to take over and so Fitzgerald took the lead.” Now only six planes remained in the second squadron formation. This squadron hit the Japanese coast about 50 miles to the right of scheduled landfall and from there made a left turn toward the IP.

Another second squadron plane that started having trouble at this time was Z-1, Bricker crew. This was a new crew in a new plane, which they had affectionately dubbed “Pee Wee”. Both crew and plane would be put to the test today. Flight engineer Cliff Smith wrote later, “At altitude our troubles began. No. 1 engine developed a turbo-surge, No. 3 developed an extremely high oil temperature (135 degrees C) with a consequent low oil pressure and No. 4 stuck on 2400 RPM.” But they managed to stay with the formation.

The first squadron was battling the same problems. At least their navigation was good; they hit the Japanese coast at the briefed point. The #4 prop governor on Z-23, Hays crew, stuck at 2275 rpm, but they stayed in formation and completed the mission. Also at about this time the #3 engine on Z-26, Parsons crew – another new crew in a new plane – began to act up and they fell rapidly behind. Soon finding themselves alone over Japan and with a balky engine, they dropped their bombs on a last resort target, a fishing village, and scooted for home. This left nine planes in the first squadron to make the bomb run.

Meanwhile, the four planes which had become separated from the second squadron were having their individual adventures. When Z-3 came out of the weather, the Samuelson crew could see only two other B-29’s, so they linked up with them to make a small formation and continued toward Japan. Everything then went well until they got up to 31,000 feet, at which point “Snafu-perfort” lived up to her name once again. The #4 turbo supercharger went out and they fell behind. Samuelson briefly considered continuing alone, but their windows were now also badly iced up, so he decided against it. They dumped their bombs on a small island and headed for home. Z-49, Feathers crew, also lost its #4 turbo supercharger and aborted. Z-25, Van Trigt crew, and Z-28, Gerwick crew, both made it to Japan but attacked targets of opportunity. Z-25 bombed Mamamatsu Airfield southeast of Nagoya, and Z-28 unloaded on a naval station at Yokosuka, just south of Yokohama.
About halfway between landfall and the IP, the radar on Z-42, leading the first squadron, failed, so Moreland and Mullen in Z-42 switched positions with the deputy lead, Maj Hurlbutt in Z-22. Good thing too, because when they reached the IP the cloud cover was complete, so the bomb run had to be made by radar. According to the Group critique, “Hurlbutt took a few short turns to get on the bomb run heading but this was because the Navigator [that would be 2/Lt Ken Fine] failed to recognize the IP and overran it to some extent.” In the navigator's defense, there were several complaints in the post-mission comments about the poor selection of the IP. In any case, these turns caused the formation to loosen up a little.

At this time the nine planes remaining in the first squadron formation were in a V of V’s. Z-22, Hurlbutt, was in the lead, with Z-42, Moreland, in the No. 2 position on the right wing, with Z-50, Gregg, on the left wing. Leading the second (right) element was Z-41, Barron, with Z-47, Amos, on the right wing and Z-43, Cheney, on the left. The third (left) element was led by Z-23, Hays, with Z-7, McNamer, on his right wing and Z-21, Pierce, on his left.

Fighter opposition began at about the IP and continued thru the target area. The first squadron reported 21 attacks and the second squadron 14. Most firing passes were made from the forward quadrants, between 10 and 2 o'clock, but were generally uncoordinated and ineffective. Two fighters came in on Z-8 from 11 o'clock low with their guns winking, but they missed. The only damage reported from fighters was on Z-2, which was hit in the #2 nacelle by a 20mm round which damaged the wheel and tire.

Two B-29 gunners made claims. The ring gunner on the Hays crew in Z-23, Sgt August A. "Mike" Michelsen, put a good burst into a Tojo, which began smoking and went out of control. The tail gunner, Cpl Kiolen Crider, reported that he saw the fighter spin all the way to the ground and explode. However, bombardier Hal Towner was of the opinion that the claim would not be confirmed. The other claim was damage to an Irving by the tail gunner on Z-50, probably Sgt Paul Haught, with the 20mm cannon.

Flak was rated meager and was mostly well below the formations, but some bursts came too close for comfort. Bob Copeland in Z-8 heard one shell burst underneath his plane with a “Whump!” But the only plane actually hit by flak was Z-24, which came back with about a three-inch hole in the underside of the right wing.

The bomb run for the first squadron was seven minutes in duration (or only three, if you believe the mission summary), which was better than the last mission but still too long. AC Hugh McNamer in fast, new Z-7 had to deploy his cowl and wing flaps to keep from outrunning the formation. According to the Group Radar Officer's report, this squadron "came into the target [to the] right of course. There was a momentary break in the clouds and the bombardier in the lead aircraft [that would be 1/Lt Glen Aitken in Z-22] was able to make a visual correction, and it is believed that the bombs from this squadron hit the target." All planes dropped together at 1438 from 31,550 feet, 90 bombs in all, 22.5 tons, but due to the undercast no impacts were observed.

Due to navigational and other problems, the six planes remaining in the second squadron were running 30-40 minutes behind the first. The formation was a little loose as it began the bomb run. Leading was still Fitzgerald in Z-8, with Z-9, Hatch, on his right wing and Z-4, Oswald, on the left. The right element was composed of only two planes – Z-1, Bricker, leading, and Z-2, McGuire, trailing on his left wing. The sixth plane, Z-24, Tackett, was straggling over in the left element position, about 100 feet below the formation.

When the second squadron reached the IP, there was still extensive cloud cover, so a radar approach was initiated. However, after about six minutes on the bomb run there was a break in the clouds and the last three minutes were done visually. The strong winds from the west reduced the ground speed of the B-29's to an estimated 111 mph. While on this run Bob Copeland in Z-8 overheard an AC in another Group order his crew to bail out because their plane was on fire. When the squadron finally reached the release point at 1512, five planes dropped their 50 bombs totaling 12.5 tons from 31,100 feet. The Group Radar Officer's report says that this squadron "had a perfect Radar approach to the target. Just before reaching the target the Bombardier in the lead aircraft of this squadron [probably 1/Lt Vincent Caufield in Z-8] had a good view of the target. He made some refinement of his rate and centered the bubbles in his bombsight and the bombs of this squadron hit the target.” The bomb bay doors on the sixth plane, Z-2, McGuire crew, would not open, so she did not drop. The crew were able to jettison the bombs later at sea.
Bomb damage assessment revealed five impacts by 500th Group planes in the target factory area, plus 20 hits on nearby docks. Overall Wing assessment was that 30 percent of the target was destroyed.

Withdrawal from the target area was by a left turn, which was supposed to be made slowly so that the formation could stay together. This was accomplished well in the first squadron, but in the second "the airspeed increased to 210 before Fitzgerald recognized it and this was immediately reduced to 185. Formation was OK then. Formation was held until just outside of Ise Bay and then started to break up (this was too soon)." All planes made it out to sea safely, but there was still a lot of ocean between them and home, and not all would make it.

As they left the Empire, flight engineer Cliff Smith in Z-1 started what should have been a routine transfer of the remaining 600-700 gallons of fuel in the bomb bay tanks to the wing tanks. This was especially important because the #4 engine was still stuck at 2400 rpm and was rapidly eating up the fuel in the #4 fuel tank. Copilot 2/Lt Kenneth R. Chidester tried reducing the rpm's on #4 by repeatedly hitting the prop feathering button. This worked for a while, until the feathering motor burned out. Now they had no means to feather that engine. Meanwhile, Smith made the dismaying discovery that the fuel pumps did not work. He tried #1 fuel pump but it quickly burned out, then he tried #2 and it burned out too. Probably what had happened was that moisture in the fuel had collected at the low points around the pumps, then had frozen due to the very cold temperatures at 30,000 feet. With no working fuel pumps, there was now no way to transfer precious fuel from either the bomb bay tanks or the center wing tank. They had only what was in the wing engine tanks, and that wasn't enough... not near enough. Smith gave his AC, Capt Linden Bricker, the bad news. They wouldn't make it back. They would have to ditch.

Soon the #4 fuel tank ran dry and the prop began windmilling, creating severe drag and impeding their progress still further. Bricker sensibly decided to ditch before dusk, while there was still light. But they also needed to let others know of their plight. Another B-29 was visible in the distance, so Bricker got on the VHF channel and tried to contact it and any other friendly planes in the vicinity. There was no answer at first on radio, so the crew resorted to Aldis lamp, and Bricker even waggled his wings and made other maneuvers to draw attention. Finally, radio contact was established with two B-29's, Z-9, Hatch crew, and Z-4, Oswald crew. In the meantime the Bricker crew started getting their survival gear together and throwing out thru the bomb bay anything that might become a dangerous flying object when they hit the water. Smith strapped on his web belt with canteen, first aid packet and knife, then put on his Mae West over that. He also had his one-man life raft, a flashlight, a .45 pistol in a water-proof bag, two boxes of K rations, three apples, and a few more miscellaneous items.

Hatch gave Bricker the bearing and approximate distance to the nearest lifeguard submarine, and Bricker turned onto that heading as he started descending rapidly toward the water. Hatch and Oswald sacrificed their altitude and followed him down from about 17,000 feet. The Bricker crew took up their ditching positions and prepared for impact.

At this time there was insufficient experience with ditchings to empirically determine the best positions. In general, everyone agreed that it was best to face rearward with your back braced against a bulkhead. But which bulkhead was best? And was it safer in the front of the plane or in the rear? Theoretically, the flight engineer had one of the best positions; he was already facing rearward and could exit thru the window right next to him. But in practice it might be different. Smith had heard of a previous ditching in which the flight engineer broke both his legs, so he kept his feet out of the boot well and put them out to the right. He used his A-3 bag and flying jacket as padding behind his head and shoulders. He was nervous and scared but then he prayed, promising to be a better person. "Immediately a warm glow came over me, and I had the feeling that everything would turn out all right for me."

The tail gunner also had an excellent ditching position, facing backwards and with an exit window right at his elbow. But some tail gunners did not like the idea of facing possible death all alone in their tiny compartment. Tail gunner Cpl Stephen Darienzo on the Bricker crew left his position and went forward into the radar room, where he joined navigator 2/Lt Jay Meikle, who had crawled back from the forward compartment, and radar operator Sgt Richard Grinstead. The three men sat against the bulkhead which separated the gunners compartment and the radar compartment. Bombardier 2/Lt Jack Mueller had also come to the rear but opted to sit all alone in the rear unpressurized compartment against the bulkhead to the radar compartment. Being in the rear unpressurized compartment had the advantage of being nearer to two exits -- the regular door on the right side of the plane and the emergency hatch on the upper left side of the plane behind the putt-putt. The three
waist gunners, Cpl's John Estes, William Frank and Emory Forrest, remained in their compartment, sitting against the bulkhead to the rear bomb bay. This aircraft was equipped with the new cross braces on the bulkhead door, which were supposed to prevent it from collapsing as had happened on earlier models. Radio operator Sgt Edmund “Smitty” Smith remained at his position to continue to communicate until the last minute, at which time he quickly moved over to the empty navigator's seat and faced aft. All crew members who were able padded their backs, shoulders and heads with extra clothing, parachutes or whatever they could find and braced strongly against the bulkheads. Airplane commander Bricker and copilot Chidester of course had to remain in their seats facing forward and guide the plane into the water. All they could do was tighten their seat belts.

Observing from above, Hatch thought that Bricker made a good approach for the ditching. Cliff Smith on board Z-1 felt the plane tap the water lightly once, then there was a sudden loud crashing stop like hitting a brick wall. The front compartment was under water almost immediately. Smith waited until the plane's forward momentum slowed a bit before clambering out his emergency exit, the flight engineer's window, because he feared being swept back into the #3 propeller. Then he swam to the surface and climbed onto the right wing. He was soon joined there by copilot Chidester, who had managed to exit thru the copilot's window but in doing so had picked up a nasty gash in his leg. Both men were dazed and had trouble opening the compartment on the side of the fuselage that held a large life raft and other survival gear. Smith handed Chidester his one-man life raft that he had brought out of the plane and started to climb across the top of the bomber to try to open the compartment on the other side, but as he did so he was caught by a large wave and swept into the water. Smith frantically tried to inflate his Mae West by using the CO2 inflating cartridges but neither one worked, and he was too out of breath to blow it up manually. By this time he had drifted beyond the tail of the plane but Chidester, who had finally managed to extract the life raft from the side compartment, saw that Smith was in trouble, quickly inflated the raft, paddled out to get him and pulled him in. Smith always credited his friend Chid for saving his life.

From above, Hatch watched Z-1 plow into the water and saw the tail break off “approximately aft of the radar compartment”, though it remained attached to the rest of the plane by wires and cables for a few minutes. The break-off of the tail, combined with the weight of the engines, caused the front compartment to dip below the surface of the water, with the main part of the plane being held up at an angle by the empty wing tanks. The tail section sank in about three minutes. Hatch could see some survivors getting out of the plane and climbing into life rafts, but he couldn't tell how many.

There were actually seven survivors. In addition to Cliff Smith and Chidester, the other two men remaining in the front compartment had made it out, though it looked iffy for a few moments. The nose of the plane had broken open, and when Bricker released his seat belt he was washed back against the gun turret, which had shifted forward upon impact. When he pulled himself back to his seat, he found his window jammed shut, but he was able to make it out thru the copilot's window, swim to the surface and inflate his Mae West. Bricker then swam around to the left side of the plane and climbed onto the wing to try to release the raft on that side. Radio operator Ed Smith was washed around the front compartment by the swirling water but managed to make it out thru the engineer's window and swim to the #3 engine, where he clung for dear life to the propeller.

The three men in the radar compartment were all thrown into the water thru the opening where the tail broke off but were not seriously injured. Darienzo and Grinstead were actually washed into the tail section, where they found the bombardier Mueller, whose feet were entangled in some wires. They freed him and helped him out the emergency exit. Mueller then dived or fell into the water. Grinstead saw him come up and seem to start swimming but then Grinstead turned to do something else and lost sight of the bombardier, and Mueller was not seen again after that. It was suspected that he had broken his back in the ditching. The two enlisted men then made their own escape from the tail section.

Nothing was seen of the three gunners in the central compartment. Cliff Smith observed that that section was crumpled and broken and appeared to be gutted. The additional cross braces had not prevented the pressure bulkhead from giving way. Smith believed that the men inside had probably been badly injured or killed by the impact.

The four men who died in the ditching of Z-1 were:

2/Lt Jack O. Mueller, B
Cpl John C. Estes, RG
Cpl William F. Frank, LG
Cpl Emory A. Forrest, Ring G

Chidester and Cliff Smith in their raft picked up Meikle, Grinstead and Darienzo from the water. Meanwhile, Bricker had succeeded in freeing the raft from the left side of the fuselage and apparently picked up Ed Smith, who was still hanging onto the #3 propeller. The men then paddled the two rafts out far enough so that they would not be sucked down when the main section of the plane sank, which it did in about 30 minutes.

Circling above, Hatch in Z-9 and Oswald in Z-4 had calculated the exact position. Hatch contacted the closest life guard submarine and passed them the coordinates. He also dropped an extra life raft and two emergency kits. Oswald dropped another raft and a "Gibson Girl" emergency transmitter. It does not appear however that the Bricker crew was able to retrieve any of those items. Running low on fuel and with darkness imminent, the two B-29's turned and headed for Saipan. They had done everything they could for their friends below.

As darkness fell down on the water, the seven survivors of the Bricker crew began to feel very lonely. They tied the two rafts together so they would not become separated but did so too tightly at first. The rubber rafts began abrading each other with the wave action, so the lines were loosened. They evened the load out with four men in one raft and three in the other, then took inventory of their situation. Each man still had his web belt with canteen, knife, etc. Four men had pistols and three had saved flashlights. Cliff Smith had hung onto his jungle vest containing various survival items. Meikle had saved his navigation log and charts by stuffing them inside his flight suit. Ed Smith had very importantly rescued a flare gun and a box of flares. Darienzo had tried to retrieve the Gibson Girl transmitter before exiting the plane but it was firmly pinned in place by something so he had to leave it. All the men were suffering from mild shock but most had only superficial injuries. The most serious wound was the deep cut in Chidester's leg. They applied first aid to each other and settled down as best they could for a long, cold night bobbing up and down on the waves. Most soon became seasick.

All other planes on the mission made it back home safely, but not without some tense moments. Z-23, Hays crew, had to fly all the way home on three engines. So did Z-3, Samuelson crew, and Z-49, Feathers crew, both of which had made it almost to Japan before being forced to abort.

As Samuelson was beginning his landing approach at Isley, both he and his copilot were blinded and disoriented by the sudden and unexpected glare of searchlights, but they managed to recover in time to set the plane down OK. The time of landing was 2025. But the excitement wasn't over. Just as they turned off the runway, "one of the enlisted men gave a yell. Two planes were coming in for a landing and one was only a few feet under the other. The plane on top went on in for a landing and the other veered off to the right. What happened next made many a stomach turn for we could see he was in trouble and couldn't climb to circle the field again. The huge silver ship hit the road, tore up two tents, crashed into a supply shack and left a trail of wreckage for two hundred yards. The wings of the plane were broken and the fuselage was twisted like a cruller. In all, the wreck looked more like a junk yard than an airplane. Here's the pay-off; all men on the crew walked away from it except one. He had a broken leg. God must have been with them on that landing for one look at the remains of the bomber and you'd think it impossible that anyone lived." Records indicate that this plane was T-47, 42-24649, "Miss Tittymouse", of the 498th Bomb Group, Turcotte crew.

Later tonight, Samuelson heard about Bricker's ditching. This news hit hard in the 881st Squadron "for Bricker is well liked by all of us."

When Z-2 touched down at 2145, she had a little difficulty due to the damage to the left tire from fighter fire, but AC Capt Tull McGuire kept her under control. The last two planes to land tonight were good Samaritans Z-9 and Z-4, at 2230 and 2245, respectively. For reasons unknown, Z-4 landed at Tinian.

While most of the Group was involved with the Nagoya mission today, those crews who didn't go had the usual routine tasks to take care of. The Cordray crew of the 882nd Squadron had to test-fly Z-27, which had been repaired from the last mission. While they were at it, they were given an additional task.

1/Lt Frank A. Carrico was an experienced pilot who had plenty of hours in B-25's, B-24's and B-17's. He also had some time in B-29's but none recently. One thing he did not have was a crew. Since assignment to the
500th earlier this year, he had been carrying out staff duties, first as Assistant Squadron Operations Officer, later as Acting Group Gunnery Officer. But then Carrico got a new assignment.

AC 1/Lt Edwin P. Schmitz had been lost on 13 Dec while on an orientation flight with the Grise crew. Now his crew, #241, was without an AC, and the command did not feel that his copilot, 2/Lt Morris M. “Robby” Robinson, had enough experience to take over. Their solution was to assign Carrico as AC. This put Carrico in an awkward position. An air crew was like a close family, and Robinson was well liked. Carrico would inevitably be regarded as an interloper by many in the crew. But orders were orders.

Whatever the case, Carrico would need a quick refresher course in flying a B-29, so today he went with Cordray to get in some practice. According to Cordray’s right gunner John Ciardi, Carrico “did a good job and pulled a couple of top flight landings.”

Ciardi devoted a long paragraph in his diary today to promotions, or rather the lack thereof. Most of the enlisted men in the 500th were long overdue, and they resented it. Ciardi himself was only a Sgt, but as a CFC gunner (MOS 580), he could be confident of making S/Sgt and eventually T/Sgt. By the TO & E (Table of Organization & Equipment), the other gunners could only go as far as Sgt (MOS 611) or S/Sgt (MOS’s 748 and 1685). But tail gunner Clyde Salaz and radar operator Alton Blakely were currently stuck at Sgt along with Ciardi, and left gunner Richard “Tiger” Johnson and ring gunner T.J. Moore were only Cpl’s. Promotions meant more money but they also represented a validation of worth, and their lack could seriously impact morale.

As for the rest of his time, Ciardi was splitting it between cleaning guns, checking the CFC system and reading Alexander Wolcott.

Three more crews with B-29’s arrived on Saipan today – Hodge (#235) and McClure (#242) of the 882nd Squadron, and Ryan (#347) of the 883rd. Ryan’s B-29, 42-63494, was assigned to the 882nd as the second Z-31, but those brought in by Hodge and McClure were allocated elsewhere.

19 Dec 44

The seven survivors of the Bricker crew were happy to see the eastern sky begin to lighten this morning. They had spent a long, miserable, sleepless night being tossed around on a choppy sea. Water constantly splashed over them and into the rafts, leaving everyone cold and wet. They had to bail all night. Flight engineer Cliff Smith recalled, “I never spent such a cold wet night in my life. I never before got so close to another man to keep warm enough to survive.”

Fortunately, with daylight the wind lessened, the sea calmed a little, and as the sun rose higher in the sky they were able to dry out to some degree. They had ditched not too far from the island of Kita Iwo Jima, which they could see far off in the distance. (Not the same island as the Iwo Jima of Marine Corps fame.) They had been told by Intelligence on Saipan that this island was uninhabited, and their plan was to paddle to it if it looked like they were not going to be picked up. They were lucky it never came to that, because they found out later from Navy Intelligence that the island in fact had a Japanese garrison, and after the war learned further that some of the Japanese garrisons in the Bonins had actually killed and eaten American prisoners.

Capt Bricker inventoried their food and water supplies and estimated that they had enough to last 21 days, so no immediate problem there. Besides, no one felt like eating anything today anyway. The crew rigged a sea anchor to slow the drift from their ditching position. And then it was just wait and hope somebody came for them.

On Saipan first priority for the 500th Bomb Group today was to get some search planes in the air and locate the Bricker crew. There was no shortage of volunteers. Two B-29’s were allocated to the search. Z-8 with 1/Lt Richard Sullivan and crew took off at 0435. Following five minutes later was Z-10, “Punchin’ Judy,” flown by Capt Donald Thompson and crew. Both crews were from the 881st. The planes headed directly for yesterday’s ditching position and began their search patterns from there. They flew low, at only 1,000 feet, but copilot 2/Lt Raymond Rood on the Thompson crew still found it was very difficult to see small objects on the water.

They found the Bricker crew but it took a while. According to Cliff Smith in the rafts, a plane didn’t come over
Until the afternoon, and it only saw them when they fired off a parachute flare which caught the attention of the tail gunner. Smith added that the plane, which turned out to be Z-8, was running low on fuel and was on its last search pass before heading home. That of course is information that Smith must have learned much later after getting back to Saipan. According to the 73rd Bomb Wing Ditching Report, upon locating the rafts Sullivan contacted Thompson, and while Sullivan in Z-8 orbited overhead and kept sending position data as long as he could, Thompson in Z-10 contacted the lifeguard submarine and shuttled back and forth between the sub and the rafts to try to guide the former to the latter. Unfortunately, it was getting late in the day and the B-29’s were running short of fuel. By the time they had to leave, the submarine still had not reached the rafts.

Before departing, Thompson dropped a written message by parachute to the men in the rafts. When they retrieved it, it read “Dolly's Folly will arrive at 1700.” Bricker and the others exchanged puzzled glances. What the hell was “Dolly's Folly”? And there was no reason they should have recognized the strange phrase. Whoever on the Thompson crew wrote that note had made a mistake. “Dolly's Folly” had been the cover-name for the lifeguard submarine stationed near Nachijo Shima on the 13 Dec mission. But the cover-name for that sub had been changed for 18 Dec to “Polluted.” (American communications security personnel tried to select words with one or more L's in them as pass-words, call-words, cover-names, etc., because most Japanese had trouble pronouncing that letter.) The Bricker crew had not been on the 13 Dec mission – 18 Dec was their first -- and therefore had not attended the 13 Dec briefing, so they had never heard of “Dolly's Folly.”

Z-10 flew off and the Bricker crew was left to to ponder the mystery. All they could do was to wait for 1700 to see what would develop. That hour came and went, but nothing arrived except dusk. The crew began to fear they would have to endure another long, cold night on the ocean. But then they heard something, a low throbbing. Gradually it grew louder. It sounded like a ship, but was it one of ours or one of theirs? After a brief debate, the men decided to risk shooting off a flare. A few minutes later they could make out some sort of vessel approaching at fairly high speed, but it was now too dark to make an identification. It could be a submarine but they weren’t sure, and anyway how do you tell a Japanese sub from an American sub in the dark? Those men who still had their .45’s pulled them out and chambered a round. Then a voice, a beautifully American voice, called out over the water, “Can you handle a line?”

Joy and relief swept over the men in the rafts. Salvation! The sailors on the USS Spearfish quickly hauled the seven men in and hustled them down the hatches. As soon as everyone was aboard, the submarine was off at flank speed again. While searching for the Bricker crew, the sub had received a message about a second downed B-29 crew, and she was going to try to get them too.

The Spearfish had been searching for the Bricker crew since late the night before. At about 1000 today she had established voice radio contact with one of the searching B-29’s overhead, probably Z-10. According to the Spearfish’s log, a B-24 also showed up to help out with the search. At 1251 the sub received word that the survivors had been sighted, over 100 miles to the east. She immediately went to flank speed to try to reach them before dark, while Capt Thompson in Z-10 shuttled back and forth urging the sub on. As we know, the Spearfish did not reach the downed fliers before dark, but the sub continued searching and saw the flare fired off by the Bricker crew, which was noted in the log at 1736. The pick-up of the crew was recorded at 1807.

The Pharmacist's Mate on the Spearfish examined and treated the airmen's wounds. The bad cut in Ken Chidester's leg was cleaned and stitched up, Darienzo needed a couple of stitches in his buttocks, and Cliff Smith got his cut finger sewn up. The airmen were offered a shot of brandy and given hot soup and a shower. Twenty-two-year-old Cliff Smith had never smoked or drank. He had been active in sports in high school and college and his coaches wouldn't allow it, so when an officer offered him the liquor, he turned it down. "Sir, I don't drink." With that, this worldly old (probably 30) officer said, 'Can't let this go to waste', and quickly drank the whole tumble in one swig.

The submariners gave the B-29 crewmen dry clothing, including underwear, from their personal stocks. Even the sub's Captain, Lt Cdr C. C. Cole, chipped in, giving Cliff Smith a couple of pairs of nice cotton undershorts that lasted him for several years after the war. In return for the clothing, the Navy men took various items of equipment, including even pieces of the rubber rafts, as souvenirs. Souvenirs were definitely in order, for history would record this incident as the first submarine rescue of a downed B-29 crew. By this time the airmen were about to fall over from exhaustion, so it was off to bed. Smith was shown to a top bunk. He gratefully climbed in.
and was out like a light.

While the B-29 men slept, the Spearfish was still looking for that second downed crew, but she would not be successful a second time today.

Meanwhile, Z-8 and Z-10 had made it back safely to Saipan. Z-10 and the Thompson crew landed at 1918. It is not known when Z-8 and the Sullivan crew landed.

This morning on Saipan, while Sullivan and Thompson were out searching for Bricker, the 500th Bomb Group held a detailed critique of yesterday's mission to Nagoya. The record of it is written in a direct and straightforward style and makes for interesting reading, so it is transcribed here in full with some explanatory comments added in italics. There was no signature block with this critique, but it was certainly approved if not authored by the Force Leader, Lt Col Marcus Mullen.

///////////////////////////////// Begin Critique ///////////////////////////////////

CRITIQUE HELD ON MISSION #13

1st Squadron:

Nine planes assembled 10 minutes after the turn onto course from Marpi Pt. The formation was OK while cruising at 1000' until the climb began. There was only a thin overcast above, so no signal to disperse was given when the climb started. [It was SOP for formations to spread out when entering clouds.] The formation broke out of the overcast at about 5000' somewhat spread out, but in a short time was assembled again. Another plane, presumably from the second squadron, came out of the overcast with the first squadron and took its place in the formation. At this point, and during the remainder of the climb, Cheney in #43 lagged behind. So there were 10 planes in the formation during the climb.

[This squadron originally had 11 planes assigned but that number included Z-6, which as previously mentioned failed to take off, and Z-30 (LaMarche), "Slick Dick", which soon developed a bad oil leak in #3 engine and had to abort, dropping its bombs on still Japanese-occupied Rota between Tinian and Guam to get rid of them. The loss of these two planes brought the number down to nine planes. The plane which joined from the second squadron to bring the number back up to ten was Z-7 (McNamer), "Helle's Belle", which had lost its squadron during the climb thru bad weather. Radar operator Jack Heffner noted in his diary that their new Z-7 was a very fast ship, which accounts for the ease in overtaking the first squadron.]

Navigation was OK; as the climb progressed, stronger winds were encountered and the drift increased steadily. At the step in the climb at 18,000', the formation flew level for 15 minutes. Strong winds were encountered at the 20,000' level and the lead plane ended up crabbing enough to kill 40 degrees drift from the west. Landfall was made in good shape.

Nine ships were in formation during the bomb run. [The plane which had dropped out was Z-26, which could not keep up due to a problem with the #3 engine. This was the Parsons crew's first mission. Finding themselves alone over Japan and with a balky engine, they dropped their bombs on a target of opportunity, a fishing village, and scooted for home.] The formation was close until the turn was made into the bomb run, then it became somewhat loose. Half way to the IP, Moreland's radar went out (lead ship). The lead then changed to Hurlbutt, at about the IP. Hurlbutt took a few short turns to get on the bomb run heading but this was because the navigator failed to recognize the IP and overran it to some extent. [In defense of the navigator, there were several complaints in the post-mission comments about the poor selection of the IP.] The turn to the left was quite sharp after the mistake was realized. The bombardier saw the target through a break in the clouds and final correction was made to the right to get on the correct heading.

Bombing altitude was 31,550', airspeed(calibrated) was 190. The bomb run was on radar for about 2-1/2 minutes. The bombardier corrected visually, but the results were unobserved. Bombing was done on a heading
of about 260-265 degrees.

Withdrawal was made by a sharp turn to the left and a decrease in airspeed to 185. The formation stayed well together until dark and then broke up.

Flak in general was below the formation. Fighter attacks were meager. Only five planes were bothered by frosting.

2nd Squadron:

Assembly was good. 12 planes formed at Marpi Pt. Upon reaching the front, the lead ship signaled for the climb but the second element was ahead of the lead element. As a result, when the formation broke out of the overcast, there were only seven planes out of the original 12 that started up. These planes were 24, 1, 5, 8, 4 [plus 2 & 9]. The others were not seen again. The formation of the seven planes was not too good. They seemed to be waiting for the other five planes to catch up and take their original positions, so several slots were left open. Radio silence was broken by Col. Reeve to get them into close formation, and then it was OK.

[There were originally 13 planes assigned to this squadron, but as we have seen, Z-7 joined the first squadron. Z-29 soon aborted due to "pilot sickness", Z-3 turned back due to #4 turbo malfunction; and Z-49 also returned due to a problem with the #4 turbo. This left nine planes.]

The climb was slow, and from 28,000' to 32,000' a few planes began to straggle. The lead plane, #5, blew a cylinder head in #1 engine and was forced to leave the formation. Fitzgerald in #8 was asked if his radar was working and if he could take over the lead. His answer was negative. Oswald in #4 was also asked and his reply was also negative because his radar was not on and he did not know whether it worked or not. Reeve left the lead without knowing who was going to take over and so Fitzgerald took the lead.

[Stragling were Z-25 and Z-28, which bombed targets of opportunity. Then Z-5 aborted, as noted. This left only six planes of the second squadron to reach the target.]

Landfall was made approximately 50 miles to the right of the IP and a left turn was made in order to get on the scheduled route. The bomb run was made on a heading of 262 degrees. The IP was never seen. About six minutes of the bomb run was made by radar entirely, and the last three minutes were made visually. During the visual run final corrections were set in the bomb sight. Radar estimated the wind to be 204 knots per hour, and the ground speed was 111 MPH.

Bomb bay doors were open for 10 minutes. Airspeed was indicated at 190 on the run. 6 ships were over the target. [These were Z-8, Z-9, Z-4, Z-1, Z-2 and Z-24; but Z-2's bomb bay doors would not open, so only five planes dropped on the target.]

Withdrawal was to the left, and the airspeed increased to 210 before Fitzgerald recognized it and this was immediately reduced to 185. Formation was OK then. Formation was held until just outside of Ise Bay and then started to break up (this was too soon).

Flak encountered was right over the target, meager but very accurate. 2 fighters out of range seemed to be directing fire of flak. Heavier flak was encountered by the rear of the formation. McGuire in #2 was struck in #2 nacelle doors by a flak fragment. From 10 to 15 fighters attacked. Fighters seemed to make all their attacks from the inside of the bomb run and turn away from the target.


There was a total of 7 aborts. Of these however, 1 bombed Hachichio Jima (Samuelson #3); one got over the target but could not release his bombs (McGuire #2); and one jettisoned his bombs about fifteen miles inland on
course over Japan (Parsons #26). [Hugh Phillips, a gunner on the Parsons crew, is certain they bombed a fishing village on the coast.] LaMarche [Z-30] bombed Rota, but just to get rid of his bombs; he aborted shortly after take-off.

///////////////////////////////////////////////////////// End Critique //////////////////////////////////////////////////////

2/Lt Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st attended the critique, where he thought the mission was “thoroughly discussed.” He added approvingly, “Col. Dougherty is getting this outfit on the ball.”

2/Lt Ken Fine of the Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd apologized in a letter to his future wife for not writing for the last five days. He explained that he had been busy preparing for yesterday’s mission to Nagoya. Today he just rested, and tonight he went to see an old movie.

Fine had been keeping careful track of his mail. Since arriving on Saipan he had received 63 letters, which was pretty good. Most letters took two weeks or more to reach him but one had made it in only nine days – actually, he pointed out, only eight days due to the International Date Line.

Fine and copilot 2/Lt Felix “Phil” Omilian had been working on a Japanese 40mm gun that someone had found up in the hills. They had cleaned it up and were trying to figure out how it worked.

On the fruit front, the men in Fine’s quonset now had collected several bunches of bananas they were trying to ripen. When ripe, they were very good. Someone had even found some oranges up in the hills.

Fine knew it would probably be after Christmas by the time Marie received this letter, but he wished her Merry Christmas anyway. With the constant balmy weather, it didn’t feel much like Christmas on Saipan.

After he finished the letter, Fine’s night wasn’t quite done. Bombardier Glen Aitken and a friend had been doing some drinking – too much drinking – in the quonset. Fine ended up having to put them both to bed.

20 Dec 44

While the rescued men of the Bricker crew slept, the USS Spearfish had searched unsuccessfully for the second reported ditched B-29 crew for several hours last night. Then a little before midnight Commander Cole decided to submerge to await sunrise. When the warning klaxon was set off as usual before diving, the sudden loud noise jolted 2/Lt Cliff Smith from his deep sleep on a top bunk. Forgetting where he was, he reflexively attempted to sit up, which was prevented by the solid impact of his head with a steel beam overhead. Clearly, life aboard submarines was going to take some getting used to.

Smith was assigned a new place to sleep. He quipped, “They evidently figured I was not smart enough to sleep in a top bunk, so they moved me to the bench in the officers wardroom.” The negative side to sleeping in the wardroom was that Smith couldn’t go to bed until all the officers had finished their business and left. But he would find out that there was a positive side too.

Later today the Bricker crew learned that they would not be getting back to Saipan anytime soon. The Spearfish had a patrol to finish, and she was not going to interrupt it merely for the convenience of some airmen. So the B-29 men were going to have plenty of time to learn about life on a submarine.

The Spearfish searched all day for the other downed crew without success. By 1900 Commander Cole was beginning to suspect that the second report had been a mistaken position for the Bricker crew. But just in case, he would continue the search tomorrow for one more day.

On Saipan there was an air raid alert at 0400 but it turned out to be a false alarm. Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, heard that it was due to a B-24 coming in from Guam with a weak IFF.
(Identification Friend or Foe) signal. Copeland didn't do much today. He helped the gunners clean guns in the morning, did some laundry in the afternoon, and spent most of the evening in a bull session with 2/Lt Ray Clanton, copilot on the Ray Taylor crew of the 881st.

Ken Fine, navigator on the Hurlbutt crew of the 882nd, didn't do anything exciting today either. He had a meeting in the morning and in the afternoon helped clear rocks from the baseball diamond they were laying out. Fine was very tired due to the early air raid alarm and also because he stayed up late last night to put his inebriated buddy Glen Aitken to bed. But his day was brightened by a Christmas card from his fiancee Marie.

On this day the 500th Bomb Group flew its first Weather Strike Missions (for background on WSM's see 5 Dec 44 entry), as recorded in the Group Operations Journal:

“20 Dec 44. First Weather Strike Mission today. Published 500th BG FO #1 served as F.O. Three Sq’s furnishing one (1) A/C. Following is short report on missions. (TARGETS – AICHI A/C FACTORY, NAGOYA, JAPAN.)

[WSM #43] 881st. Capt Taylor flying Z Square 6 [“Draggin’ Lady”] aborted shortly after T/O. #3 engine cut out on T/O. Salvoed bombs 10 miles E of Marpi Point. [The weather observer on this mission was 2/Lt Alexander H. “Ham” Howard. This was the Ray Taylor crew’s first mission and they were lucky they didn’t crash when they lost that engine on take-off.]

[WSM #44] 882nd. Lt. Carrico in A/C #429 [42-63429, Z-29, “Pacific Queen”] reached target which was covered by overcast. No E/A opposition. Little flak (about 4 bursts). Bombed by Radar, obtained pictures. Bomb load was 12 x 500# GP [General Purpose] – 3 x 500# IB [Incendiary Bomb] + 155# M46 [the M46 was a photoflash bomb]. [This was the first mission for both Carrico and his new crew. See 18 Dec 44 entry, last few paragraphs, for background.]

[WSM #45] 883rd. Lt. Clinkscales flew Z Square 42 [“Supine Sue”]. Bombed last resort target (Toyohashi #1 Airfield). Results 1 building afire. 1 building lit up. – Buildings unidentified. E/A opposition was two (2) fighters (exhaust stacks). These did no damage. Flak was very light and inaccurate. Some tracers seen.” [This was the Clinkscales crew’s first mission.]

Sometime today the Charters crew (#357) of the 883rd Squadron arrived on Saipan. They probably flew in on a B-29, but we don’t know that for sure.

21 Dec 44

1/Lt Stanley Samuelson of the 881st Squadron was putting his off-time to good use these days. His talents as an artist were in great demand for the nose art that every crew coveted for their plane. He earned about $2 an hour, or about $50 per job. The only problem was that Samuelson was running out of paint. He regretted not picking up more paint and brushes when he had had the chance in Hawaii.

Samuelson had found a good man to develop the 80 or so pictures he had taken so far. The prints had come out very well and now everyone wanted a set.

Samuelson also noted that Marines were often coming around trying to buy liquor at prices as high as $30 to $40 a bottle. (Officers had regular access to liquor. Enlisted men did not.)

2/Lt Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron got a special treat today. He went with his friends 2/Lt William C. Harrell, Jr., and 2/Lt Raymond Ofiesh, copilot and bombardier respectively on the Oswald crew of the 881st, to visit an acquaintance of Harrell’s on the submarine tender USS Fulton, currently anchored in Saipan’s Tanapag Harbor. They took an LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) out to the tender and were given a tour. Not only that, a torpedoman took them aboard the submarine USS Trigger which was tied up alongside, and the
airmen learned a lot about subs. Copeland was impressed by how crowded the tender and the sub were, but also how clean they were kept. But best of all, on the tender Harrell's friend got them some ice cream, which to Copeland was “the tastiest delicacy I've had since getting on this island.” He also enjoyed another rarity for the men on Saipan, cold water from a drinking fountain.

Another flier who was learning how well the Navy ate was 2/Lt Clifford Smith on the submarine Spearfish. The benefit Smith acquired by sleeping in the submarine's wardroom was a closer association with the colored cook, who seemed to take a liking to the young officer from Missouri. One night after everyone else had left the wardroom but before Smith lay down to sleep, the cook asked him, "Lieutenant Smith, would you like some peaches and ice cream before you turn in?" Assuming that there had been a few leftovers from dinner, Smith said yes. He then watched in surprise as the cook proceeded to open a huge gallon can of peaches. And so it went, great food day after day. Smith would gain 15 pounds in the time he was on the Spearfish. But he never resented the way the submariners were fed in comparison with the subsistence food the airmen got on Saipan. As he would see amply demonstrated over the next few weeks, submarine service was demanding and dangerous, and these undersea sailors, volunteers every one, deserved every perk they got.

The 500th Bomb Group flew its next set of Weather Strike Missions today. From the Group Operations Journal:

“Today's WX Strike Mission was run by the 883d Sq alone. Results of participating A/C are listed below:

[WSM #46] Z Sq 50 ["Fancy Detail"] – Major Adams took off at 0405 Z [1405 Saipan time] and reached target (KANEGAFUCHI SPINNING MILL, TOKYO). Bombs released and 2 fires seen from a distance. One enemy fighter tracked for 10 min. over target – did not see. Used Radar scope. Flak was moderate [to] heavy & accurate behind. No damage sustained. Bombing was accomplished from 25,500 ft. Great many searchlights. Could see to read in plane.

[WSM #47] Z Sq 52 ["20th Century Sweetheart"] – Capt irby took off at 0702 Z [1702 Saipan time]. Found small opening in coverage over target. Impacts were observed but immediate coverage prevented crew from seeing results. No E/A were encountered. No flak was encountered. Bombing altitude was 27,000 ft. No searchlights were seen. I.P. Was not used as Radar went out. – No Radar Scope pictures. Ship was in flight 16 hours, 22 minutes.

[WSM #48] Z Sq 51 ["Tail Wind"] – Capt Mahoney – Encountered 10/10 [complete] coverage over target. Radar pressurization went out. Loran [long-range navigation system] was out. Both scopes out [probably meaning both radar operator's and navigator's]. Bombed on D.R. [dead reckoning] No opposition of any kind.”

The Reeves crew (#229) of the 882nd Squadron made it to Saipan today. They probably came in on a B-29, possibly 42-63487, which would become the second Z-30, but available records do not confirm this.

This evening there was a briefing for another mission to Nagoya. This time they would go back to the target they had attacked on 13 Dec, the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory, Target #193. This was expected to be another tough mission.

22 Dec 44

On this day, for the third straight time, the 73rd Bomb Wing went to Nagoya, hoping to complete the destruction of the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Factory. Once again, two Groups would bomb downwind and the other two Groups would bomb upwind, and once again, the 500th Bomb Group drew the upwind run, which was the more dangerous because it left the planes hanging over the target longer.

This was supposed to be another maximum effort, but the 500th could only schedule 14 planes, and only from the 881st and 882nd Squadrons. The 883rd was completely occupied at this time with Wing-required weather
strike missions.

Two of the scheduled 14 planes, Z-10 (Thompson), "Punchin' Judy", and Z-23 (Hays), "Ramblin Roscoe", had last-minute problems which scratched them from take-off. Another plane, Z-27 (Cordray), "Heavenly Body", also had problems but managed to get them fixed and took off later with the 497th Group (which was one of the Groups making the downwind run). All this left only eleven planes airborne in the 500th Group combat squadron.

Designated Group leader was Group Commander Lt Col John Dougherty, riding in Z-30 (LaMarche), "Slick Dick".

Take-off was from 0656 to 0706. Bomb load was 11 x 500 lb M76 incendiary bombs.

As the planes droned their long way toward Japan, their number grew even smaller. First, Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Belle", dropped out due to a turbo malfunction. Then Z-25 (Van Trigt), "American Beauty", developed oil leaks in #2 and #3 engines and had to turn back. Then successively Z-30 (LaMarche), "Slick Dick"; Z-3 (Jackson), "Snafu-perfort"; and Z-31 (McClure), "Homing De-Vice", aborted for various mechanical reasons. By the time landfall was made, only six planes were still in formation.

Fortunately, navigation was good and the small formation was only five miles off the planned course when it hit the Japanese coast. As they headed toward the IP, the six planes tightened up their formation, well aware that Japanese fighters were attracted by stragglers and smaller formations.

When Lt Col Dougherty and Z-30 had to drop out, tactical command fell to Maj Robert Fitzgerald in Z-4, "Black Magic". It was evidently Fitzgerald who out of concern over the vulnerability of his small formation made the tactical decision to bomb from 32,000 feet instead of the assigned 27,000 feet. It was hoped the increased altitude would be above the effective ceiling of most Japanese interceptors.

The Group was able to pick up the IP (southern end of Lake Biwa, east of Nagoya) through the clouds, but then the undercast became complete all the way to the target and the bomb run had to be made entirely by radar.

As the formation approached the target area, 1/Lt Stanley Pierce in Z-21, "Devils' Delight", was in the lead. Probably there was a problem with Z-4's radar, as Fitzgerald had dropped back to deputy lead position, on Pierce's right wing. On Pierce's left wing was Z-2 (Brown), "20th Century Limited". Leading the second element, to the right rear of the first, was Capt Joe Savage in Z-29, "Pacific Queen", with Z-24 (Hodge), "Pride of the Yankees" on his right wing and Z-26 (Parsons) on his left.

The attempt to avoid enemy fighters by bombing from a higher altitude was no successful, as the 500th was hit by about 70 attacks over the target. Z-26 was struck in her #1 engine nacelle and oil tank, and also in her radar dome, while Z-29 took a 20mm round in her astrodome. Fortunately, none of these hits was fatal. In return, 500th gunners claimed one enemy fighter destroyed, two probably destroyed, and four damaged.

Flak over the target was also fairly accurate. Z-24 took a hit in the fuselage behind the putt-putt engine, and Z-29, already struck by fighters, picked up three sizable holes in the vertical stabilizer. (A couple of feet lower and I wouldn't be writing this, as my father was the tail gunner on that plane.)

All six planes successfully dropped their bombs, at about 1436, but results were unobserved due to the cloud cover.

As the formation turned away from the target to the right, the second element fell behind. Parsons in Z-26 was having trouble with both his #1 and #3 engines and could not keep up, so Savage in Z-29 cut his speed to keep the element together for mutual protection.

Fortunately, all planes safely returned to Saipan, landing between 2033 and 2100. However, Z-29 must have
had some control problems, because she had to make an emergency landing that damaged the main gear tires and wheels enough to require their replacement.

While the main 500th formation was being tested over Nagoya, Z-27 (Cordray), "Heavenly Body", was having her own adventure. As you recall, this plane had been delayed on the ground and had taken off with the 497th Group. She made it to the target okay, undergoing several fighter attacks but coming through unscathed. Unfortunately, when she tried to drop her bombs, nothing happened -- rack malfunction. The bombs were successfully jettisoned later and Z-27 safely returned home.

There is interesting story behind Z-27's rack malfunction. John Ciardi, the right gunner, tells it like this:

"Doc [2/Lt Lynn Grow] toggled the bombs out on the lead bombardier and called for verification. I couldn't get my head into the blister to look out. The flak helmet wedged in the way. The problem of the flak helmets being too big to fit into the blisters was a frequent gunner complaint. I ripped it off and looked out: no bombs. But cruising along 50 ft under our open bomb bay doors right down the bomb run was one of the A Square [497th Bomb Group] boys doing a little sightseeing. Doc's warning lights were telling him no bombs had dropped and he was working the toggles hard. I interphoned a stop to that in a hurry. We were carrying 11 500-pounders with instantaneous fuses. If one of them had hit our little friend down below, both of us and a good piece of the nearest elements of the formation would have been making a badly splashed Christmas in and under Nagoya. The miracle was that our bomb releases had frozen tight."

The three weather strike missions flown this day were as follows:

"WSM 49, 50, & 51 were run today by the 883rd Squadron. Target was the OGURA OIL CO, TOKYO. Same bomb load as previous mission. Field Order number is #3-26.

"WSM 49 (Z Sq 41) ["The Baroness"] Capt. Ryan aborted when 2-1/2 hours from target due to use of oil in excess on #4 engine. Bombs were jettisoned and landing was made at 1408 Z [0008 23 Dec Saipan time] on Isley #1. Observations on flight included the following: -- 8 Ship Convoy – 3 large, 5 smaller at 16 05 N – 143 55 E at 1330 Z (2500'). Heading of convoy – 350 degrees. Picked up on Radar. Types & speed unknown. No Radar scope photos.

"WSM 50 – Captain Feathers [in Z-49, "Three Feathers"] was scheduled to fly this WSM but flight was cancelled.

"WSM 51 – Flown by Capt. Black [in Z-48, "Million Dollar Baby"]. Target reached, and bombs were dropped by Radar because of intense searchlights. Bombed from 26,000 ft. Results unobserved. Believe the photo-electric cell was affected by searchlights." [The shutter on the strike camera was activated by a photo-electric cell which picked up the bright flash from an M-46 photoflash bomb. - JEB]

On this day the last of the 20 crews of the 881st Squadron, the Kappil crew (#120), reported for duty on Saipan. They probably came in on a B-29, but available records cannot confirm this. There is also no indication as to why the long delay in transit.

Also arriving today was the Farrell crew of the 882nd Squadron in an F-13, the photo recon version of the B-29. The plane was reassigned to the 3rd Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron. But at least the Farrell crew was finally here. 1/Lt James Farrell had had some personnel problems along the way. His original flight engineer had dislocated his shoulder at Kearney, which caused a week's delay until a replacement arrived. The replacement's name was Jack Arterburn and he had an interesting resume. He had actually flown in the RAF as a flight engineer on a Lancaster bomber. Eager to get to the war zone, Farrell accepted Arterburn with a handshake and they got out of Kearney as soon as possible. A little later, at Mather, Farrell discovered that Arterburn was nearly deaf and wondered how he had made it past the medical exam, but Farrell wasn't about to ask any questions at this point. As it turned out, Arterburn did his job very well and Farrell never had any
complaints. Farrell also lost his original radio operator at Kearney, Sgt Bernard Desrochers, who was transferred over to the Kappil crew of the 881st Squadron. The replacement was Cpl Julius Atkins, about whom Farrell also had no complaints.

23 Dec 44

The 500th Bomb Group flew another three weather strike missions today, as recorded in the Group Operations Journal. The 883rd Squadron again had the duty:

“WSM's 52-53-54 ran a mission by individual A/C to OGURA OIL CO, TOKYO, JAPAN. (Target 911)

“WSM-52, Pilot, Charters [in Z-42, “Supine Sue”]. [This was the Charters crew’s first mission.] Took off 0348 Z [1348 local] from Isley #1. Bombs away over Target at 1246 Z [2246 local]. Clear weather over Target with slight ground haze. No flak or searchlights encountered. Several enemy aircraft picked up but not one gave opposition. Bomb load was 18 x M18 IC (E6R2) [M18 Incendiary Cluster – the E6R2 was apparently a Cluster Adapter - JEB] and 1 x M46 Photoflash. Large fires started by bombs, largest of which were the first and last sighted. Landed Guam at 1930 Z [0530 24 Dec local] and thence to Isley #1 at 2200 Z [0800 24 Dec local]. No casualties. [Weather strike aircraft sometimes landed at Guam to deliver their weather data directly to XXI Bomber Command HQ. - JEB]

“WSM-53. – Pilot, Schmidt [in Z-51, “Tail Wind”] carried same load as WSM 52. Complete blackout was in effect over target. No flak, E/A, or searchlights encountered. Long string of fires were [sic] observed from our bomb hits. – No casualties. [This was also the Schmidt crew’s first mission. The weather observer on this mission was WO Jack Grantham. - JEB]

“WSM-54. – Pilot Capt Feathers [in Z-49, “Three Feathers”] started 2 large distinct fires with M-18 bomb load. Fires flared up like Gasoline fires. There was no flak to speak of (4 flashes seen and although enemy aircraft were picked up by Radar scope, none pressed an attack. A single searchlight came on when ship was at I.P. and followed A/C on run but was always behind. Photos were obtained, and 40-50 scope exposures were made.

There were no casualties and aircraft landed at 0320 Z [1320 24 Dec local] at Isley #1.”

Arriving on Saipan today was the Arbon crew (#234) of the 882nd Squadron, probably bringing in a B-29.

On this day S/Sgt Manuel Bettencourt, radar operator on the Gerwick crew, from Gilroy, California, received orders for TD (Temporary Duty) beginning tomorrow with the 3rd Photo Recon Squadron, at that time based very near the 500th Group (the 3rd would later relocate to Guam).

24 Dec 44

On Christmas Eve 1944 the 73rd Bomb Wing took a break from bombing Japan and went after a closer target, Iwo Jima. This would be a coordinated strike with fighters and B-24 bombers of the 7th Air Force based on Saipan, as well as a naval bombardment force.

Japanese air raids against Saipan from Iwo Jima had been annoyingly effective over the past month, with at least ten B-29's destroyed or badly damaged on the ground. According to diarist John Ciardi of the 882nd Squadron, this mission on 24 December stemmed from an event which had occurred two days earlier. After having to abort on the 22 Dec mission to Nagoya, Group Commander Lt Col Dougherty, riding in Z-30, "Slick Dick", decided to fly over Iwo Jima and drop his bombs on a worthwhile target rather than jettison them at sea. Arriving over the island, he found a large number of Japanese planes on what appeared to be a fully repaired airfield. Some fighters were also sighted in the air. The Japs were apparently building up for another raid on Saipan. The 73rd hoped to nip it in the bud by striking first.
The 500th Bomb Group originally scheduled eleven aircraft for the 24 December mission but two, Z-29, “Pacific Queen”, and Z-41, “The Baroness”, had been erroneously reported as in commission, so they had to be scratched. The Parsons and Ryan crews, respectively scheduled in those planes, would not be going on this mission. The remaining nine planes were augmented by two planes from the 498th Bomb Group, bringing the number of planes in the formation back up to eleven.

Leading the Group was Lt Col Dougherty again, flying with 1/Lt James Farrell and crew in Z-22. Deputy commander was Lt Col Joseph Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, riding with 1/Lt William Hodge and crew in Z-24. Other brass along for the ride were Maj Freeman Parsons, Group Air Inspector, in Z-23, with 1/Lt John Reeves and crew; and 883rd Squadron Operations Officer Maj John Gay in Z-48, with Capt Eugene Mahoney and crew. Several newly arrived crews were flying their first missions. This would be good training for them in preparation for the longer and more dangerous flights to Japan.

Since the target was much closer than Japan, the B-29’s could dispense with bomb bay fuel tanks and carry a full load of bombs, 20 x 500 lb general purpose.

Take-off was from 1053 to 1104. The eleven planes formed up as follows. Leading the first element of four planes was Z-22 (Farrell), “Leading Lady”; in No. 2 position on the right wing was Z-24 (Hodge), “Pride of the Yankees”; on the left wing was Z-21 (Gray), “Devils’ Delight”; and closing up the box to the rear was Z-31 (McClure), “Homing De-Vice”. The right element was led by Z-28 (Gerwick), “Old Ironsides”, with Z-23 (Reeves), “Ramblin Roscoe” on his right wing and Z-27 (Carrico), “Heavenly Body” on the left. The left element was led by Z-48 (Mahoney), “Million Dollar Baby”; on his right was Z-52 (Irby), “20th Century Sweetheart”; on the left was T-1 (Kilgo); and bringing up the rear was T-6 (Rodley).

There were no aborts and no changes in position as the formation neared Iwo. However, the island was completely covered by clouds, so bombing had to be done by radar. The first approach was not satisfactory to the lead bombardier, so Lt Col Dougherty brought the formation around for a second run. This one was successful and all planes dropped their bombs at 1512 from 20,000 feet. Bombing results could not be observed due to the undercast.

No flak or fighters were encountered. All aircraft returned safely to Saipan, landing between 1845 and 1856.

The 500th Bomb Group also flew three weather strike missions on Christmas Eve, as described in the Group Operations Journal. The 881st Squadron drew the duty this time:

“WSM 55 – Pilot – Lt. Mather [in Z-7, “Hell’s Belle”]. Target for today’s WSM’s was the Ogura Oil Co, Tokyo. WSM 55 reached the target alright and dropped bombs visually on fires seen on run because of a Radar Malfunction. No photos were taken.

A/A was very meagre & inaccurate. Only one E/A approached with navigation lights on. He did not fire on our A/C. We got off about 40 bursts.

There were no casualties or damage to our A/C.

“WSM 56 – Capt Curtis in A/C 743 [Ser. No. 42-24743, Z-8, “Wabash Cannonball”] bombed target by radar and started two large fires just north of target area. This ship encountered no enemy opposition. Pilot reports possible radar jamming off Bonins with 200 miles duration. There were no casualties & no damage to A/C.

“WSM 57 – Lt. Engle in A/C #694 [Ser. No. 42-24694, Z-6, “Draggin’ Lady”] reached target, but was forced to jettison bombs at sea before reaching same. No opposition was encountered. One fighter approached B-29, but did not fire. WX observations made & Radar scope photos were taken. There were no casualties nor was A/C damaged. Bomb-bay malfunction was the direct cause of ‘abortion’.

25 Dec 44
The 500th Bomb Group made a valiant attempt to celebrate Christmas. The cooks did the best they could with limited resources. According to gunner John Ciardi, the noon meal included "ham, chicken, cranberry sauce, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pickles, peas, corn, bread, jam, fruit salad, coffee, tea, lemonade, apples and vitamin pills." (Vitamin pills?) Probably the officers fared even better.

Bottles of various alcoholic libations appeared and made the rounds during the afternoon, and in the evening there was a Christmas party at Surfside, the group theater, featuring grapefruit punch spiked with gin, followed by a talent show put on by men from the three squadrons. The 881st performers went first, followed by the 882nd, but before the 883rd artists could take the stage, the war interrupted.

Yesterday's preemptive attack against Iwo had not preempted the Japanese air raid after all. About 25 Japanese Betty's broke up the party a little after 2000 as they zoomed bombing and strafing across the island. Four more B-29's were destroyed or badly damaged. (One of these B-29's was my father's, Z-29, 42-63429, "Pacific Queen". She was out of action until mid-February, when she would return with the same name but a different tail number, Z-35.) Fortunately, there were no personnel casualties in the 500th.

This was another frustrating episode for the 73rd Bomb Wing, but they would have felt better had they known that this would be the last successful Japanese raid.

And so Christmas Day 1944 passed on Saipan. But the night wasn't over. Three planes and crews of the 881st Squadron were scheduled to carry out weather strike missions to Japan on this Christmas evening, but only one reached the primary target, which was the Atsuta Arsenal in Nagoya. The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal unaccountably omits WSM #58 from its summaries, but the Group Summary of Weather Strike Missions shows that WSM #58, Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", flown by Lt. Lou Kappil and crew, completed its assignment, dropping 3.2 tons of bombs on the Atsuta Arsenal.

The Operations Journal does record the other two WSM's:

"WSM #59 – Target for tonight was ATSUTA ARSENAL, NAGOYA. Lt. Calhoun flying Z Sq 9 ["Nina Ross"] was forced to bomb CHI CHI JIMA instead of proceeding to primary target, because of stuck valve in top bomb bay tank. Large orange colored fires were observed. No flak or enemy aircraft was encountered. Photos of CHI CHI JIMA were taken and also Radar Scope Photos. – No damage to A/C or casualties.

"WSM #60 – Capt. Taylor [in Z-11, "Holy Joe"] was scheduled to fly this mission, but same was cancelled because of enemy aircraft over home base."

Far to the north, under the ocean, somewhere off Tokyo Bay, the survivors of the Bricker crew on the USS Spearfish did not miss out on Christmas dinner. They got to experience it submarine style. 2/Lt Clifford Smith remembered, "The cooks out did themselves. We had turkey, strawberry short cake and all the rest. Following the Christmas dinner they showed a movie in the galley, "Tarzan in New York"."

26 Dec 44

Another set of three weather strike missions was scheduled today, with the 882nd Squadron starting its turn, but the assignment was an almost total failure. Two planes didn't even get off, and the one that did only made it as far as Iwo Jima. The 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal reported the details:

"WSM #61 – Lt. Arbon [in Z-25, "American Beauty"] was forced to feather his #1 engine due to oil leak and bombed Iwo Jima. Bombs were observed to begin hitting just short of the North Airfield and continued along the southeast strip of the North Airfield towards the south field. Two (2) searchlights were turned on at approach to bomb run & turned off at start of run. No flak or E/A were encountered. There were no casualties or damage to A/C.

"WSM #62 – Lt. Reeves [in Z-22, "Leading Lady"] was scheduled to fly this mission with target #911 [Ogura Oil Co.] Tokyo as the objective, but failed to take off due to enemy raid on this Island.
"WSM #63 – Lt. Farrell [in Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe"] was scheduled for WSM 63, but due to an extra long air raid alert, his flight was scratched."

Today the Haley crew (#352) of the 883rd Squadron finally made it to Saipan, probably bringing in a new B-29. This was the last of the 20 original crews of the 883rd. Now the 500th Group was missing only two crews of the original 60. Both were from the 882nd Squadron – the Shorey (#240) and Donald Jackson (#236) crews.

27 Dec 44

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing went back to the infamous Target 357, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory in Musashino on the outskirts of Tokyo. Secondary target was the harbor facilities and built-up areas of Tokyo proper.

The Groups were directed to put up a maximum number of aircraft for this effort, but for the 500th that turned out to be a paltry eight planes. The official mission report blamed the low number on "problems of maintenance and the frequency of the missions," and that was true enough as far as it went. Engine changes were slowing things down, several planes were red-lined awaiting replacements for cracked blisters, etc. Not mentioned however was the impact that weather strike missions were having on the regular missions.

The 500th Group drew WSM duty from 20-29 December. This required three planes per day. Considering that the three planes from the previous day's WSM's were probably still undergoing post-flight maintenance, and three planes had to be reserved for the following day, that meant as many as nine planes were unavailable for regular missions. To illustrate, the 500th had delegated WSM duty for the three-day period 26-28 December to the 882nd Squadron. The effect was that the 882nd would provide no planes for the regular mission on 27 December, leaving the effort to fall entirely on the 881st and 883rd.

Force commander for this mission would be Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Squadron, riding with Capt Vance Black in Z-48, "Million Dollar Baby".

All eight planes assigned made it off the ground as scheduled between 0600 and 0617. Bomb load was 10 x 500 lb general purpose bombs.

The 500th Group led the Wing on this mission, followed in order by the 497th, 498th and 499th.

About 5-1/2 hours out from Saipan, Z-49 (Clinkscales), "Three Feathers", lost her #3 engine and had to turn back. The problem was later determined to be a blown cylinder head. The remaining seven planes carried on, climbing to the briefed altitude of 30,000 feet about four minutes before the IP.

At this point the formation was as follows: Black in Z-48 was in the lead; in No. 2 position on his right wing was Z-2 (McGuire), "20th Century Limited"; in No. 3 position on his left wing was Z-51 (Schmidt), "Tail Wind". The remaining four planes were divided into two two-plane elements. The right element was led by Z-11 (Samuelson), "Holy Joe", with Z-6 (Taylor), "Draggin' Lady" on his right wing. The left element was led by Z-41 (Ryan), "The Baroness", with Z-52 (Standen), "20th Century Sweetheart", on his left wing.

As the Group headed from the IP toward the target, everything seemed to be going well. But then something went wrong. In an unusually frank *mea culpa* which was included as part of the official report, the lead bombardier explained in detail what happened:

*[Note: Slightly edited to improve understanding - JEB]*

"Weather over target was clear. We turned at IP with seven (7) planes in formation and we were on C-1 [autopilot]. We were at the briefed altitude of 29,500 [feet] when we leveled off to start bomb run. We were
following the briefed course and had a wind (obtained from navigator’s data after mission) of 240 knots from 260 degrees, which was 120 knots more than briefed wind. Just as we leveled off I checked and pre-set drift and synchronized rate and started looking for the target, which was visible just at that time, but I didn't positively identify it and the pilot and co-pilot started pointing at the target and asking me if I could see it. By the time I found out we had been looking at the same target, which was the right target, we were a little left of course and I couldn't get the airplane turned over on course to the target because of the strong wind and the fast ground speed we were making. The pilot decided to make a 180 degree turn to the right and attempt another run. After flying upwind for about 15 minutes he decided to turn downwind and we saw that we would be blown downwind past the target before we could level off for a run. We then tried to bomb the secondary target. I tried to synchronize on a railroad marshalling yard but was past the point of release and got on another installation just over this target and dropped the bombs. Just before we dropped our bombs two planes broke formation and went off to the right, so only five planes dropped bombs on this target. [The two planes which broke off, Z-11 and Z-52, reported that they could not keep with the formation and were running low on fuel. Also, Z-11’s CFC system had gone haywire, putting all turrets out of commission. These two planes bombed a target of opportunity near Yokohama. However, Z-52 dropped only four of her bombs because the bombardier accidentally closed the bomb bay doors too early; the others had to be jettisoned at sea. - JEB]

"The IP and AP were OK for the briefed wing. I think we should have an IP farther upwind to allow for these excessive winds and give you more time to check your course to see if you are making track good enough to come into target. The aiming point was excellent. It turned out to be the most prominent land mark on the ground for the Japs had been grading and trying to camouflage the area. The large black water tanks were painted green and looked like pools of water. This and the suddenness with which we came upon the target were the contributing factors to my missing the target. I also think that we should be briefed on a last resort that is on the same course as the primary target because there is not enough time to make a turn of any size, and we could be prepared to bomb something of a military value instead of haphazard bombing when an instance like this occurs again.

"The reason for not bombing target was failure to identify target and exceedingly strong wind (240 knots). Our racks and intervalometer worked OK, as well as all the rest of our equipment. ... IP should be farther upwind of target to allow for these excessive winds. It was my error in not hitting the target due to failure to positively identify target soon enough.

Thomas P. Bills
1st Lt., Air Corps
Lead Bombardier"

You have to sympathize with 1/Lt Bills and admire his honesty. He obviously felt badly about his mistake. But he was not the first bombardier to be victimized by the jet stream winds over Japan, nor would he be the last.

So as we see, the 500th Bomb Group failed to hit the primary at all, and photos showed damage to the secondary target to be minimal. Another mission that must be called a failure.

Fighter opposition was light to moderate, 22 attacks reported, mostly on the two planes, Z-11 and Z-52, which broke off from the main formation. Three planes, Z-6, Z-11 and Z-48, were slightly damaged by flak, which was rated moderate to heavy over the target. But no planes were lost. 500th gunners claimed two enemy fighters destroyed, a Tojo by the right gunner of Z-41 and either an Oscar or Hamp claimed by the right gunners of both Z-52 and Z-6.

All planes returned safely to Saipan, landing between 2030 and 2107.

In addition to the main mission, three weather strike missions were flown today by the 882nd Squadron, but with only marginally better success than yesterday, as reported in the Group Operations Journal:

"WSM #64 – Lt. Gray [in Z-21, “Devils’ Delight”] reached 142 30 E - 36 45 N and was forced to jettison bombs
into ocean and return to Saipan, due to oil leak in #1 engine, and lack of fuel caused by winds of high velocity.

“Capt. La Marche [in Z-30, “Slick Dick”] flew WSM 65 today and bombed an unidentified target near Ota, Japan. This flight saw no fighters & flak was meagre and distant. Radar was out and no scope photos were taken. No casualties were suffered & A/C sustained no damage.

“WSM 66 – Lt. Hodge [in Z-28, “Old Ironsides”] bombed target of opportunity. Radar was out. Bombing was done by flak flash & ETA [estimated time of arrival]. Results unobserved. No E/A and flak was slight inaccurate below to level and to rear [sic]. No casualties. [The weather observer on this mission was WO Jack Grantham. - JEB]

28 Dec 44

Today the 500th Bomb Group again assigned three weather strike missions to the 882nd Squadron, which had better success this time, as reported in the Group Operations Journal:

“28 Dec 44 – WSM #67 – Major Hurlbutt [in Z-22, “Leading Lady”] flew today against the JAPAN REFINING WORKS, TOKYO. There was a total blackout being enforced from landfall to target. Flak was meagre at OTA, but intense and accurate over TOKYO – trailing below, level, high, and to the sides. Bombs were released by Radar since searchlights were too bright for visual bombing. Several fairly large fires started in & north of Target Area. No damage was sustained by our plane & no casualties were suffered. Twenty-nine (29) scope pictures were taken from landfall. – Lakes, Ota & Tokyo.” [The weather observer on this mission was 2/Lt Alexander H. Howard. - JEB]

Ed Levin (now Lawson), right gunner on the Hurlbutt crew, remembers this mission as one of the scariest he flew. With little to do but watch, he counted as many as 250 searchlights probing the sky. Fortunately, only a few caught the plane. Levin followed the beams down to their points of origin on the ground and noted how the searchlights were arrayed in neat and orderly rows, spaced at least a city block apart. The crew held on for several tense minutes while Maj Hurlbutt threw the big B-29 through every maneuver in his inventory trying to shake the searchlights, and finally they broke away. Levin noticed later that Hurlbutt's shirt was soaked through with perspiration. Previously, Levin had declined the generally proffered post-mission shot of liquor, but this time he took it, and did so on every mission thereafter.

“WSM #68 – Lt Carrico [in Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”] – Bombed center of Tokyo, which was under complete blackout. 50 searchlights were turned on, but only one caught our A/C in its beam. – Did not appear to be radar controlled. No fighters intercepted. Flak was meagre, inaccurate, below & behind. Strike photos were taken as well as 54 scope photos of landfall, OTA & TOKYO. Shipping in harbor threw up a barrage of flak. Enormous fires were started in target area. Flames increased with great rapidity. – No damage suffered to our A/C.” 2/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd RCM Officer, was on this mission in Z-24 and may have assisted with those 54 radar scope photos.

WSM #69 – Major Van Trigt [in Z-25, “American Beauty”] – Target was SENDAI and large fires were started. [Actually, the assigned target was Tokyo, but a combination of bad weather, equipment failure and bad navigation decisions caused the plane to end up near Sendai, which is where they dropped their bombs. Was the target changed to Sendai in the Operations Journal entry to avoid embarrassment to the unit and to Lt Col Dougherty, who was along on this mission? - JEB] Entire island was under complete blackout. Forced to ditch on return leg. Navigator sustained broken left leg & L. Gunner suffered possible broken hand. All of crew sustained cuts/bruises. Rescue was affected by destroyer which was standing by for ditching.”

You can read more about WSM #69 and the ditching of Z-25 below.

29 Dec 44
The 500th Bomb Group had been very lucky over the past three missions -- no losses on 22, 24 or 27 December. But today they lost an airplane, on a weather strike mission. The luck wasn't all gone, though, as the crew were all rescued.

Maj John Van Trigt and crew of the 882nd Squadron had taken off in Z-25, "American Beauty", late in the evening of 28 Dec on WSM #69. Well, not the whole crew. For some reason, Group Commander Lt Col John Dougherty decided to go along on this mission, so the copilot, 2/Lt Hubert Bingham, was bumped from the flight so Dougherty could take the right seat.

The weather officer, or observer, assigned to this mission was 2/Lt Frederick R. "Dick" Worthen.

The weathermen found that there were some problems with being an extra man on a B-29 crew. For one thing, they had no seat - so they sat wherever they could find space, or in some cases where the Airplane Commander told them to sit. When they started taking their weather readings, they were pretty busy moving around, and when encrypting the data to be radioed home they usually took over the navigator's table. Another problem was that there was no extra plug-in to the oxygen system, so when at altitude the weather observer had to carry around a cumbersome oxygen bottle.

Planes on WSM's were usually assigned a particular area of Japan to head for to take their readings. On this mission the target area was Tokyo.

There were high clouds nearly all the way to Japan preventing celestial fixes, and the Loran set was ineffective, so positions had to calculated by dead reckoning. When Z-25 hit the coast of Japan, the navigator thought they were WSW of Tokyo, so they turned ENE and flew up the coast. As luck would have it, though, they had hit the coast east of Tokyo, around Choshi Point, so they ended up flying farther away from Tokyo. By the time the mistake was realized, they were running low on fuel, so they unloaded their bombs on Sendai and headed directly for home.

The official report says the plane hit unexpected headwinds all the way back, and it soon became obvious they wouldn't make it back to Saipan. So they flew down the small islands of the northern Marianas looking for a likely place to ditch. When the #4 engine ran out of fuel, they were near what they thought was Guguan Island (it turned out to be Alamagan Island), so that's where they ditched, about 140 miles north of Saipan.

The radio operator had been in regular contact with base and successfully sent out a ditching message. Fortunately, the misidentification of the island would not impede rescue. The crew took up their ditching positions. The weather observer took a position lying in the tunnel. By this time it was about 1300 hrs on 29 December.

Maj Van Trigt skillfully put the plane down in the lee of the island, even as a second engine gave out and a third was beginning to sputter. The landing was relatively soft, the plane remaining intact, but it was rough enough to give the navigator, 2/Lt Jerome Silver, a broken leg. But Silver was the only man seriously injured. With the plane staying afloat for quite some time, the crew were able to get out safely, retrieve all survival and emergency equipment, inflate the large life raft, get the navigator into it, and swim to the shore, only about 50 yards away, while towing the raft.

Rescue was very efficient. The first search plane flew over only 20 minutes after the ditching. Other planes followed and circled, and by 1730 a destroyer showed up and lowered its whaleboat. The crew were off the island by 1800. The last they saw of "American Beauty", her tail had been broken off by the pounding waves, the forward part of the plane had turned belly up, and she was almost entirely under water. Parts of her are probably still there today.

The above is what's in the official records. But sometimes there's another view. According to John Ciardi of the 882nd, Lt Col Dougherty was to blame for the ditching:

"The boys are fairly well soured at Lt Col. Dougherty. The report is that Dougherty ... kept them over Japan
looking for a good target of opportunity an hour and a quarter longer than the navigator's estimated time of return and the flight engineer's gas consumption curve permitted. As a result they ran out of gas on the way back and had to ditch. Total: one navigator's leg, one crew unnecessarily risked, one B-29 forming barnacles.

"I seem to see a lot of stupidity these days."

In fairness it should be pointed out that Ciardi had not had a good opinion of Dougherty ever since an incident in training in Kansas during which two enlisted men died, and for which Ciardi held him to blame.

So which version of the mission is correct, the official one of unexpected headwinds, or Ciardi's of lingering over Japan too long? Impossible to say at this late date.

Here is a list of the crew on this mission:

AC        Maj John R. Van Trigt
P         Lt Col John E. Dougherty
B        1/Lt William B. Mayes, Jr.
N        2/Lt Jerome Silver
FE       2/Lt William L. Ryalls
Radio     Sgt Victor V. Thompson
CFC       Sgt Thomas E. McEvoy
RG        Cpl Francis H. Kindseth
LG        Cpl Peter A. Sanchez
Radar     Sgt Raymond B. Dugan
TG        Cpl Dick Woolf
Weather Observer 2/Lt Fredrick R. Worthen

After the ditching the Van Trigt crew was broken up. Van Trigt himself went to Group as Assistant Operations Officer. The rest of the crew were parceled out to other crews. (Victor Thompson flew as radio operator with my father's crew on several occasions.) Ryalls was lost with the Hughes crew in Z-30, "Sting Shift", on 23 May 45. McEvoy was lost as part of the Sewell crew in Z-31, "Homing De-Vice", on 4 Apr 45. All others survived the war.

While the Van Trigt crew was being rescued, the 500th Bomb Group flew three more WSM's, as summarized in the Group Operations Journal. Today they were flown by the 881st Squadron:

"WSM #70 – Lt. Pearson [in Z-9, “Nina Ross”] bombed MATSUDO, JAPAN. Primary & briefed target was KOSAI STEEL CO, TOKYO. Results were unobserved, except that 2 fires were started & were burning fiercely when leaving Target. No E/A [or] FLAK. Bombs were dropped visually on searchlights. No casualties or damage to A/C.

WSM #71 – Lt. Oswald [in Z-4, “Black Magic”] dropped bombs on KOSAI STEEL Co, TOKYO (as briefed) but results were unobserved due to intense searchlights in area. No E/A were seen. Flak was intense accurate level. A/C was rocked 3 times and 15 or 20 bursts were heard. 150 to 200 searchlights were observed. Two vapor trails from other A/C cut across nose. It is believed these were A/A spotters. No damage to A/C nor were personnel injured.

WSM #72 – (FO 10-26) This mission was flown by Capt Thompson in Z Sq 10 [Punchin’ Judy]. Bombs were dropped north of TOKYO DOCK AREA between ARA & SUMIDA RIVERS. Fires seen by Tail Gnr. Target area was blacked out. No E/A were encountered and only 2 bursts of flak were seen. Radar was out. No casualties or damage to A/C."

The 500th Bomb Group was now done with weather strike missions for a little while.
The Shorey crew (#240) of the 882nd Squadron finally made it to Saipan from the States today, probably ferrying in a B-29. Now only the Donald Jackson crew (#236) was missing from the 882nd.

31 Dec 44

No combat missions today. The 500th Bomb Group concentrated on a different type of mission, celebrating the imminent arrival of 1945.

Here is how the poet-diary John Ciardi recorded the events:

"The whiskey caches around the area began emerging about supper time. A couple of the boys in the Quonsett were fairly well spiked by six-thirty or so. At seven o'clock we had a false-alarm air-raid -- probably part of somebody's celebration -- and I went out into the field between our Quonsetts and the officers' Quonsetts (BGQ for Bachelor Gunners' Quarters and BOQ for Bachelor Officers' Quarters). Bud Orenstein [the copilot on Ciardi's crew] was bumping around there in the dark with a naval Ensign, Hank Mannheim, an old pal who had popped in off a cruiser. There were loud and bacchic noises coming from the darkened BOQ, and after a while we gave up the raid and all went inside."

Ciardi spent the next few hours in the officers' quonset engaging in "the serious business of getting drunk." [Ciardi was an enlisted man but he was older (28), had a master's degree, and had even completed navigator's school before being denied a commission, so he was accepted as an equal in officers' country.]

And then, "All at once somebody down by the shore cut loose with a tommy gun. Almost everybody had his piece with him because of the false alarm alert. In no time at all pistols and carbines were popping off all over the area. I looked at my watch -- midnight. All at once the batteries of fifties up on the hill let go, firing out to sea. The tracers zoomed above our heads all over the sky."

The senior officers tried to get things under control before somebody got killed. "Major Wollcott, Ground C.O. [Maj Robert E. Wolcott, 882nd Executive Officer], pretty well in whiskey himself was going through the frantic motions of trying to restore order. As we passed him, he was having a call sent out for all Master Sgts. to report to the orderly room." Ciardi, self-admittedly drunk, made a smart-ass comment to the Major, who threatened to have him arrested, but by morning everyone involved had sobered up, and all was forgiven.

Eventually the firing died down and mercifully no one in the 500th had been shot.

So ended 1944, a tumultuous year for the 500th. A year before, the unit was hardly more than a cadre, but within that time they had organized, been brought up to strength, trained, reorganized, trained some more, deployed half-way around the world, engaged in combat, and suffered their first losses, including their commander. What would 1945 bring?

1 Jan 45

On this day there were a lot of hangovers in the 500th Bomb Group.

On a more official note, the 500th Group narrative history reviewed the unit's accomplishments since arriving on Saipan:

"Since the start of its first combat mission against the mainland of Japan on the 24th of November 1944, the 500th Bombardment Group had at the end of December 1944 participated in four daylight and one night combat bombing missions against military targets in Tokyo and three daylight missions against the city of Nagoya, both located on the main Japanese island of Honshu. In addition to these seven major attacks the Group had
participated in two bombing missions against the fortified Japanese island of Iwo Jima, in the Kazan Island Group, a preliminary combat mission against the Japanese island of Truk, and had sent twenty-two planes on effective night 'weather strike' missions over the cities of Nagoya and Tokyo.

"The Group's aircraft had released a total of 572.90 tons of bombs against Japanese military installations. Of this tonnage 71.5 percent was the 500 pound general purpose demolition bomb, 28 percent was the 500 pound incendiary type bomb, .5 percent was the 100 pound photoflash bomb used on the night 'weather strike' missions."

* * * * * * * *

"The Group had lost a total of six aircraft on combat missions; one to enemy action over the target, four were forced to 'ditch' in the open sea on the return route from combat missions, and one is missing probably ditched. Two aircraft were destroyed and several others damaged by enemy air raids.

"Personnel rescued from ditched aircraft consisted of seven men reported picked up by a submarine, details unknown until return of submarine [this was the Bricker crew in Z-1 (second), ditched on 18 Dec, survivors returned to Saipan on 13 Jan]; and the rescue of a crew of twelve men from one aircraft that ditched in the lee side of Alamagan Island in the Marianas, when the aircraft ran out of fuel on a weather strike mission [this was the Van Trigt crew in Z-25]. Four other complete crews are missing [Irvin on 27 Nov in Z-2, Hansen on 29 Nov in Z-44, Goldsworthy on 3 Dec in Z-1 (first), Grise on 13 Dec in Z-26].

"A total of 2312 combat crew hours was accumulated by crews of the Group and a total of 176 crew sortie credits obtained.

"Colonel Richard T. King, Group Commander since the 5th of May 1944, was lost over Tokyo while leading a squadron on the 3 December bombing mission against the Nakajima Musashino Aircraft Engine Plant.

"Lieutenant Colonel John E. Dougherty assumed command of the Group on the 5th of December 1944. ...."

2 Jan 45

In his diary, 2/Lt Harold "Hal" Towner, bombardier on the Hale Hays crew (#228), made the following brief entry for the night of 1/2 Jan 45: "Japs came over again tonight -- dropped one big bomb and fled."

For Hal Towner, this incident merited no more than passing notice, but for young Sgt Ed Levin, CFC gunner on the Hurlbutt crew (#222), it was a matter of life or death, in more ways than one.

Levin had been assigned that night as plane guard, a regular duty rotated among the enlisted men, so he was up on the flight line that night when the air raid alarm went off about 0345 and the antiaircraft guns opened up.

In Levin's words, "Then we saw many tracers. There was a streak in the sky. I assumed that a Japanese bomber had been shot down. It looked like it would fall close to where I was. When a previous Japanese plane had gone down, some people had gotten souvenirs. I wanted one, too.

"I was unaware that the Japanese had rocket bombs and was nonchalant about watching the display until I heard a whistling sound. Then I remembered that planes shot down do not whistle. I tried to get into the air raid shelter. I could not get in all the way. Others blocked me. Perhaps the shelter was too small. The result was that my ankles were sticking out. The bomb (I later found out that it was an 1800 pounder) had landed quite close to us. I believe it exploded 100 to 200 feet away. It was the loudest noise I ever heard in my life -- before then or later. I remember having visions of flames.

"It turned out that a bomb fragment had pierced my left ankle and I was bleeding badly...." Levin was given first
aid to stop the bleeding and then transported to the hospital, where a surgeon repaired his severed tendons. He would fully recover and eventually return to duty but would be out of the war for a while.

But the war waited on no one. The Hurlbutt crew was scheduled for the 3 Jan 45 mission against Nagoya and they would go. Levin was replaced on that flight by Cpl Richard P. Steinberg. The crew would never come home.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings that ran through Ed Levin's mind when he found out his crew had been shot down, and I won't try, except to say that there was certainly some survivor's guilt there, as after he got home from the war Ed screwed up his courage and took the time to visit the families of his lost crewmates, or at least as many as he could. This made for some awkward situations, but it was something Ed felt he had to do. A good man, Ed Levin.

Arriving on Saipan today, probably having hitched a ride with another B-29 crew passing thru Mather Field, California, was 2/Lt Paul Beck, navigator on the Cheney crew of the 883rd Squadron. Beck had been held back at Mather due to a bout with prostatitus, but he had recovered and was permitted to rejoin his crew. Now the Cheney crew was whole again.

3 Jan 45

The 73rd Bomb Wing would start out the new year with a new tactic -- the incendiary raid, or as the B-29 crews put it, a "burn job". The target chosen was the industrial center of Nagoya, which, not having experienced a major earthquake or fire in recent times, was thought to be the Japanese city most vulnerable to incendiaries.

The crews knew this would be a tough mission, as the Nagoya area was well protected with antiaircraft guns. Also, the 73rd Wing Field Order warned them they could expect to be met by more than 200 fighters.

A second runway on Isley Field had been under construction for some time, and it was used for the first time on this mission. The two runways, designated A and B, greatly sped up take-offs and landings.

For this mission the 500th Bomb Group put up 24 planes. They were supposed to be organized into two equal combat squadrons, but during take-off one plane of the first squadron, Z-4 (Mather), "Black Magic", had some sort of problem on the runway, taxied off and back around, and took off as tail end charlie in the second squadron. This left the first squadron with 11 planes and the second squadron with 13 planes.

Force Leader would be Lt Col Marcus Mullen, formerly Group Operations Officer but now Deputy Group Commander, riding with Maj Barney Hurlbutt and crew in Z-22, "Leading Lady", at the head of the second squadron. Leading the first squadron would be Lt Col Ralph Reeve, 881st Squadron CO, flying with Capt Jay Brown and crew in Z-2, "20th Century Limited". In charge of the second squadron would be Lt Col Joseph Brannock, 882nd Squadron CO, riding in the Deputy Lead position with 1/Lt Hale Hays and crew in Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe".

Additional non-crew personnel coming along on this mission were Group Navigator Capt Berry Thompson, flying with Maj Robert Fitzgerald in Z-8, and 882nd Squadron RCM (Radar Counter-Measures) Officer 2/Lt Norman Garrigus, whose special intercept and jamming equipment was set up in Z-24, 1/Lt Frank Carrico and crew.

There was a minor personnel casualty before the mission even started. 2/Lt Gerald Auerbach, navigator on the Engle crew of the 881st, hurried out of his hut and jumped on the already crowded vehicle that would take them up to the hardstand and their plane. The vehicle started off quickly and Auerbach had not settled into place on top when it made a sharp turn. The laws of physics immediately applied. Auerbach went flying off and badly scraped his knee and elbow on the coral-paved roadway. He was taken to the dispensary and his crew had to quickly get a substitute navigator from the reserve pool.

Take-off was from 0758 to 0823 from Runway B. Bomb load was 14 x 500 lb incendiary bombs and 1 x 500 lb
high explosive bomb.

On the route out, the first squadron lost two planes to mechanical problems. Z-8 (Fitzgerald) turned back when its fuel transfer system went out. Z-3 (Jackson), "Ann Dee", aborted with #1 and #2 engines overheating. The second squadron had three aborts: Z-50 (Gregg), "Fancy Detail", due to failure of bomb bay doors to remain closed; Z-28 (Arbon), "Old Ironsides", with #1 engine backfiring and losing power; and Z-25 (Hodge), "Homing De-Vice", with a severe oil leak in #3 engine. Z-25 bombed Iwo Jima on the way back as a target of opportunity.

Also on the way to Japan, Brown and Reeve in Z-2 relinquished the lead to the Deputy Lead, Capt Horace "Hod" Hatch in Z-9, "Nina Ross", because Z-2's radar was out. The radar came back on later but it was decided not to change leads again. While this was going on, the second squadron, due to more accurate navigation, reached Japan and the IP first and led the way in to the target. It had been expected that the target would be covered by clouds, so a radar approach had been planned, but the clouds dissipated at the IP, the city of Fushima, and the B-29's were able to bomb the target visually.

Due to the aborts, the first squadron was now down to nine planes and the second squadron reduced to ten. The second squadron, now in the lead, was still led by Hurlbutt and Mullen in Z-22. Z-23 (Hays and Brannock)) was still in No. 2 position on Hurlbutt's right wing, while Z-21 (Reeves), "Devils' Delight", was in No. 3 position on Hurlbutt's left wing. Z-32 (Parsons), "Fever from the South", led the second (right) element, with probably Z-4 (Mather), "Black Magic", on the right wing and Z-24 (Carrico), "Pride of the Yankees", on the left. The third (left) element was led by Z-41 (Barron), "The Barons", with Z-43 (Cheney) on the left wing. The other two planes in the third element were Z-51 (Mahoney), "Tail Wind", and Z-42 (Clinkscales), "Supine Sue", but it's not clear which was in No. 2 (right wing) position and which was in No. 4 (rear) position.

The first squadron was still led by Hatch in Z-9, with Brown and Reeve in Z-2 in No. 2 position on his right wing. Z-7 (McNamer), "Hell's Belle", was in No. 3 position on Hatch's left wing, and Z-10 (Kappil), "Punchin' Judy", was in the No. 4 (rear) position of the lead element. The second (right) element consisted of only two planes, Z-11 (Curtis), "Holy Joe", leading, and Z-6 (Engle), "Draggin' Lady", on the right wing. The third (left) element of this squadron was composed of Z-47 (Holmes), "Adam's Eve", in the lead; Z-52 (Irby), "20th Century Sweetheart", on the right wing; and Z-48 (Amos), "Million Dollar Baby", on the left.

On this mission the 500th was the last Group in the Wing order, so the enemy was well set up and waiting for them over the target. The 500th planes dropped their loads from the briefed altitude of 29,000 feet, the second squadron at 1611 and the first squadron five minutes later at 1616. All planes dropped successfully on the primary except for Z-11, which experienced a partial rack malfunction and only dropped eight bombs.

Right after bombs away, the fighters struck. The second squadron was jumped by an estimated 75-100 fighters, the first squadron by about the same number. The B-29 gunners blazed away with no shortage of targets. The enemy fighters concentrated on the leader, Z-22. A Tony came in firing from eleven o'clock high. The bombardier of Z-22, 1/Lt Glen Aitken, picked up the fighter, fired back and apparently hit him. Opinions of eyewitnesses varied as to whether the fighter went out of control or whether it was a deliberate ramming, but whatever the case it struck the bomber's right wing between the #3 engine and the fuselage. If a deliberate ramming, it was a harbinger of things to come on later missions.

According to 2/Lt Hal Towner, who as the bombardier on Z-23 had an excellent vantage point, the Tony's right wing cut a large gash in the fuselage from the nose back to behind the copilot's seat, and the fighter's left wing hit the #3 engine. The Tony broke into pieces, with the main portion sliding over Z-22's wing before falling, while other chunks shrapneled out through the formation. One piece of debris put a hole in the left wing of Z-24 of the second element.

Z-22 immediately dropped down and turned to the right under the formation. According to Cpl Melvin Neel, right gunner on the Parsons crew in Z-32, Z-22 appeared at first to be trying to head toward the coast but then turned back inland and began losing altitude rapidly. She leveled off briefly, then went into a spin, burst into flames, and eventually crashed into the ground. No parachutes were seen, and it was thought there were no survivors, but after the war it was found that tail gunner Sgt Harold Hedges had somehow managed to bail out and had
survived as a POW.

While Z-22 was going down, the Japanese fighters continued their attacks on the rest of the formation. Z-7 was hit in the #2 and #3 engine nacelles, the right tire and the leading edge of the left wing. Z-9 had hydraulic lines and the trim tab control cable severed. The rear pressurized compartment of Z-10 was holed and the ring gunner's blister was shot out. Z-43 was hit numerous times and her command antenna was shot off. In Z-21 an oxygen line and the wiring to the lower aft turret was cut. Other planes were hit too, but fortunately not fatally.

The gunners were dishing it out too. With most of the attacks coming from ahead, the bombardiers were especially active. The Japanese pilots had apparently hoped to catch the bombardiers while they were still occupied with the bomb run, but they were a little late. Claims totaled four Tony's and one Tojo destroyed, five fighters probably destroyed, and three damaged. That includes claims of one destroyed and one probable put in for Z-22 by their comrades.

Japanese antiaircraft scored too. At least five B-29's -- Z-2, Z-52, Z-48, Z-10 and Z-43 -- were hit by flak, and for one of them the damage proved fatal. On the way home, Z-48, Amos crew (#363), was observed to have a large hole in her left wing. All engines seemed to running fine at that time, but something must have been wrong, because later she sent out a ditching message saying she was going into the water about 350 miles out from Japan.

Other B-29's were in trouble too. The Engle crew (#105A) in Z-6 had been anxiously watching an oil leak in #1 engine ever since the IP but gamely stayed in formation until after bombs away. By that time the engine was smoking. An attempt to feather it was unsuccessful, the prop began to windmill, and the plane started to lose speed. Luckily, the bomber was not followed by fighters, but it still began to look like "Draggin' Lady" wouldn't make it home. When the plane reached the coast, 1/Lt Engle ordered the radio operator to send a ditching message and the crew to start jettisoning equipment, but then he decided to wait and get as close to home as possible before dark before ditching. About a hundred miles south of Iwo Jima the windmilling propeller spun off and flew out ahead of and over the plane to the right, causing no damage. With the drag relieved, the airspeed immediately increased and the crew were then able to make it home on the other three engines.

Z-51 ran low on fuel and the Mahoney crew (#362) salvoed the bomb bay tanks and jettisoned their flak suits, tail gun armor plate, crew chief and armorers kits, and other equipment to lighten ship. It worked. They made it back.

All other aircraft safely returned to base, landing on Saipan between 2150 and 2316. But there was much damage to patch up before the next mission. At least eleven planes had been hit by fighters or flak and another eleven had various mechanical or electrical problems that had to be fixed. The ground crews wouldn't get much sleep for the next few days.

Bomb damage assessment revealed that results were modest -- only 3.2 acres of Nagoya had been burned out. The analysis was that the incendiaries had not been concentrated closely enough, which in turn was partly a result of the high bombing altitude of 29,000 feet. Ironically, however, these poor results gave the Japanese overconfidence in their fire-fighting abilities, so they failed to prepare sufficiently for the big fire raids which would come later.

Back on Saipan, the men of the 500th thought about their friends who didn't make it home. They had seen Barney Hurlbutt and his crew go down over Japan. There was nothing that could be done for those men now. But the Amos crew was out there somewhere on the cold, dark ocean, and their buddies in the 883rd Squadron would do everything possible to find and save them. They just had to wait for daylight.

The Hurlbutt crew (#222) lost on 3 Jan 1945 was composed of the following men:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AC</th>
<th>Maj Wilbur E. Hurlbutt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copilot</td>
<td>2/Lt Felix P. Omilian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1/Lt Glendon M. Aitken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 500th Bomb Group Day By Day – Part 2 - Combat

N 1/Lt Edward H. Stoehr
FE 1/Lt Glenn C. Truesdell
Radio Sgt Joseph P. Nighan
CFC Cpl Richard P. Steinberg
RG Sgt Frank J. Yanik
LG Sgt Karl Hunt
Radar S/Sgt Paul E. Dreyer
TG Sgt Harold T. Hedges
Obs Lt Col Marcus A. Mullen

As already noted, tail gunner Sgt Harold Hedges was the only survivor, as a POW. Two regular members of the crew were not on this mission. Sgt Edwin D. Levin, the CFC gunner, as explained previously, had been wounded while on plane guard on 2 Jan. He was replaced on this mission by Cpl Steinberg. 2/Lt Kenneth F. Fine, the navigator, was bumped from the flight in favor of 1/Lt Stoehr for reasons never explained to Fine. Possibly Lt Col Mullen, the mission commander, wanted a lead navigator with whom he was familiar. Both Levin and Fine would finish out their combat tours with other crews.

4 Jan 45

At 0253 today on Saipan, a single B-29 rolled down the runway in the early morning darkness and lifted into the air. This was the McClanahan crew (#353) in Z-45, "Mustn't Touch". Their mission was to search for the Amos crew (#363), which had ditched the day before in Z-48, "Million Dollar Baby", on the way home from Mission No. 17 to Nagoya.

Z-45 proceeded to the reported ditching area near Sofu Gan Island and began a systematic back-and-forth search. After 4-1/2 hours, they spotted the crew in two rafts, about 40 miles NE of Tori Chima. Z-45 circled and dropped a life raft with rescue equipment, while the men in the rafts waved their arms in elation.

The McClanahan crew then spent several hours trying to guide a rescue submarine, the USS Whale, to the rafts, while the weather, which had initially been clear, steadily worsened into low clouds and rain. When Z-45 was forced to leave for home, the sub was within five miles of the raft. Unfortunately, the Whale failed to find the rafts that evening.

Z-45 got back home late that night, after 20 hours and 35 minutes in the air.

Today the Donald Jackson crew (#236) of the 882nd Squadron finally made it to the war. Records do not indicate what was responsible for the long delay, nor do they indicate by what means the crew traveled, but most likely they brought in a new B-29 from the States. This was the last of the original 60 crews of the 500th Bomb Group to report to Saipan.

5 Jan 45

On Saipan on this day the 500th Bomb Group, and especially the 883rd Bomb Squadron, remained focused on rescuing their downed comrades. They now knew from yesterday's successful search by the McClanahan crew (#353) that the Amos crew (#363), or at least most of them, had survived the ditching. Unfortunately, the rescue submarine had not been able to locate the life rafts in the darkness and rough seas, so today the 883rd would go out to try to find their buddies again.

The search this day was undertaken by the Braden crew (#364) in Z-51, "Tail Wind". They took off in the darkness at about 0330 and headed for the island of Tori Shima. From there, they initiated a standard search, first heading out 45 miles on a bearing of 40 degrees magnetic, which was the last reported position from yesterday, then running legs from there. The sea was calm, visibility was variable.
The Braden crew did not find the rafts but they did find several armed Japanese ships which fired on them and scored a few hits but fortunately none serious. The Braden crew made contact with one of the two rescue submarines searching the area and learned that the subs had been forced to dive during the day by the Japanese ships, as well as by some patrolling Nell aircraft.

After a long and frustratingly unsuccessful day, Capt Braden called it quits late in the afternoon and returned to base, landing at about 2045.

6 Jan 45

The 500th Bomb Group and 883rd Bomb Squadron tried again today to relocate the downed Amos crew, found on 4 Jan NE of Tori Shima Island by the McClanahan crew but then lost in the bad weather.

Taking up the search this day was the Setterich crew (#346) flying Z-46, "Su Su Baby". They took off at 0300 and arrived at Tori Shima at 0810. From there they flew NE to the last known position of the downed crew and began a systematic, circular search. The sea was rough and the weather was squally.

The crew noticed in the area several small Japanese ships, which by their movements also appeared to be searching. They also noted at least two Nells (twin-engine long-range reconnaissance planes). At 0934 one of the Nells made the mistake of getting too close. Capt Setterich turned and headed for the enemy plane, which banked toward Tori Shima and began climbing. Setterich picks up the story: "The Bombardier opened fire at 800 yards with the upper turret and must have hit the E/A [enemy aircraft] for it stopped climbing and went into a dive. The rate of our closure then doubled and on a second burst from our lower turret, the E/A burst into flames and glided burning into the sea. On hitting the water, the NELL skipped and, on the second bounce, still burning, burst into a mass of flames." The bombardier who got credit for the kill was 2/Lt Robert Oesterreicher. Navigator 2/Lt Paul Hering had a little Kodak Brownie camera along and managed to snap a few shots of the burning Jap plane. When they got back to Saipan, Intelligence took the film but later gave Hering four pictures developed from it to keep.

This is the only known instance of a B-29 turning the tables, acting like a pursuit plane and chasing and shooting down an enemy aircraft.

Unfortunately, no sign was seen of the Amos crew. In view of the rough weather and the heavy presence of Japanese vessels apparently also searching, Setterich decided to abandon the search and return to base. 73rd Bomb Wing then ordered cessation of the search for the Amos crew. Nothing was ever heard of them again.

The members of the Amos crew (#363) were the following:

| AC  | 1/Lt Joe S. Amos, Jr. |
| Copilot | 2/Lt Otis L. Perriman |
| B | 2/Lt George Y. Rainey, Jr. |
| N | 2/Lt Dillon G. Miller |
| FE | 2/Lt Frederick W. Shippee, Jr. |
| Radio | Sgt Norman L. Young |
| CFC | Sgt John R. Volk |
| RG | Cpl Morris S. Jones |
| LG | Cpl James E. Johnson |
| Radar | Sgt James B. Cusick |
| TG | Sgt Robert M. Sadler |

9 Jan 45

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing and the 500th Bomb Group paid another visit to Target 357, the
Nakajima Aircraft Engine Factory in Musashino near Tokyo. This would be another high-altitude, precision bombing mission.

Field Order 37 from the 73rd Bomb Wing directed the 500th Group to prepare 18 aircraft for this mission, in two combat squadrons of 9 planes each. The 500th would bomb third in the Wing order, behind the 498th and 499th Groups and in front of the 497th Group.

The 500th scheduled 18 planes plus two spares (identities unknown) in case of mechanical problems with any of the original 18. As it happened, both spares had to be used, because Z-32, "Fever from the South", scheduled in the first squadron, did have a mechanical problem (prop governor stuck), and Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", of the second (883rd) Squadron, Capt J. D. Haley and crew, failed to take off due to a magneto drop.

Leading the mission and the first squadron was Lt Col John E. Dougherty, Group Commander, riding in Z-27 with Capt Joseph M. Savage and his lead crew. Leading the second squadron in Z-46, "Su Su Baby", with Maj Charles F. Adams and crew was Maj John E. Gay, 883rd Squadron Operations Officer. The 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, Maj Frank Roberts, was also going on this mission, with Maj John Van Trigt and crew in Z-25, and Group Navigator Capt Berry Thompson was flying with 1/Lt Stanley Pierce and crew in Z-21, "Devils' Delight".

All planes took off from Runway B between 0746 and 0805. Bomb load was 10 x 500 lb general purpose bombs. The weather at take-off time was poor, with low clouds and rain showers, necessitating instrument take-offs by some planes.

The weather continued very poor all the way to Japan and played hell with squadron assembly and maintenance of formations.

Four planes from the first squadron turned back for various reasons before reaching Japan. The fuel transfer system on Z-3 (Samuelson), "Ann Dee", went out. Z-21 (Pierce), "Devils' Delight", couldn't pressurize and had insufficient oxygen remaining to complete the mission. Z-22 (D. Jackson), "Georgia Ann", with a new crew on their first mission, lost the formation in the foul weather and decided against trying to bomb alone. Z-25 (Van Trigt), "Homing De-Vice", had an oil leak in the #1 engine.

Still another plane from the first squadron, Z-28 (Gerwick), "Old Ironsides", lost the formation in the bad weather and bombed a target of opportunity, a fishing village on Cape Omae.

When the first squadron finally broke out into the clear at the Japanese coast after the climb to 30,000 feet, there were only four planes left together. These four planes formed into a diamond, with Z-27 still in the lead, Z-31 (McClure) in No 2 position on the right, Z-24 (Carrico), "Pride of the Yankees", in No 3 position on the left, and Z-30 (Farrell), "Constant Nymph", in No 4 position in the rear.

The squadron had hit the coast to the right of their scheduled course, so the lead navigator, probably at this time 2/Lt Clarence M. "Mel" Sonne on the Savage crew in Z-27, had to hurriedly plot a new course to the IP, the city of Kofu. As they approached the IP, there were other problems.

Because of icing on the lead bombardier's window, Z-27 surrendered the lead to Z-31. However, no sooner had Z-31 taken over than the McClure crew discovered that their C-1 (autopilot used on the bomb run) was not working. They tried to pass the lead to a third ship (Z-24?) but that didn't work out, so Z-27 moved back into the lead again. By this time they were well past the IP, so the formation had to turn sharply toward the target. Originally, the 500th had been scheduled to make a downwind run, but after all these changes, they now found themselves on an upwind run at 240 degrees.

Finally, they had some good luck. In an effort to obscure the target, the Japanese had set off smoke pots around the factory area. This actually had the unintended effect of drawing attention to the target from a distance. The 500th planes picked it up from 40 miles away and homed in. The lead bombardier, probably 2/Lt Thomas
Hemingway, doing his best to sight in on the target from 30,000 feet through the ice on the glass, hit the release at 1518. The other planes dropped on his lead, except for Z-30, which suffered a rack malfunction and was unable to drop any of her bombs.

In the final analysis, only three planes from the first squadron dropped on the primary. Bombing results were unobserved.

Flak over Tokyo was rated as moderate to intense, fighter opposition as moderate but inaccurate. Z-30 took several hits from flak and fighters in the fuselage, wing, and vertical and horizontal stabilizers, and Z-31 was holed by fighters in the left wing, but none of the damage proved serious. The tail gunner of Z-30 claimed a Zeke damaged.

Meanwhile, the second squadron was having an even worse time. Z-2 (McGuire), "20th Century Limited", aborted shortly after take-off due to an oil leak in #2 engine. Then the multiple weather fronts on the way to Japan hopelessly scattered the formation.

Z-45 (Charters), "Mustn't Touch", Z-50 (Gregg), "Fancy Detail", and Z-51 (Schmidt), "Tail Wind", managed to stay together for the first part of the route, but when they began their climb to altitude about 600 miles out from Japan, Z-51 fell back and lost the formation. Then Z-45 developed engine trouble.

Capt John J. Charters from Oak Park, Illinois, was a seasoned pilot with considerable combat experience. He was stationed in Hawaii as a B-17 copilot during the attack of 7 Dec 1941, then later at Midway and in the Solomons, where he earned the Silver Star and the Distinguished Flying Cross. After returning to the US in 1943, he volunteered for B-29's, was promoted and assigned as an AC. Charters and crew, #357, had arrived on Saipan in early December, probably by ATC, and had flown their first mission, an individual weather strike mission, on 23-24 Dec. Today was their second mission, but their first as part of a regular bombing formation.

But with the engine trouble, the Charters crew wasn't going to make it to Japan today. Charters feathered his #1 engine, signaled by Aldis lamp that he was aborting, and turned for home. Z-50 flew on alone. About 45 minutes later the radio operator on Z-50, probably Cpl Charles Cross, intercepted a ditching message from Z-45. Something else must have gone wrong on the plane, possibly another engine out, but we'll never know for sure. Nothing else was heard and no survivors from the Charters crew were ever found.

Z-51 and Z-50 were left to struggle separately toward the target. But as Z-51 neared the coast she was jumped by Japanese fighters and forced to jettison her bombs. Her gunners kept the fighters at bay, claiming one Tony probably destroyed and six Tony's damaged, but the bomber was badly shot up. The fighters knocked out her radar dome, oil separators and a fuel transfer motor, and riddled the fuselage, bomb bay doors, nose wheel doors, horizontal stabilizer, and #3 engine and nacelle. Bombardier 2/Lt Orville Pounds took a splinter in his leg. Unsure if they would be able to make it home, AC 1/Lt Robert C. Schmidt ordered a ditching message sent out but rescinded it later when things began to look a little better. Z-51 was able to limp home to Saipan and finally set down on Isely at 2313.

Z-50 was luckier. Before reaching the target, the crew spotted two planes from the 499th Group, V-43 and V-44, and hooked up with them. This small formation bombed the primary from 34,000 feet. They were attacked ineffectively by fighters, the gunners of Z-50 claiming one Tony destroyed and one Tony probably destroyed.

The remaining five aircraft of the second squadron arrived over Japan individually and bombed targets of opportunity. Z-41 (Ryan), "The Baroness", dropped on Hamamatsu; Z-49 (Feathers), "Three Feathers", hit Shingu; Z-4 (Oswald), "Black Magic", bombed Nagoya; Z-10 (Kappil), "Punchin' Judy", struck Shizuko; and Z-46 (Adams), "Su Su Baby", attacked a fighter air field. Z-4 ran into some fighters but fought them off, her gunners claiming one Tony and one Tojo damaged.

Aside from Z-45, all aircraft made it back safely to Saipan, landing between 2059 and 2313.

With so few planes making it through to the primary, this mission had to be rated a failure. Once again, the 73rd
Bomb Wing’s worst enemy had proved to be the weather.

The members of Crew 357 lost on Z-45 were:

AC Capt John J. Charters  
CP 1/Lt Carmon B. Rucker  
B 1/Lt Leland L. Young  
N 2/Lt Thomas G. Maher  
FE 2/Lt William F. Northcutt  
Radio Pfc James A. Marshall, Jr.  
Ring G Cpl Clarence Cohen  
RG Cpl Ray M. Bell  
LG Sgt George T. Copher  
Radar T/Sgt Max J. Swanson  
TG Pvt Beverly A. Hocker

10 Jan 45

The Cheney crew of the 883rd Squadron was scheduled to leave early this morning on a search mission for the Charters crew but they had some sort of problem and did not get off. The Pierce crew of the 882nd went in their place in Z-21, but they did not sight any survivors.

The 500th Bomb Group flew a Weather Strike Mission today, as recorded in the Operations Journal:

"10 Jan 45 -- Weather Strike Mission #103 (Wing) was run today. Target was the OGURA OIL Co, TOKYO. Major Fitzgerald [in Z-8, 42-24743] reached the target and dropped 19 x M18IB [M18 incendiary cluster] on it at 1154Z [2154 local] from 27,500 feet. Bomb load was 20 x M18's but due to a rack malfunction, one (1) was dropped in the ocean.

One twin engine E/A [enemy aircraft] made a single pass over Tokyo firing tracers from 2:30 [o'clock]. -- No damage. Flak was heavy [to] meagre & one hit was sustained on stabilizer. About 35 searchlights were seen in TOKYO area. A/C [aircraft] received radio message to the effect that Z Square 45 had ditched.

There were no casualties on this mission."

But there was a non-combat casualty on Saipan today. Sgt Louis Davenport, an ordnance man, turned over a weapons carrier while on roving guard at the bomb dump and was killed instantly.

11 Jan 45

Two B-29's went out early this morning to search for the Charters crew. These were the Cheney crew of the 883rd Squadron in Z-43 and the Donald Jackson crew of the 882nd in Z-22, “Georgia Ann”. Also engaged in the search, down on the surface, was our old friend the Spearfish, still with the Bricker crew survivors on board. The planes and the sub established voice radio contact and coordinated their search. At 1320 one of the planes informed the Spearfish of the sighting of a “barge” with a torn sail. With the B-29's coaching the sub in the correct direction, the Spearfish reached the reported position nearly four hours later and found the “barge” to be a sampan.

Command Cole of the Spearfish ordered the sampan sunk by gunfire, but their 20mm shells seemed to have little effect, so as the boat crossed his bow he rammed it and broke it in two. Three survivors were picked up. The Japanese “were shackled and taken below, washed, fed, inspected and stowed, one in each torpedo room and the third in the engine room.” They were all checked and treated for minor injuries by the sub's Pharmacist's Mate. Capt Bricker and his airmen, who had already been helping out on patrol as lookouts, volunteered to...
guard the prisoners, which relieved the grateful submarine crew of the necessity of standing extra watches. The frightened prisoner that 2/Lt Cliff Smith drew spoke some English. “He was laying down his wet yen and pleading for his life. … I asked him what he did. He replied that he was from Kagoshima and that he had been a truck driver.”

Following the sampan incident, the Spearfish turned toward Saipan.

No sign of the Charters crew was found.

12 Jan 45

This morning the Arbon crew of the 882nd Squadron took off, plane unknown, to search for the Charters crew. Results were again negative. Wing canceled any further searches by B-29’s.

13 Jan 45

On this date the 500th Bomb Group was directed by the 73rd Bomb Wing to carry out a special reconnaissance mission "to obtain aerial photographs of the aircraft factories at Akashi, Osaka, and of the city of Nagoya." The Group assigned this mission to the 882nd Squadron. No bombs would be carried.

Seven aircraft took off between 0624 and 0646. These were as follows:

- Z-21, “Devils' Delight”, LaMarche
- Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Gray
- Z-24, “Pride of the Yankees”, Tackett
- Z-27, Cordray
- Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Gerwick
- Z-30, "Constant Nymph", Reeves?
- Z-31, crew unknown

Three planes turned back on the way to Japan. Z-24 blew a cylinder in #2 engine; on Z-27 the turbo supercharger control in #4 engine failed; and Z-28 lost its #1 engine.

Thanks to John Ciardi, right gunner on the Cordray crew, we have more detail on this mission and Z-27’s problems. Ciardi says that this photo-recon mission was "specially ordered by Washington." Further, the crews weren't happy about it because in order to take the pictures the airplane had to turned over to the autopilot, as if on a bomb run, and that meant hanging up in the air straight and level for an extended period of time.

But it turned out the Cordray crew didn't have to worry about enemy anti-aircraft fire today, because about five hours out when they began to climb to altitude the #4 supercharger went out and the flight engineer, 1/Lt Robert Campbell, could not get it restarted. So they headed home. When they got back to Saipan, the ground crew checked out the supercharger and discovered that the problem was simply a blown fuse “that could have been replaced in a minute.”

Cordray and Campbell were probably both embarrassed by this unnecessary abort, but there would be consequences more severe than embarrassment. At this time the command was cracking down on unjustified aborts, and Cordray would be one of those cracked down on. A few days after this mission he was relieved as AC and on 24 Jan reassigned to 73rd Bomb Wing HQ. Crew #239 would get a new commander.

But Cordray was lucky. He would get a second chance. On 3 Feb the original reassignment order was amended to detached service, and two months later he would return to the 882nd Squadron, and a couple of months after that he would be reinstated as an AC, though with a different crew. By then, his original crew had mostly been lost.
As for the rest of the planes, Z-31 reached the coast of Japan, but due to excessive gas consumption the flight engineer advised the airplane commander to return to base immediately, so no photographs were taken.

The remaining three planes reached the assigned locations and attempted to take photographs from between 31,000 and 33,000 feet. However, the weather largely failed to cooperate. An extensive undercast covered most of the area. Z-30 got some pictures of Akashi; Z-21 took 46 camera photos and eight radar scope photos of Akashi, Osaka and Nagoya; and Z-22 took 29 radar scope photos of the same three cities.

No flak or fighter opposition was encountered on this mission.

All planes returned safely to base.

This evening the submarine Spearfish arrived in Tanapag harbor on Saipan and tied up alongside the submarine Tender USS Fulton. The seven survivors of the Bricker crew said farewell to the good friends they had made on the submarine and boarded the Fulton, where they were joyfully welcomed home by 881st Squadron CO Lt Col Ralph Reeve, Executive Officer Capt Ralph Maust, and Squadron Navigator Capt Arthur Miller.

According to Maust, after the happy reunion the officers from the 881st were invited to dine aboard the Fulton. They gratefully accepted, enjoying a “supper which was in true Navy style, tablecloth, sterling, Filipino boys all spic and span, wonderful food beautifully served.” The airmen, in their everyday outfits, may have felt a little out-dressed by the Navy officers in their crisp, starched uniforms, but if so, they didn't let it affect their appetites.

14 Jan 45

On this day, in accordance with 73rd Bomb Wing FO No. 39 dated 13 Jan 1945, the 500th Bomb Group scheduled 10 aircraft for a mission to the Mitsubishi Aircraft Factory Kokoku Plant on the Nagoya waterfront. This would be another high-altitude, precision bombing mission.

Due to a leak in the bomb bay tank, Z-11 (Pearson), "Holy Joe", Pearson crew, failed to take off, leaving only nine planes to make it airborne. These nine were:

Z-6 (Luman/F. Parsons), "Draggin' Lady"
Z-2 (McGuire), "20th Century Limited"
Z-47 (Adams), "Adam's Eve"
Z-32 (W. Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-25 (Arbon), "Homing De-Vice"
Z-46 (Standen), "Su Su Baby"
Z-3 (Samuelson), "Ann Dee"
Z-7 (McNamer), Hell's Belle"
Z-52 (Haley), "20th Century Sweetheart"

Maj Freeman Parsons, new Group Operations Officer (replacing Lt Col Marcus Mullen, lost on the 3 Jan mission), would lead this mission, flying in Z-6 with the Luman crew.

Take-off was from Runway B between 0754 and 0803. Bomb load was 10 x 500 lb general purpose bombs.

There were no problems on the route out or on the climb to the bombing altitude of 30,000 feet, and the formation was well maintained. Z-6 led the squadron, with Z-47 in No. 2 position (right wing) and Z-2 in No. 3 position (left wing). Z-3 led the second (right) element, with Z-7 in No. 2 position and Z-52 in No. 3 position. Z-32 led the third (left) element, with Z-46 in No. 2 position and Z-25 in No. 3 position. However, faulty navigation resulted in a landfall 60 miles to the right of the scheduled course, near Hamajima.
At this point Z-2, McGuire crew, lost its #1 engine and had to drop out. Capt McGuire dropped his bomb load through a complete undercast by radar on the airport on Iwo Shima, then headed for home.

The now eight-plane formation did not even attempt to make the far-away IP. They headed instead for Toshijima Island in Ise Bay, then turned to the left and flew upwind along the western coast of the bay, eventually executing a right turn onto the bomb run. A radar approach was made but the undercast broke up slightly near the target and the lead bombardier, probably 2/Lt Admer Boren of the Luman crew, was able to make last-minute corrections. Winds were strong, estimated from the west at from 138 to 170 knots, but the formation stayed tight and all planes dropped on the leader at 1617, except for Z-25, which only got one bomb away before suffering a rack malfunction.

The formation turned away from the target before the on-board cameras could take any good photos, and the undercast hindered visual observation, so there was no immediate bomb damage assessment. However, post-strike photos would reveal very little damage to the target.

Flak was rated at light to moderate, fighter opposition from moderate to heavy but generally inaccurate. About 75 attacks were made on the formation, starting at bombs away and gradually ceasing as the B-29's reached the coast on their withdrawal.

Both Z-46 and Z-47 had their lower forward turrets put out of action by fighter fire, and the former also took some bullet holes in the fuselage. B-29 gunners claimed a Tojo probably destroyed (right gunner Z-52), an Irving damaged (right and tail gunners Z-6), and an Oscar damaged (tail gunner Z-47).

All planes experienced a routine trip home except for unlucky Z-25, the plane that had suffered the rack malfunction, with the Arbon crew. In the bombardier's frantic efforts to salvo their remaining bombs right after bombs away, he also accidentally salvoed their bomb bay tanks. Now they were dangerously low on fuel. All remaining ammo was fired out of the turrets, and everything of any weight was thrown out through the bomb bays: flak vests, food warmers, cameras, the radar, navigational equipment, tool kits, oxygen bottles, everything. They sweated it out all the way, and when they reached Saipan, their engines were sputtering, but they safely set down at 2224 on Isley #2, the B-24 strip. The other planes landed on Isley #1 between 2228 and 2251.

17 Jan 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"17 Jan. - Briefing for Mission #20 held in new briefing building. Target #1547. [This mission was against the Kawasaki-Akashi Aircraft Plant just west of Akashi and was originally scheduled for 18 Jan, but it would be postponed to 19 Jan due to weather.] Morale of combat crew enlisted men not too high from their correspondence. Lack of understanding of censorship rules, their lack of understanding about the liquor situation, squadron details to which they are assigned, and lack of details for the officers on the combat crews seem to be the major causes of their present discontented mood. Maybe this condition will clear up with the passing of time."

This entry probably exaggerates the poor morale of the enlisted men of the 883rd and the 500th. Griping is normal. There's an old Army saying that you know the morale of your troops is really bad when they stop griping.

18 Jan 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:
"18 January 1945

1st Lt William S. Schlup Jr to DS [detached service] XXI Bomber Command. 96 Enlisted Men promoted on SO #6, 500th Bomb Group, dated 18 January." [One of the promotions, and a well-deserved one, went to now M/Sgt George Lucas, crew chief on Z-8 of the 881st Squadron. - JEB]

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"18 Jan. - Mission postponed due to weather. Men worked on ball diamond getting it into shape. Code classes for E/M."

19 Jan 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing mounted a mission against the Kawasaki-Akashi Aircraft Plant just west of Akashi. This would be another daylight, high-altitude, precision attack, but the Wing continued to try new things to improve bombing results. For example, as the 500th Bomb Group Mission Summary explains, "A combat group formation was directed to be flown for the first time en route to the target. A diversionary force of 3 planes provided by the 499th Group was directed to make a feint toward Nagoya and turn before reaching that city and proceed to bomb the city of Hamamatsu."

The 500th Group put up all 21 planes of the 21 scheduled. Using both runways, the planes were in the air in ten minutes, from 0710 to 0720. After assembly and formation into two squadrons, the Group headed off on the long flight to Japan, with the eleven planes of the second squadron flying to the right of the ten planes of the first squadron.

The planes and crews on this mission were as follows:

1st Squadron:

Z-21 (Pierce), "Devils' Delight"
Z-22 (D. Jackson), "Georgia Ann"
Z-23 (Hays), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-30 (Farrell), "Constant Nymph"
Z-41 (Barron), "The Baroness"
Z-42 (Moreland), "Supine Sue"
Z-43 (Setterich)
Z-46 (Holmes), "Su Su Baby"
Z-49 (Black), "Three Feathers"
Z-50 (Gregg), "Fancy Detail"

2nd Squadron:

Z-3 (Thompson), "Ann Dee"
Z-4 (Mather), "Black Magic"
Z-5 (Hatch), "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-6 (Calhoun), "Draggin' Lady"
Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Belle"
Z-8 (Fitzgerald)
Z-11 (Pearson), "Holy Joe"
Z-19 (H. Jackson), "Snafu-perfort"
Z-27 (Savage)
Z-31 (McClure)
Z-32 (Shorey), "Fever from the South"
Leading the Group and the first squadron on this mission was Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry M. Brandon, riding with Capt Vance E. Black and crew in Z-49. Deputy Lead in the first squadron was Lt Col William B. McDowell, Jr., CO of the 883rd Squadron, flying with Capt Charles T. Moreland and crew in Z-42.

Leading the second squadron was Major Robert J. Fitzgerald in Z-8. Deputy Lead was Capt Donald W. Thompson in Z-19.

On the route out, the second squadron lost two aircraft to aborts, Z-4 due to inoperative #1 and #2 superchargers, and Z-5 due to a malfunctioning fuel transfer system.

The climb to bombing altitude was begun about 400 miles out from Japan and went according to plan, with the formation reaching the briefed altitude of 27,000 feet just at landfall. Navigation was pretty good, the Group hitting the coast about 12 miles west of the planned course.

Three more aircraft dropped out before reaching the IP of Otsomura. The #1 engine on Z-21 began running away, making it impossible for her to hold formation; she dropped out and bombed a last resort target, the city of Kantori Saki, south of Shingu. Z-46 lost an engine and turned away to drop her bombs on shipping in the harbor of Kuki. Z-31, having trouble with her #4 engine, broke off and bombed Shingu.

These reductions left both squadrons with eight planes. As the Group formation made their turn toward the target at the IP, the second squadron swung a little wider than the first and came within range of the outer defenses of Osaka. It was here that Z-19 was struck by flak in the left and right outboard nacelle panels and the #1 propeller blade, but she stayed in formation.

As the squadrons headed toward the target, they looked like this:

Z-42 now led the first squadron, with Z-49 in No. 2 position on her right wing. Z-43 was nominally in the No. 3 position on the left wing but was lagging a little behind. Z-50 and Z-41 formed the second (right) element, flying about even with one other, with Z-41 on the outside. Z-23 led the third (left) element, which was out a little far to the left. Z-22 was nominally in the No. 2 position of this element but was out wide, closer to the rest of the squadron. Z-30 was tucked closely into No. 3 position on Z-23’s left wing.

The formation of the second squadron was a little loose at the IP but tightened up as it approached the target. This squadron was led by Z-8, with Z-19 in No. 2 position on her right and Z-6 in No. 3 position on her left. The second (right) element was led by Z-7, with Z-11 in No. 2 position and Z-3 in No. 3. The third (left) element of two planes was led by Z-27 with Z-32 on the left wing.

As the squadrons approached the target, the weather was CAVU (Clear and Visibility Unlimited). Bomb bay doors opened. The two lead bombardiers hunched over their bombsights, while the other bombardiers watched carefully to drop on their mark. That is, except for the bombardier on Z-50, who accidentally hit his release about ten seconds too early, putting his bombs into the city of Akashi.

The rest of the planes dropped visually at 1524, the first squadron from 26,800 feet, the second from 27,200. Two partial rack malfunctions were experienced, on Z-7 and Z-22, each of which failed to get off two bombs, which had to be jettisoned later. All told, the 500th Group put 41.5 tons of bombs in and around the target. Both visual observation and strike photos indicated excellent results, with the aircraft factory appearing to be totally covered by explosions.

All during the bomb run, flak continued to pepper away at the formation, mostly the second squadron, which was a little farther to the north. In addition to Z-19 already mentioned, four other planes in the second squadron were struck by flak. None of these hits proved serious, although Z-6 had to fly home with the center panel in the nose shattered.
Fighter opposition was light for the first squadron, but heavy for the second, which counted about 80 separate attacks. Fortunately, the enemy fire was mostly inaccurate, although you probably wouldn't convince the Shorey crew in Z-32 of that. They were attacked by several fighters and had their right blister shot out. The 20mm round which did this then struck the right gunner in his flak vest but was mostly spent so did not hurt him. A lucky man. But Z-32 was the only plane that reported damage from fighters.

500th gunners claimed one Tony destroyed (ring gunner Z-11), two Zeke's probably destroyed (ring gunner Z-3 and left gunner Z-32) and three Irving's damaged (right gunner Z-3 and tail gunner Z-32 twice).

All planes returned to Saipan safely, landing between 2105 and 2304. The only casualty was one flight engineer suffering a minor case of frostbite.

Later bomb damage assessment estimated the target to have been more than 50% destroyed. This was a very successful mission.

20 Jan 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Chronology:

"20 January 1945
Critique on Mission No. 20 held in Group Briefing Room. Captain Allen, USMC, gave briefing to all combat crews on escape and evasion."

21 Jan 45

During January 1945 the men of the 500th Bomb Group continued to work on improving their living and working facilities. The following remarks were added at the end of the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary for that month:

"During the month progress was made on several projects. A concrete mixer was kept very busy from 6 to 9 of January pouring floors for the Squadron Day Room, two EM showers and wash rooms, a 'wash line' for the mess, a garbage rack for the mess, and two other wash rooms. The 'wash line' for the mess was piped and put into operation as soon as possible and has proven to be a vast improvement. The completion of the new showers was hampered by a lack of plumbing fittings but these were finally obtained and assembled by the Squadron Welders and one new shower for the Combat EM was completed in the latter part of the month. Its operation was not entirely satisfactory due to the small size of the valves installed.

"The Day Room progressed slowly with volunteer labor from among the EM. That part of it which was to be the new Mail Room was completed rapidly and the Mail Clerk (Cpl. Earl V. Harrison) was installed in his new place of business. This change is considered a vast improvement and further, it complies with regulations on the subject.

"An additional quonset hut for housing Combat EM was begun and work on it was sporadic. The project was under the supervision of Sgt. William H. Harrison with Sgt. Bruce E. Gilbertson assisting and crews of Combat EM assigned to the job by Operations.

"About twelve pyramidal tents were built and erected by volunteers for their own comfort. At the end of the month three tents still remained to be built in order for all to live six men to a tent.

"Wiring for the area to make the power from a 50 KW generator available was begun. 2d Lt Elwyn M. Shinn was in charge with 2d Lt Bruce P. Craig and 2d Lt Horace A. Portigal as energetic volunteer assistants. The project was hampered by lack of materials and some 'unusual' requisitioning was necessary. At the end of the month the new system was operative and proved to be a great improvement."
As another indication of improvement in living conditions, Sgt William Eilers, an airplane mechanic in the 881st Squadron, today had his first taste of ice cream since leaving the States.

22 Jan 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“22 Jan. - Several of our planes were slow timed. Back stop erected on ball diamond. Shower bath was completed. Briefing at 1800 in Gp S-2 on Target #193, Nagoya.”

[Note: Slow timing was the standard method for breaking in newly installed engines. The airplane was flown low and slow for an hour or so, then after landing the sump plugs in the engines were checked for metal fragments. If too many fragments were found, there was a problem with the engine and it had to be replaced. Occasionally, new engines failed during the slow timing flight and the plane crashed. This happened at least once in the 500th (see 23 Feb 45), with some loss of life. - JEB]

23 Jan 45

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out a mission against the Mitsubishi-Hatsudeki Aircraft Plant, Target No. 193, on the northeastern outskirts of Nagoya. Secondary target was the center of Nagoya. This would be another daylight, high-altitude mission. Bomb load was a mix of high explosive and incendiary bombs, 7 x 500 lb general purpose and 5 x 500 lb incendiaries per plane.

For this mission the 500th Bomb Group scheduled 19 aircraft, but Z-27 (Rouse) and Z-51 (Mahoney) had engine trouble and did not take off, so only 17 made it into the air. The eight planes of the first combat squadron took off from Runway B from 0724 to 0732, while the nine planes of the second combat squadron took off from Runway A from 0725 to 0734.

This was going to be the former Cordray crew's first mission under their new AC, 2/Lt George Rouse, formerly copilot on the Hodge crew. Maj Van Trigt was scheduled to come along in the right seat, presumably to provide experience for Rouse's first mission as AC, but it all came to naught, as they could not get #2 engine started and the plane had to be scratched. That was fine with right gunner John Ciardi, who "didn't like the idea of going in over a run as hot as Nagoya with a pilot out for a check ride." Ciardi was also a little resentful that Rouse had been assigned as their new AC "over [original copilot] Orenstein's head."

Participating planes and crews for this mission were as follows:

First squadron

Z-23 (Hays), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-2 (Brown), "20th Century Limited"
Z-25 (Porter), "Homing De-Vice"
Z-32 (Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-28 (Arbon), "Old Ironsides"
Z-7 (McNamer), "Hell's Belle"
Z-8 (Taylor)
Z-6 (Engle), "Draggin' Lady"

Second squadron

Z-47 (Adams), "Adam's Eve"
Z-9 (Curtis), "Nina Ross"
Z-22 (Gray), "Georgia Ann"
Z-45 (Braden), "Mustn't Touch"
Z-49 (Haley), "Three Feathers"
Z-46 (Standen), "Su Su Baby"
Z-52 (Irby), "20th Century Sweetheart"
Z-31 (Hodge)
Z-30 (Reeves), "Constant Nymph"

Leading the Group was Lt Col Joseph F. "Toby" Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, flying with 1/Lt Hale Hays and crew in Z-23. Leading the first squadron was Maj Frank F. Roberts, 882nd Squadron Operations Officer, riding with 2/Lt Samuel B. Porter and crew in Z-25. Leading the second squadron was Maj Charles F. Adams in Z-47.

The two squadrons assembled without incident and headed for Japan at 1,000 feet, with the second squadron flying to the right and rear of the first squadron and slightly higher. There were three aborts along the way, two from the first squadron (Z-6 and Z-32) and one (Z-49) from the second squadron. On Z-6, the fuel transfer system failed, while Z-32 lost her #2 and #4 turbos. Z-49 turned back because of fumes in the cabin. This was later determined to be due to burnt wire insulation, nothing serious, or at least not serious enough in the estimation of the command to justify aborting the mission. The Airplane Commander of Z-49, Capt Hostetter J. D. Haley, who was flying only his second mission, must have thought the plane was on fire. But there was heavy pressure from above to cut down on aborts, and possibly someone thought an example needed to be made. Whatever the reason, Haley was transferred to Guam and never flew with the 500th again. His crew was broken up.

The three aborts left the first squadron with only six planes and the second squadron with eight.

About four hours out from Saipan, at the start of the climb to altitude, the crew of Z-23, the lead plane, discovered that their C-1 autopilot, necessary for the bomb run, was not working. The bombsight vertical gyro was also doubtful. Normally, the No. 2 position (right wing) plane, Z-2, would have taken over the lead, but Z-2's radar was not working, so Z-23 switched places instead with the No. 3 position (left wing) plane, Z-25. Z-25 then held the lead all the way to the target.

Flying his very first mission as AC in Z-25 was Sam Porter, a tall, likable West Virginian. Porter had previously been copilot on the Farrell crew (#227) but had been promoted to take over the Gerwick crew (#233) when Gerwick had been medically grounded (and later evacuated to Tripler Hospital in Hawaii). Now here he was, on his first mission as AC and still only a 2/Lt, by quirk of circumstance flying in the important -- and dangerous -- lead position, even though his was not a trained lead crew. On top of that, the crew's regular bombardier, 2/Lt Alfred Olsen, had also been medically grounded (and also later evacuated to Hawaii), and radar operator S/Sgt Manuel Bettencourt was on temporary duty with the 3rd Photo Recon Squadron at this time and also missed this mission. Both the bombardier and radar operator played vital roles in radar bombing, but now there were two men in those positions who had probably never worked together. Furthermore, the replacement radar operator was only a Pfc, indicating little experience. (Most radar operators were Sgt's or S/Sgt's.) On the plus side, at least Maj Roberts was along to provide experienced back-up if needed.

The climb to bombing altitude, which was 25,000 feet on this mission, was accomplished without incident. In an effort to improve bombing results, the 73rd Wing had decided to reduce the altitude from the previous 30,000 or more. This was not popular with the crews, as it made them more vulnerable to both flak and fighters. But orders were orders. (A suggestion recorded in the Bombing Data section of the Consolidated Mission Report was to make all bomb runs upwind and above 38,000 feet! Ostensible reason given was that this would increase sighting time.)

Landfall was 10-15 miles to the right of the scheduled course, near the city of Shingu, and the turn to the right at the IP, which was a point on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa, was made on time. However, the second squadron turned a bit later than the first. This meant that the two squadrons approached the target on slightly different headings, 80 degrees for the first and 86 degrees for the second. The different headings were not a problem, but the fact that the squadrons were now in trail, one behind the other, was a problem. The Wing order had
called for the two squadrons to cross the target nearly abreast, in order to prevent enemy fighters from attacking both squadrons in succession. But that was now out the window.

As well as can be determined, airplane positions at this time were as follows:

In the first squadron, Z-25 was still leading, with Z-2 in the No. 2 (right wing) position and Z-23 in the No. 3 (left wing) position. The positions of the other three planes are unconfirmed, but some evidence indicates that they formed an element to the right and rear of the first element, with Z-7 leading, Z-28 in No. 2 position, and Z-8 in No. 3 position.

In the second squadron, Z-47 was in the lead, with Z-9 and Z-22 in No. 2 and No. 3 positions respectively. The second (right) element had Z-45 in the lead and Z-46 in No. 2 position. Positions of the remaining three planes are unconfirmed, but they probably formed the third (left) element, with Z-52 in the lead and Z-31 and Z-30 in No. 2 and No. 3 positions respectively.

Japanese fighters were particularly aggressive on this mission, probably because of the lower altitude. Attacks began at about the IP and continued on through the bomb run. 500th gunners were kept very busy.

Flak was active as well, beginning on the western outskirts of Nagoya and intensifying during the bomb run.

From a distance the target appeared to be obscured by clouds, but as the B-29's neared the release point at 25,300 feet, a hole opened in the cloud cover and visual sighting was made. A good break. But the other planes could see that there was something wrong with Z-25. Her bomb bay doors were still closed. As the other bombardiers watched anxiously with fingers on the release mechanism, the doors on Z-25 finally opened, but late. As she released her bombs at 1547 and the other planes in the first squadron followed suit, it was dishearteningly clear that all their bombs would fall beyond the target. A complete waste. But then something even worse happened.

Just after bomb bay doors were closed and the formation turned away from the target, the lead element was rocked by a very accurate pattern of flak. Both Z-2 and Z-23 were struck by multiple fragments, and one burst appeared to be very close to Z-25's #4 engine. Other observers say that at about the same time the bomber was hit by a fighter, possibly a Tony, making an attack from directly above. Whatever the cause, the #4 engine caught fire and Z-25 dropped rapidly out of the formation. Fighters swarmed around the cripple as she fell. At about 15,000 feet the #4 engine was seen to explode, and the right wing tip broke off, after which the plane turned over on her back and went into a spin. She was observed to crash into the sea about 15 miles off the coast. No parachutes were seen.

The shocked crews of the first squadron continued their withdrawal, fighting off the still buzzing fighters, some of which pursued them up to 40 miles out to sea.

Meanwhile, the second squadron was running the flak and fighter gauntlet. They dropped bombs from 26,420 feet at 1545, or at least most planes did. Z-30 had a complete rack malfunction, and Z-31 had a partial one, getting out only eight bombs. But it hardly mattered. All bombs from the second squadron also fell beyond the target. (The Bombing Data section of the Consolidated Mission Report submitted by Group Bombardier Capt. R. E. Hale counter-intuitively sought to blame the poor results on the lower bombing altitude: "The lower altitude at which this mission was flown caused great personal anxiety among the bombardiers and was [a] very large contributing factor to bombing errors."

In addition to Z-25, seven B-29's suffered damage from either flak or fighters, or in some cases both. Z-2, Z-23 and Z-8 were the worst shot up, but they all made it home, although Z-2 had to do it on three engines. Z-7, Z-9, Z-45 and Z-46 suffered light damage. Z-28, Z-30 and Z-31 had holes in the front bomb bay doors and other protuberances on the underside of the plane, but these were later determined to have been inflicted by the planes' own lower forward turret. It appeared some sort of limiting device for that turret was needed.
The returning planes landed on Saipan late that evening, between 2133 and 2252. They brought back with them five wounded men, four on Z-8 and one on Z-45. The most seriously wounded was a man with two fingers shot off.

500th gunners made claims of 10 enemy fighters destroyed, 12 probably destroyed and 15 damaged.

Jim Farrell, AC of Crew 227, of which Sam Porter had been the copilot, took the loss of his good friend hard. On a night not long before the fatal flight, before either man knew that Porter would soon have his own crew, the normally optimistic West Virginian had suddenly blurted out, "Jim, I know I'm not coming back from this fracas, but I don't care because I know it's worth it." The surprised Farrell had told him he was off his rocker and tried to reassure him. But Farrell remained disturbed by the incident. Now he went to Squadron, Group and all the way up to Wing pleading for permission to take a plane out to search for survivors from Z-25. But he was refused. General O'Donnell wisely ruled, "It could only result in the loss of another B-29 and its crew."

No trace of Z-25 or its crew was ever found. The members of the crew were:

AC 2/Lt Samuel B. Porter, Jr.  
Copilot Maj Frank A. Roberts  
B 2/Lt Howard E. McBride  
N 2/Lt Eugene E. Pierson  
FE 2/Lt William F. Kottke  
Radio Sgt Glen E. Danielson  
Ring G Sgt Charles F. Hicks  
RG Sgt James A. Bailey  
LG Sgt Joseph P. Conte  
Radar Pfc Arthur W. Mitchell  
TG Sgt Eugene B. Wood

Maj Roberts was the third Operations Officer (one Group, two Squadron) that the 500th Group had lost in two months of combat. For some reason, it was uncommonly dangerous to be an Operations Officer in this Group.

24 Jan 45

Badly shot up Z-8 42-24743, with over 200 bullet holes in her, was transferred today to Service Center B for long-term repairs. She would return to the 500th in a few weeks, but in a different guise.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 Jan. - Squadron critique [of previous day's mission] at 1230; Gp critique at 1300. Capt. Chapin in Wing hospital with a fungus in his ear. Training program discontinued for the day."

25 Jan 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"25 Jan 45 - WSM's [Weather Strike Missions] #139, 140 & 141 were run today. Pilots participating were Tackett, Savage & [D.] Jackson. Target was the Atsuta factory of Nagoya Arsenal.

Capt Tackett reached Target and observed flashes from his bombs and one medium fire growing in intensity. Target was completely blacked out. No searchlights were seen nor E/A [enemy aircraft]. Flak was Heavy meagre [?] behind at 6:00. Inaccurate over Nagoya. No photos were obtained since no camera was installed. Two Radar Scope Photos were obtained -- Lake Biwa & Nagoya. No casualties.
Capt. Savage aborted due to fire in #4 turbo. Bomb bay doors wouldn't close.

Capt. Jackson dropped 12 x 500# G.P.'s [General Purpose, i.e., high explosive] over Target. Bomb impacts were observed, but position of same was not exactly determined. This A/C bombed on an ETA [Estimated Time of Arrival?] since Radar was out & there was a complete undercast. There were no searchlights seen. No E/A sighted. Flak was very slight; LG saw 3 bursts at 07:00. No casualties were sustained."

By this point in the campaign, after two months of combat, the 500th Bomb Group had lost nine of its original 60 crews, while receiving only two replacement crews, Engle of the 881st and Standen of the 883rd, and those two back in December. More were badly needed.

Most of the men in the 500th would not have believed it, but the brass back in Washington had planned for this contingency long ago. As far back as September 1944, approximately 60 crews had been detached from the 313th Bomb Wing, then in training at bases in Nebraska, and transferred to Pyote, Texas, for training as replacement crews. More crews were probably detached for the same purpose from the 314th Bomb Wing, also then in training. In addition to Pyote, other bases in the Southwest may have served as replacement crew training bases. All that is known for sure is that on 11 Dec 44 no less than 99 B-29 replacement crews were in training at Pyote.

Typical in many ways of these crews was Crew 0121, otherwise known as the Raymond O. “Otto” Haas crew. They had been transferred to Pyote from the 484th Bomb Squadron, 505th Bomb Group, 313th Bomb Wing back in September. Thankfully for history, the crew included two young men who chose to flout regulations and keep diaries – 21-year-old copilot 2/Lt Donald M. Weber from Glassford, Illinois, and Cpl William E. “Willie” Greene, the CFC gunner, then just 19 years old, from Salisbury, North Carolina. The two journals complement each other well. Weber’s account was kept in a regular diary which permitted lengthy and detailed entries; Greene’s was kept in a pocket pin-up calendar, so his entries are necessarily cramped and abbreviated, but his writing and spelling are quite good for such a young man. Weber was deeply religious, unfailingly praising God in every entry. Greene was religious too, often attending church, but was not above using profanity when the situation seemed to call for it.

The Haas crew spent several months at desolate Pyote in west Texas, training whenever aircraft were available, which was irregularly. B-29’s were needed everywhere, both for combat and training. And the occasional crash in training – Willie Greene recorded one on 7 Jan – didn’t help the situation. But finally the crew was declared ready for combat and given their orders. On this day, 25 Jan 1945, they left by train for Herington, Kansas, to pick up a new B-29 and fly her to the Marianas. Greene got to sleep in an upper berth on the train, which he thought was fun.

26 Jan 45

Below is a summary of Weather Strike Mission #143 flown on this date, taken from the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal. WSM’s did not usually encounter enemy fighters, but this one did.

"A/C 696 [42-24696, Z-50, “Fancy Detail”] (McClanahan) was over Target [Ogura Oil Co, Tokyo] at 25,600’ (Abs) [Absolute?] and dropped 6 x GP’s [General Purpose, i.e., high explosive] & 6 IB’s [Incendiary Bombs]. Bomb impact flashes were seen, but the exact location of same is unknown since searchlights were very bright. Tail gunner thinks he saw some fires. Target was completely blacked out except for searchlights. One night fighter made a single pass on B-29. It was not seen, but its tracers were. This E/A [Enemy Aircraft] inflicted damage on #696, to the extent of machine gun & 20mm holes in center section of left wing, bomb bay doors, #2 nacelle doors, and top part of fuselage at wing roots. Attack was made just after bombs away. B-29 did not return fire. A/A was moderate & accurate; lasted 6 or 7 minutes. There were no casualties."

Far away from Saipan, the Haas replacement crew arrived at Herington, Kansas, at 1300 hours today. They
would spend the next few days undergoing overseas processing and awaiting the new B-29 they would fly overseas.

27 Jan 45

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing flew another daylight, high-altitude mission to Tokyo. But it wasn't quite as straightforward as that. 73rd Bomb Wing Field Order 44 dated 26 Jan 45 actually specified two possible targets, designated Plan A and Plan B. The plan which would be followed would depend on weather reports sent back by two weather planes which would precede the main force by one hour to check out the weather at 32,000 feet over the two potential targets. The 500th Bomb Group was tasked with providing the two weather planes. These were Z-3 (Samuelson), "Ann Dee", and Z-6 (Calhoun), "Draggin' Lady". Lt Col Reeve, 881st Squadron CO, would accompany Samuelson, while Lt Col Willis Beightol, Wing Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, andLt Kimball, Wing Weather Officer, would fly with Calhoun. Calhoun's regular copilot, 2/Lt Richard Dodds, was bumped from this mission. Beightol would make the final determination as to which plan would be followed, then the decision would be transmitted to the bombing force en route.

Target A was Tokyo, more specifically the dreaded Target #357, the Nakajima Musashino Aircraft Engine Plant, as primary, and the harbor area as secondary. Target B was also a familiar one, Target #193, the Mitsubishi Hatsudoki Aircraft Engine Plant in Nagoya as primary, and the city center as secondary. Bomb load was 8 x 500 lb General Purpose and 4 x 500 lb Incendiary bombs.

The two weather planes took off as scheduled, Z-6 at 0607 and Z-3 at 0608. Carrying no bombs, they would be able to fly faster and reach Japan well before the main force.

The rest of the 500th Group planes took off between 0655 and 0702. Since the 500th had drawn Weather Strike duty for 25-27 Jan, and had also had to provide the two weather planes for this mission, there were only 13 planes left to join the bombing force, only enough to form one combat squadron.

Planes and crews forming the combat squadron from the 500th were as follows:

Z-5 (Fitzgerald), "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-9 (Hatch), "Nina Ross"
Z-22 (Pierce), "Georgia Ann"
Z-7 (Sullivan), "Hell's Belle"
Z-52 (Clinkscales), "20th Century Sweetheart"
Z-48 (Cheney)
Z-27 (Savage)
Z-31 ( McClure)
Z-24 (Carrico), "Pride of the Yankees"
Z-29 (Shorey), "Gravel Gertie"
Z-49 (Feathers), "Three Feathers"
Z-45 (Setterich), "Mustn't Touch"
Z-30 (Farrell), "Constant Nymph"

Group CO Lt Col Dougherty led this mission, riding with Maj Fitzgerald and crew in Z-5. Capt Hatch in Z-9 was the Deputy Leader, with Group Navigator Capt Berry Thompson along for the ride. 883rd Squadron RCM (Radar Counter-Measures) Officer 2/Lt Robert Holmes flew with the Feathers crew in Z-49, and even the Group Surgeon, Maj John McLaughlin, decided to come along this time to find out what a mission was like. McLaughlin was with the McClure crew in Z-31.

Assembly was accomplished without incident and the squadron headed for Japan. All went well until the climb to altitude started. Then Z-30's #1 and #3 turbos went out and she could not keep up. A little later Z-49 lost manifold pressure in her #3 engine. Both these planes turned for home but detoured over Iwo Jima and unloaded their bombs on Airfield #2 there.
While en route to Japan, the formation received the target decision from Col Beightol in the weather plane. It would be Plan A, Tokyo.

The 500th's combat squadron with its remaining 11 planes made landfall in the vicinity of Hamamatsu as scheduled. Just off the coast, as a harbinger of what was to come, the formation was met by about five Japanese fighters, which made some tentative passes. Shortly after crossing the coast, Z-45 dropped out due to an oil leak in #2 engine. She bombed Hamamatsu as a Last Resort target, then headed for home.

Now down to ten planes, the squadron continued at 24,580 feet toward the IP, which was the city of Kofu. At the IP, the turn was made toward the target as scheduled, onto a course of 88 degrees. All the while, the fighter attacks continued, increasing in intensity as the bombers approached the target. Many B-29 crew members recall this mission as the worst they experienced in terms of fighter opposition. The attacks, 191 of them by official count, were fierce and unrelenting. 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot in the lead plane, Z-5, estimated that they alone received at least 50 attacks.

There is very little evidence available concerning individual plane positions within the formation at this point. Z-5 was leading, and Z-9 was probably on her right wing in No. 2 position. Z-24 was "on the left side of the formation". Beyond that, nothing is known.

Despite the earlier positive weather report, the formation found a nearly solid undercast as the planes neared the primary target. According to the report by Group Bombardier Capt Richard Hale, the Lead Bombardier prepared to make a radar approach but did not have confidence in this because for some reason no radar Aiming Point had been established for the primary. Consequently, he attempted to make a radar run on the secondary, the Tokyo dock area. Then confusion took over in the lead plane. The Command Pilot, Lt Col Dougherty, did not feel that circumstances permitted the nearly 90 degree turn to the right required for a run on the secondary. Perhaps this was because the formation was under great pressure from the heavy fighter attacks and in danger of losing its cohesion. So Dougherty overruled the Lead Bombardier and ordered him to continue toward the primary in the hope of a last-minute break in the clouds. The order was followed but no break materialized and the bombs were dropped blind and late, falling in the northeastern part of Tokyo well beyond the primary. Z-9 and Z-7 experienced partial rack malfunctions and were able to drop only some of their bombs.

Flak was active all the time the formation was over land, but was light and inaccurate. No B-29's suffered damage from flak.

The same could not be said with respect to fighters. They continued their aggressive attacks, scoring hits on eight out of the ten B-29's in the formation. Z-9 was holed in the fuselage, bomb bay doors, nose wheel door and right nose wheel tire. Z-7 had holes in the horizontal and vertical stabilizers, the leading edge of the left wing, and the #3 ring cowling. Z-27 was badly shot up, taking numerous hits to the rear of the plane. The vertical and horizontal stabilizers and the rudder were shot full of holes, the rudder trim tab cable and the wires to the putt-putt were shot away, and the radar operator and tail gunner were both wounded. The plane was also hit in the bomb bay doors, the tunnel, and the #1 and #2 propellers. Many years later, this mission was still burned into the memory of Airplane Commander Joe Savage: "We got our ass shot off." But despite the damage, Z-27 somehow flew on.

And the B-29 gunners were giving it back. Seven fighters were claimed destroyed -- an Oscar by the ring gunner on Z-27; a Tony by the ring gunner on Z-48; a Tony and a Tojo by the right (Dick Wing) and tail (Elmo Glockner) gunners respectively on Z-52; a Tojo each by the bombardier and left gunner on Z-22; and an Irving chalked up to the entire crew of Z-24. Three other fighters were claimed as probables, and five as damaged.

But finally, just after bombs away, it looked like the fighters had claimed a kill. As AC 1/Lt Frank "Chico" Carrico in Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", looked out of his left-side window, he caught sight of a Tony streaking down from above. The fighter put a good burst into the #2 engine, which flamed up immediately. While his copilot, 2/Lt Morris "Robby" Robinson, tried to hold the plane in formation, Carrico attempted to feather the engine, but it wouldn't feather. Then fortunately the prop ran away and blew out the flames. But this was only a temporary
The runaway propeller would eventually melt the hub and fly off -- and when it did, there was no telling which way it would go. Sometimes a runaway prop would fly off harmlessly ahead or above or below. But there was an equal chance that it would fly off and slash into the fuselage, or in the other direction, into the #1 engine. The crew could only wait and pray.

But the Jap fighters weren't about to wait. As the loss of an engine and the runaway prop slowed the plane, Z-24 fell out of formation. The fighters pounced on the straggler. One of them making a pass from ahead put a 20mm round into the nose. It exploded, taking out two of the plexiglass panels in the nose and wounding the bombardier, F/O Rosendo "Andy" Hernandez, in the leg. Immediately, supercold air, at minus 40 degrees centigrade, whooshed into the cabin from the holes in the plexiglass. The powerful wind blew out the astrodome, which increased the flow. At the same time, Carrico narrowly escaped emasculation when a bullet passed under the instrument panel and ricocheted off a canteen sitting between his legs, then embedded itself in the ceiling over the flight engineer's position. As Carrico and Robinson attempted to keep the plane flying, more fighters attacked. With the bombardier wounded, the B-29 now had no gunner in the nose, and the fighters seemed to realize that. Carrico counted nine more attacks from dead ahead. Fortunately, the fighters' aim was off.

Then Z-24 got some help. Lt Col Dougherty and Maj Fitzgerald in Z-5 dropped down to their altitude of 20,000 feet to check on their status and protect them from the fighters, which followed them out to sea for a few miles but did no more damage. Dougherty said he would stick with them until the prop came off.

In the meantime, Carrico and Robinson were trying to keep the plane flying with the frigid wind blowing through the compartment. They took turns on the controls. One man would fly the plane until the shivering became too bad, then the other would take over for a while. The navigator, 2/Lt Urban "Bert" Bonneau, gave first aid to Hernandez and then stuffed whatever he could find in the holes in the plexiglass. It did some good, but the crew still shivered. Carrico and Robinson wrapped flak suits, papers and maps around their freezing legs. Neither man realized it at the time, because the cold numbed their lower extremities and stopped any bleeding, but both had been wounded in the legs by shell fragments.

At 1625, an hour and fifteen minutes after bombs away, the runaway #2 prop finally came off. But it didn't fly off cleanly. It peeled off to the left, hung there for a moment, and then flew into the #1 engine. The two huge propellers collided with a great screech and tearing of metal. All four blades on #1 were bent and torn, but the engine kept running. The turning of the twisted blades created a terrific vibration, shaking the entire plane but especially the left wing. And the engine would not feather. Afraid the plane might break up or spin out of control, Carrico pressed the mike switch to order the crew to bail out. But before he could say anything, the engine miraculously stopped and so did the vibration.

The plane was now flying on only the two right engines. Carrico turned to his flight engineer, 2/Lt Albert "Woody" Woodward, and asked, "What do we do now, Woody?" Woodward leafed frantically through his flight manual for what was probably only seconds but seemed like minutes, then looked up and said, "We're not supposed to be flying." But they were. It was not easy, but somehow Carrico and Robinson were managing to keep the plane in the air... for the moment, anyway.

Several planes in the 73rd had made it back from Japan on three engines, but none had ever come back with two engines out on the same side. Lt Col Dougherty advised Carrico to ditch while it was still daylight. If they waited and then ditched in the dark, their chances of surviving the ditching and being found were very low. Carrico decided to put it to a vote over the interphone. It was unanimous; the crew voted to try to make it home.

By this time, Fitzgerald and Dougherty had left to escort a badly damaged plane of the 497th Group, A-52, "Irish Lassie", which had been rammed by two Japanese fighters. But Capt. Hatch, though himself wounded, came over in Z-9 and volunteered to keep Z-24 company on the way home. They certainly needed it. Most of the navigation aids had been blown out of the astrodome opening when the blister there went. With the help of Hatch's crew, they got a position fix and were able to work out a course home. But it didn't look good. On two engines the going was slow, so slow that Hatch in Z-9 had to make S-turns to stay with them. But to keep the
plane in the air those two engines had to be run on full power, which ate fuel rapidly. Woodward, the flight engineer, calculated they didn't have enough fuel to make it. They would be about ten minutes short. Carrico decided they would fly as long as they could and ditch when they had about 15 minutes of fuel remaining.

When they reached a point about a half hour out from Saipan, Carrico ordered the crew into their ditching positions and was preparing to descend toward the water. Then Woodward announced that he had found 75 additional gallons of gas in the center wing section tank, which should be enough to get them in. So they decided to try to make it to Saipan. They got there, but landing on two engines was tricky. Carrico described it: "When we got to the base we had to make the normal right hand traffic pattern because I couldn't turn the plane into the dead wing. We held 2000 feet of altitude and when (we) got on the base leg we took out all our trim and let down the wheels. I flew the approach at 1500 feet until I knew we could get it down power off. We chopped all power and stuck the nose down and we still lost too much speed because when we got below 140 miles per hour we lost aileron control since we had it in such a steep dive. But when we leveled off we picked up our aileron control and she landed good. That landing was strictly a two man job, also as was most of the flying on the two engines."

Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", set down at 2313, and her good shepherd, Z-9, "Nina Ross", landed four minutes later. The rest of the 500th planes had been back for nearly two hours. All had made it safely despite much battle damage.

Joe Savage remembered that all the officers got drunk that night at the Officers Club. They had certainly earned it.

The following morning found a crowd of on-lookers and picture-takers gathered around Z-24 gaping at the mangled and torn engines and props. How on earth had the crew managed to bring her back with that level of damage? Carrico and the crew of the "Pride of the Yankees" became an instant legend.

28 Jan 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"WSM #147 was run today by Lt. Pearson in A/C Z Sq 11 [42-63489, "Holy Joe"]). [Per other records, Z-11 took off at about 1700 local 27 Jan. - JEB] This A/C dropped 6 x 500# GP [General Purpose] & 6 x 500# IB [Incendiary Bomb] over the Ogura Oil Co. Tokyo. Small fires were observed on ground after impacts. Target was blacked out. Three (3) E/A [enemy aircraft] attacked B-29 #11 shortly after release and B-29 suffered several hits. Sgt. Salvador Delgado, radar operator, was wounded by a 20mm shell which did not explode. Shell passed through his left leg between hip & knee & grazed right leg. Flak was moderate – accurate to inaccurate. There were approximately 200 searchlights in the area. A/C returned to Saipan at 2120Z [0720 Saipan time 28 Jan] and was met by surgeon of 500th Gp." [The weather observer on this flight was 2/Lt Alexander H. "Ham" Howard.]

30 Jan 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"30 Jan. - Baseball team played 435th Av. Battalion (colored) and won 4 to 1. Party in mess hall for EM."

31 Jan 45

The ground crew of M/Sgt George Lucas received a replacement Z-8 today, 42-24849, their third.

1 Feb 45
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"1 Feb. - Erected map wall in S-2 office. Still much work to be done. Group Mission #23 briefing at 1500, target Industrial Area of Kobe."

Today in Herington, Kansas, it snowed. The Haas replacement crew learned that there would be nothing for them to do for a few days, so the crew got two-day passes and copilot 2/Lt Don Weber and CFC gunner Cpl Willie Greene hitch-hiked to the much larger city of Wichita. They had good luck with their thumbs, reaching Wichita about 1900, and then had even better luck in snagging a two-room suite at the Allis Hotel. Later, their crewmate radar operator Cpl Bill Lange came in on the bus from Herington and the three shared the suite.

2 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 February 1945

Lt. Col. Reeve, Captain Miller, Captain Thompson, Captain Hatch, Lt. Shulman, Lt. Graves, Sgt. Gilbertson, and Sgt. Maples flew to Tinian, visiting the 313th Wing units there and passing on to them specific knowledge gained from combat experience over Japan. Returned 3 February." \[The 313th Bomb Wing would fly its first combat mission on 4 Feb. The 73rd Wing was no longer alone in flying from the Marianas. - JEB\]

Many years later, radio operator Charlie Maples still remembered being "selected to fly over to Tinian to discuss with the new, incoming crews our experiences and what it was like to fly these long missions. I, of course, was assigned to talk to a group of radio operators. Mostly, all they wanted to know were things like how many fighters we had seen, how much flak we had encountered, had we ever been hit, etc. We did manage to talk a little about [radio] procedures, but they were clearly a nervous bunch."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"2 Feb. - Mission #23 cancelled at take-off time. [This mission would finally be flown on 4 Feb.] Capt. Black flew a training flight. Ground officers beat combat officers in soft ball game."

Back in cold and drizzly Wichita, Kansas, 2/Lt Don Weber, copilot on the Haas replacement crew and on pass from Herington, spent some time with a relative who worked in Wichita. Also, being a serious and inquisitive sort, Weber took a tour of the Boeing-Wichita plant where most of the B-29's were built, as well as a tour of the Boeing Stearman plant. \[The Stearman was a training plane. - JEB\] Willie Greene of the same crew and also on pass on Wichita was not as interested in the construction of B-29's and devoted his time to activities which generated more immediate gratification. He spent some time at the USO and then went to a show and a couple of night clubs. Both Weber and Greene had to report back to base in the morning, so they caught the 0130 bus tonight and got to Herington at about 0430.

3 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"3 February 1945

Poured concrete floor for second half of 'day room'."
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


NOTE: If you've been wondering why I keep citing the 881st & 883rd war diaries but never the 882nd, it's because the 882nd's never made it into the historical records. They were either never forwarded from the squadron or were lost. (And by the way, the 881st & 883rd diaries are not complete -- some months are missing.)

4 Feb 45

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out a daylight, high-altitude incendiary mission against the port and urban area of the city of Kobe. For this mission the 500th Bomb Wing scheduled 18 planes, of which 1, Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Kappil crew, failed to take off, leaving 17 airborne.

The Group was divided into two combat squadrons, the first consisting of eight planes and the second of nine planes. Leading the Group and the first squadron was Lt Col Harry Brandon, Deputy Group Commander, riding with Maj Charles Adams and crew in Z-47. Leading the second squadron was Maj John Van Trigt, Assistant Group Operations Officer, riding with 2/Lt George Rouse and crew in Z-31. Another command and staff officer along for the ride was 883rd Operations Officer Maj John Gay, with the Feathers crew in Z-49. Flying as RCM (Radar Countermeasures) Officer with the Tackett crew in Z-21 to foil Japanese radars was 882nd Squadron RCM Officer, 2/Lt Norman Garrigus, from Tucson, Arizona.

The participating aircraft and crews were as follows:

First squadron
Z-47 (Adams/Brandon), "Adam's Eve"
Z-49 (Feathers/Gay), "Three Feathers"
Z-46 (Holmes), "Su Su Baby"
Z-45 (McClanahan), "Mustn't Touch"
Z-51 (Mahoney), "Tail Wind"
Z-41 (Barron), "The Baroness"
Z-52 (Irby), "20th Century Sweetheart"
Z-43 (Gregg)

Second squadron
Z-31 (Rouse/Van Trigt)
Z-21 (Tackett), "Devils' Delight"
Z-27 (Arbon)
Z-30 (Reeves), "Constant Nymph"
Z-22 (D. Jackson), "Georgia Ann"
Z-32 (Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-33 (Hanft), "Slick Dick"
Z-29 (Gray), "Gravel Gertie"
Z-19 (McGuire), "Snafu-perfot"

Take-off was from 0729 to 0737 using both runways. Bomb load was 16 x 500 lb incendiaries plus 1 x 500 lb fragmentation cluster for most planes, and 17 x 500 lb incendiaries plus 1 x 500 lb fragmentation cluster for two planes (Z-30 and Z-33).

For this mission, "Each Group in the 73rd WIng was directed to fly a combat Group type of formation with the
second combat squadron high and to the right of the first." Squadron and Group assembly were accomplished without incident and the formation headed for Japan, with the 500th as the last Group in the Wing order. About 4-1/2 hours out, Z-19, McGuire crew, blew a cylinder in #1 engine and aborted, leaving eight aircraft in each squadron.

After the Group began its climb to bombing altitude of 26,500 feet, strong headwinds were encountered. At landfall, it was found that faulty navigation by the lead navigator had resulted in about a 50-mile error to the right of the scheduled course. The formation turned left toward the Primary Target, now about 120 miles away, but the continuing strong headwinds made for slow going. It soon became obvious that attempting to reach the Primary would leave many if not most planes low on fuel for the return trip, so the Group Leader made the decision to turn toward Ise Bay and bomb the city of Matuzaka as a last resort target.

The sharp turns made to get on course toward Matsuzaka, combined with severe turbulence at altitude, disrupted and loosened up the formation. This dispersion resulted in a poor bombing pattern over Matsuzaka when bombs were dropped at 1604. Some bombs landed in the city suburbs but many others were seen to land in hills near the city. One plane, Z-43, suffered a rack malfunction and dropped no bombs over the target.

Both flak and fighter opposition were very light on this mission. No B-29's were damaged and no claims of enemy aircraft were made.

A couple of B-29's had to sweat out their fuel situation on the way home, and Z-29, Gray crew, flew the last 1,000 miles on three engines, but all planes made it back to Saipan safely, landing between 2138 and 2217.

A very disappointing day for the 500th Bomb Group. Not a single bomb had been dropped on the Primary Target.

While most of the Group were off today bombing Japan, 1/Lt Herschel Connor, flight engineer on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, was busy making arrangements to get Z-19 weighed. This was 42-63435, formerly Z-3, now back in commission after extensive repairs and redesignated Z-19. Planes were weighed from time to time because weight was a critical factor in determining exactly how much fuel had to be carried to get the plane to the target and back. A set weight could not be assumed for all planes because B-29's were built at four different plants and in accordance with different modification schedules, so they could vary by as much as several hundred pounds. Z-19 was not the Fitzgerald crew's regular plane, and in fact they never flew her. Connor was overseeing the weighing of Z-19 in his new capacity as Squadron Flight Engineer. Finally, he got everything set up for tomorrow, or thought he had.

At some point today Connor and his friend copilot Robert Copeland went “up on the hill” to a local reunion of Texas A&M graduates. Plans were for these meetings to become a regular occurrence on Saipan.

Also today the Fitzgerald crew took their newly assigned replacement plane, 42-24849, now designated Z-8 (third), up for a test flight. Everything went well. Copilot Copeland got to fly her a little and even made the landing, which he rated as “the best I've made.” Flight engineer Connor rated 24849 as only “an average plane – nothing extra.” Some planes seemed to handle better or worse or fly faster or slower than expected, but apparently not this one.

Far away from sunny Saipan, back in chilly Herington, Kansas, copilot Don Weber of the Haas replacement crew uncharacteristically overslept on this Sunday morning and was late for chapel services. Still, he enjoyed the sermon. With little to do until they got word that their B-29 was ready to go, Weber finished reading A Tree Grows in Brooklyn this afternoon, then he and some friends went to see the show “Winged Victory” in the evening. Weber thought that “the first part of the picture closely followed the life I led as a cadet, the examinations and aptitude tests and all.”

5 Feb 45
From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"5 Feb 45
2/Lt Milton O. Pack, Group Radar Counter Measure Officer, returned after a six week stay at Guam where he acted as an instructor in the Lead Crew School. He left the organization on the 22 of December 1944."

1/Lt Herschel Connor's arrangements for getting Z-19 weighed today fell thru for some reason. Connor simply called it a snafu and did not elaborate. The weighing was postponed until tomorrow, and since Connor had a Group class on malfunctions to present tomorrow, the weighty responsibility for Z-19 would devolve upon 1/Lt Robert Kraushaar, flight engineer on the Kappil crew.

Today copilot Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew attended a critique of yesterday's mission. “The conclusions drawn were that we didn't do a bit of good.” Given the results, or lack thereof, this seems like an accurate assessment. This evening Copeland taxied the crew's new ship, Z-8, back from the harmonization range, where she had been taken to harmonize the guns and gunsights.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"5 Feb. - Squadron critique at Group S-2 at 1030 and Group critique at 1400 on Mission #23 [this was the previous day's mission to Kobe - JEB]. Mission not too successful. Major Adams led Group. Capt's Feathers, Mahoney, Irby, McClanahan, Lt's Holmes, Gregg and Barron flew and completed mission. No opposition and no losses. New ground school scheduled by Group started."

Thousands of miles away in Herington, Kansas, the weather was fair today. The replacement crews waiting there for B-29's had to report to formation twice a day, at 0830 and 1330. At the first formation the Haas crew learned that there was nothing for them to do that morning, so most of them played basketball. However, at the second formation there was progress. They were introduced to the B-29 they would likely fly overseas, serial number 44-69735. Copilot Don Weber thought it was “a Renton job.” He was correct; this plane had been built at the Boeing factory in Renton, Washington. But before the crew could take possession, some minor repairs had to be made. All new B-29's were given a thorough going-over at Herington before they were allowed to proceed overseas, and according to Weber, this one had been found to be “defective with a bad gas cap or something.” The plane was however expected to be ready by tomorrow afternoon.

6 Feb 45

In Herington, Kansas, the Haas crew's prospective B-29, 44-69735, was taken up for a “test hop” this morning, not by the Haas crew but by men assigned to the base. Apparently everything went well, because the Haas crew were told at the afternoon formation that they had to attend a “POE [Port of Embarkation] meeting” tonight. It looked like they might be leaving as early as tomorrow.

7 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"7 February 1945
2d Lt. Eugene C. Herweg transferred to 500th Bomb Group as Group Supply Officer. Captain Arthur S. Miller to TD [Temporary Duty] 73rd Bomb Wing for special training and to teach. Three (3) Enlisted Men promoted."
From Lt Robert Copeland's War Diary:

"7 Feb 45 Got up at 0500 and took off at 0715 for Pagan. [Pagan is an island in the Northern Marianas about 160 miles north of Saipan. In 1945 it was still occupied by the Japanese and was regularly used by XXI Bomber Command for practice missions. Must've driven the poor Japs crazy to be bombed so often. - JEB] Over the field we were intercepted by P-47's and they made pursuit curves on us for some time. We dropped 4 bombs on Pagan by radar and then calibrated our instruments. After we got down I and the gunners cleaned guns. [Another officer who pitched in on cleaning the guns. A good man, Bob Copeland.] We are going on a mission to Japan (Tokoyama) in a day or so, [number] 15."

The Haas replacement crew didn't leave Herington, Kansas, for the war today but they did get to take their assigned plane up for a check flight. First there was a minor problem with #3 fuel pressure indicator but that was fixed, and then they took her up at 1145 for three hours. They calibrated the airspeed and swung the compass, then climbed to 22,000 feet and checked pressurization and turret operation. Everything worked satisfactorily except for a few minor items.

Anticipating that they might leave tomorrow, copilot Don Weber and navigator 2/Lt Robert Wool decided to go the expense of last phone calls home. Weber had to wait a while for the call to go thru, and when it did the connection was bad. He could barely hear his mother and father, but they carried on a conversation as well as they could.

8 Feb 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

"8 Feb 45 - WSM-181. A/C Z Square 33 ["Slick Dick"], flown by Lt. Hughes, aborted one hour and fifteen minutes after take-off. Reasons: #1 engine prop featherline disconnected; bad oil leak.
WSM-182. Target: Kawanishi Machine Shops, Kobe. Lt. Farrell flew [Z Square 30, "Constant Nymph"] and Lt. Pack, Group RCM [Radar Counter-Measures] Officer, acted as Radar Observer. Over target at 1703 making a radar run from 26,000 feet. Bombs were seen to break up but nothing further was observed. There was no AA [anti-aircraft] or fighter opposition. Searchlights observed after bombs away catching the tail of the plane at one time during their two minute search.
WSM-183. Scratched when Z Square 33, piloted by Capt. McClure, swerved violently to the left on take-off due to #1 and #2 props overspeeding. In bringing A/C to stop, at end of runway, the breaks (sic) were burned out.

[Apparently, Z-33 was considered repaired sufficiently from the earlier abort to try again later, but obviously she wasn't. - JEB]

In compliance with FO #49 a wing training mission was flown to Rota [a still Japanese-occupied island between Tinian and Guam]. 2 x 500 pound GP's were dropped on the runway from 9,000 feet. The 500th returned to base 1110 K time."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:


Back in Herington, Kansas, the Haas replacement crew was inching closer to departure. With nothing to do this morning, they played some basketball for a couple of hours. Later, copilot Don Weber sensibly prepared for the
trip by stocking up on gum, razor blades and candy. In the afternoon there was some final processing and a last check by the Doc. Then all their luggage had to be weighed and packed in the plane in a balanced way. Weber's equipment alone came to 120 pounds. CFC gunner Willie Greene called the packing job "Close!!" They were ready to go.

9 Feb 45

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"9 Feb. - Ground school carried over from classes excused yesterday PM. News presentation by Sgt Harris of 882nd in Group S-2. Wing practice mission flown."

In Herington, Kansas, today was the big day for the Otto Haas replacement crew. They were finally leaving. The crew got up early, some as early as 0400, dressed, ate breakfast and went down to their plane. While his crew did some final straightening-up of the all the junk they had packed in the plane, AC 1/Lt Otto Haas went off to get ammunition, take-off clearance and final instructions for the flight. They took off at about 0920 and flew the southern route to California via Hutchinson, Amarillo and Albuquerque. When they reached the Golden State, copilot Don Weber recognized Muroc Dry Lake and the location of Polaris Flight Academy, where he had taken his basic flight training. Their destination for today was Mather Field, the usual POE (Port of Embarkation) for B-29 departures, near Sacramento, but due to high winds they were diverted to nearby McClellan AAF, which is where they spent the night. Weber was impressed by all the different types of planes stationed at McClellan. CFC gunner Willie Greene thought that McClellan was a nice field.

10 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"10 February 1945

At 0545 while preparing for take-off the lower aft turret of Z Square 12 ran away and fired rounds in a north easterly direction across the runways. Apparently there was no damage except to the gun barrel which was changed in time for the take-off. Spontaneous reaction of those who heard the firing caused a mild flurry of scraped shins, etc., from 'hitting the dirt'."

The Calhoun crew were on the next hardstand prepping Z-7 when the turret on Z-12 began firing. The men quickly took cover behind the landing gear and the truck that had brought them to the plane until the firing stopped. Then they came out and continued their business of preparing for the mission. It was bad enough to be shot at by the enemy. Now their own planes were shooting at them.

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing put up 85 planes for a high-altitude, precision strike against the Nakajima Aircraft Assembly Plant near the city of Ota. For its part, the 500th Bomb Group put up 23 planes out of a scheduled 22. No, that's not a mistake. When one of the originally scheduled planes had a mechanical problem, a spare plane took off to replace it, but then the problem on the original plane was quickly fixed and it took off too.

The Group formed into two combat squadrons, the first consisting of 12 planes (originally 11 but then augmented by the spare plane) and the second of 11 planes. Leading the Group and the first squadron was Lt Col "Toby" Brannock, CO 882nd Squadron, riding with 1/Lt Hale Hays and crew in Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe". Leading the second squadron was Maj Freeman Parsons, Group Operations Officer, flying with Maj Robert Luman and crew in Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas".

The participating planes and crews were:
First squadron
Z-23 (Hays), "Ramblin Roscoe"
Z-27 (Savage)
Z-34 (Reeves), "Frisco Nannie"
Z-47 (Adams), "Adam's Eve"
Z-32 (W. Parsons), "Fever from the South"
Z-31 (Rouse)
Z-29 (Shorey), "Gravel Gertie"
Z-42 (Moreland), "Supine Sue"
Z-52 (Clinkscales), "20th Century Sweetheart"
Z-45 (McClanahan), "Mustn't Touch"
Z-51 (Schmidt), "Tail Wind"
Z-46 (Holmes), "Su Su Baby"

Second squadron
Z-5 (Luman), "There'll Always Be A Christmas"
Z-41 (Ryan), "The Baroness"
Z-12 (Curtis), "Wabash Cannonball"
Z-3 (Samuelson), "Ann Dee"
Z-10 (Kappil), "Punchin' Judy"
Z-13 (McGuire)
Z-6 (Engle), "Draggin' Lady"
Z-7 (Calhoun), "Hell's Belle"
Z-2 (Brown), "20th Century Limited"
Z-11 (Thompson), "Holy Joe"
Z-4 (Mather), "Black Magic"

Take-off was from 0735 to 0747 using both runways. One plane of the first squadron, possibly either Z-46 or Z-51 (records are unclear), had some sort of mechanical problem and failed to take off initially. However, the problem was quickly fixed and the plane was able to take off after the second squadron and catch up to the first en route. In the meantime, a spare plane, Z-47, had taxied out to take the place of the first plane, and Z-47 also took off after the second squadron and joined the first, giving that squadron 12 planes.

Bomb load for this mission was 10 x 500 lb GP bombs and 2 x 500 lb Incendiaries.

Squadron and Group assemblies were accomplished as planned, except for the last two planes mentioned above which caught up to the first squadron on the route out. With the second squadron flying to the right and above the first, the 500th headed for the Wing Assembly Point. About two hours out, the #1 engine of Z-45 in the first squadron swallowed a valve and the plane turned back, bombing Pagan Island on the way home.

For this mission, the 500th would bomb third in the Wing order, behind the 498th and 499th Groups and ahead of the 497th. With regard to the route and formations, the Wing instructions for this mission were quite detailed. To quote the 500th Bomb Group Consolidated Mission Report:

"Each Group in the 73rd Wing was directed to fly a combat group formation to the Wing Assembly Point, the island of Nashino Jima (27 15N - 140 53E) [an island in the Bonins about 500 miles south of Japan, also known as Nishino Shima]; at this point, the combat Groups were to form into a Combat wing type of formation and depart on course at 100235 Z [1235 local time 10 Feb]. The Wing formation was to be maintained until 35 42N - 140 33E, at which point the Wing formation was to form into a column of Groups. At the IP (36 09N - 140 19E), the north tip of Nishi Ura, the groups were to fall into a column of squadrons. The objective was to have all squadrons over the target within the space of five minutes."

Such a complicated plan was doomed to failure. Sure enough, the 500th Group reached the Wing Assembly Point about ten minutes late to find that the two preceding Groups had decided not to wait. They were already
disappearing into the distance, beginning the climb to bombing altitude. The 500th immediately followed trying to catch up but never did. The 73rd would bomb this day as individual Groups, not as a Wing.

Between the Wing Assembly Point and landfall, two more planes from the first squadron aborted, Z-31 due to a severe oil leak and Z-46 due to the #1 prop sticking at 2250 RPM and the #4 engine backfiring. Both these planes bombed two Jima on the way home. Z-4 from the second squadron developed a problem with the fuel pump in #4 engine and could not keep up with the formation as it climbed to the briefed bombing altitude of 29,000 feet. She fell out about 125 miles from landfall but AC 1/Lt Walter Mather elected to continue to Japan and bomb the Tatoyama-Hojo airfield south of Tokyo as a target of opportunity.

These aborts and drop-outs left the first squadron with only nine planes and the second with ten.

The formation made landfall as planned south of Choshi Point and proceeded to the IP, which was turned on without difficulty. However, by this time the second squadron had fallen about 4-5 minutes behind the first.

At this point, the enemy fighters showed up. Fighter opposition was rated light, with only 31 reported attacks, but most of those were made here, between the IP and the target. The high altitude, 29,000, for this mission, apparently made it harder for the fighters to reach the B-29's, but some did, and one scored a hit. A Tony made a pass on Z-13, AC Capt Tull McGuire, who was leading the third element of the second squadron. McGuire and his crew were on at least their fifth mission, but this was the first mission for unlucky Z-13. A gunner on Z-6 saw something fly off the bomber's right wing, after which the plane dropped back and pulled out of the formation to the right, then turned 180 degrees and headed back toward the coast. A gunner in A-43 of the trailing 497th Group observed Z-13 passing several thousand feet below, still headed for the coast but in a steep glide with her #3 engine smoking. This was the last reported sighting of Z-13. The plane is assumed to have gone down in the sea, since neither plane nor crew were ever found.

Later, 1/Lt Herschel Connor of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron wrote in his diary that an SOS had been picked up from Z-13 on VHF but with no coordinates given. He noted the loss of fellow flight engineer 2/Lt Urban J. Schroder with this crew and added that one of McGuire's gunners had "used his beer ration the night before because he didn't expect to come back."

The only other damage from fighters was a bullet which entered the navigator's compartment of Z-29 and struck a computer.

B-29 gunners claimed one Tony destroyed (by the right gunner of Z-11), one Tony probably destroyed (by the bombardier of Z-7), one twin-engine plane damaged (by the tail gunner of Z-3), one Irving damaged (by the ring gunner of Z-2), and one Oscar damaged (by the tail gunner of Z-47).

Flak was encountered at various points along the route over land but was light and inaccurate. No planes were hit.

With the loss of Z-13, only 18 planes, nine in each squadron, reached the target. Visibility was good except for a cloud which obscured the target at the last moment. On an upwind bomb run, heading 282 degrees, and at just below 29,000 feet, bombs were dropped by the first squadron at 1613 and the second squadron at 1619. All 18 planes successfully bombed the target except for Z-29, which suffered a partial rack malfunction and only got away seven bombs, the remaining five being jettisoned later.

The last-minute cloud hindered strike photographs, but some of the crews reported bomb bursts in the eastern half of the factory area. The target would later be assessed as 40% destroyed.

After bombs away, the squadrons turned right to a heading of 90 degrees and reached the coast without further incident. All planes returned safely to Saipan, landing between 2227 and 2337.

The members of the lost crew in Z-13 were:
AC     Capt Tull H. McGuire
Copilot 2/Lt Frank Fernandez, Jr
B     F/O William Schulman
N     2/Lt Calvin W. Regnier
FE     2/Lt Urban J. Schroder
Radio S/Sgt William R. Johnson
Ring G     Sgt Elijah G. Lane, Jr
RG     Sgt Tony J. Maiorana
LG     Sgt Roy E. Robbins
Radar S/Sgt William R. Johnson
TG     Sgt Sherman E. Brown

The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron had gotten up at 0630 and stood by in Z-8 during take-off in case they had to replace the Luman crew as second squadron leader, but it turned out they weren't needed, so they took off at 0835 on a training mission to Pagan Island instead. According to copilot Robert Copeland, they made one practice radar run and returned, logging four hours in the air.

Nearly 6,000 miles away from their final destination of Saipan, the Haas replacement crew were enjoying the sunny California weather and admiring the green grass at McClellan AAF this morning. The first thing on the agenda was to get from McClellan to Mather AAF, where they had been unable to land yesterday due to high winds. It was only a short hop, but it was made more difficult than it should have been. First they were told by base operations to go out to their plane and get ready, but then they were called back. When they returned to operations, they were told to go back out and take off. Finally they got away and made the 30-minute flight, arriving at Mather at about 1200. Copilot Don Weber, like just about everyone else who had passed thru Mather, was impressed with the place. CFC gunner Willie Greene, for reasons not specified, wasn't. The crew were assigned quarters and told they would be processing for the next several days. Weber got the impression they might be there for as much as a week.

11 Feb 45

This morning Bob Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron went to church. In the afternoon he attended the critique of yesterday's mission to Ota. He wrote in his diary, “Apparently the mission could have run more smoothly but results were gotten,” which seems a fair summation. In the evening there was a medical lecture by “Doc” McConnell, the 881st Squadron Medical Officer, but Copeland still had time to get in on a jam session at Special Service. He thought they sounded “darn good.” As an afterthought, Copeland added that a troopship convoy arrived at Saipan today. [This convoy was certainly part of the Iwo Jima invasion force. - JEB]

Flight engineer Herschel Connor of the same crew confided to his diary some details he had heard about the Ota mission. The new 313th Wing on Tinian had participated in this one and Connor was shocked by their loss of nine planes, which he listed as “1 during T.O. – 3 over the target – 2 ditched and 3 unreported.” This was out of only 27 planes, by Connor’s account. (Other sources report 35 planes airborne and 29 over the target for the 313th, but they agree on the 9 losses. - JEB) On a more individual note, Connor received an order today making Squadron Flight Engineer his primary duty.

To the Haas replacement crew at Mather Field in California, as to all previous B-29 crews, it seemed like they had to repeat overseas processing at every base thru which they passed. So it was again at Mather. This morning their paperwork – allotments, insurance, etc. – was checked, then there were medical and dental examinations. In the afternoon they went thru supply and were issued various items. Everyone got sunglasses, and AC Otto Haas and copilot Don Weber received very nice GI wrist watches made by Elgin. Weber hadn't expected the watch and resolved to send his own fairly new watch home. This being a Sunday, Weber didn't want to miss church, so he went to chapel services at 1830. CFC gunner Willie Greene went to see the movie
This morning the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron got up at 0645 for another training mission to Pagan Island. They took off at 0820, made three bombing runs on the target island, then returned. When they got back to Saipan at about 1230, they saw that a large task force containing battleships, cruisers and four or five escort aircraft carriers had come in to join the troopship convoy in Tanapag Harbor and in the channel between Saipan and Tinian.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

“12 Feb. - Battleship Tennessee and A/C on CV's Bogue class [The Bogue class was actually an escort carrier (CVE), not a fleet carrier - JEB] moved into port. Wing critique -- the General [presumably O'Donnell] was quite dissatisfied with results [apparently of the 10 Feb mission to Ota]. Gave class in Target Identification to radar operators. Miss Barbara Finch from Reuters News Agency visited Squadron area.”

Upon their return from the training mission, the officers of the Fitzgerald crew had another surprise. Their footlockers had finally arrived. Everybody was reunited with some welcome items he had packed away four long months ago in Kansas.

In his official flight engineer persona, 1/Lt Herschel Connor noted in his diary that there was an engineer's meeting tonight. He added that the 73rd Wing now had a B-29 fitted out as a flying laboratory, for which they were requesting items for research.

Back at Mather Field in California, the Haas replacement crew had an 0800 briefing on their route to Saipan and the expected weather. It looked like they would be leaving tonight. CFC gunner Willie Greene conducted an operations check on the central fire control system. There was a little more processing to complete and some last-minute personal items to take care of. Copilot Don Weber mailed his old watch home and got a haircut. Then there was a lot of waiting.

13 Feb 45

The irrepressible and always inquisitive 2/Lt Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron went down to the harbor today with some friends and took an LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) out to one of the escort carriers, CVE Wake Island. On the way they passed close by several Fletcher-class destroyers and the huge battleship Tennessee. They were welcomed aboard the Wake Island and given a tour. Copeland was impressed by the layout and cleanliness of the little carrier. “A nice way to fight a war.” On the way back in, the sea was a little rough and they all got soaking wet.

The Haas replacement crew finally got out of Mather Field in California at 0330. They had hoped to leave earlier but the servicing and fueling of the plane (6800 gallons to take on) took longer than anticipated. Once they got airborne all went well. They headed out over the Oakland Bay Bridge and then the Farallon Islands and then on into the vast Pacific. With all the preparations and excitement, no one had gotten any sleep, so later on during the long flight to Hawaii it was hard to stay awake, but they managed and the weather was good. They landed at John Rodgers Field at 1450 local. Copilot Don Weber thought that Oahu was very pretty from the air.

Departing Mather at almost the same time was another replacement crew which had trained at Pyote, the Althoff crew. Their experience so far had paralleled that of the Haas crew, but they had been running about two days ahead. 2/Lt Robert Althoff and crew had departed Pyote on 23 Jan and Herington on 7 Feb. But for some reason they had been held at Mather for almost a week, so now the Haas crew had caught up. For the rest of
the way, these two crews would fly roughly the same schedule, jockeying back and forth. Cpl Joseph Altott, right gunner on the Althoff crew, was another man to whom we owe a debt for keeping a diary. On this, his last day in the US for who knew how long, Altott wrote in emphatic letters, “So long USA... hope to be back soon!” The Althoff crew took off at almost the same time as the Haas crew but apparently reached Oahu first. The exhausted crew got some chow, and then Altott hit the sack.

14 Feb 45

From the 500th Bomb Group Operations Journal:

“14 Feb. Twenty planes of the 500th Group participated in a Wing training mission to bomb the airstrip on Rota. Major Parsons and Captain Thompson flew on the mission. [Freeman Parsons was the Group Operations Officer, Berry Thompson was the Group Navigation Officer]."

The Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron participated in this training mission, probably in Z-8. According to copilot Robert Copeland, Squadron CO Lt Col Ralph A. “Pete” Reeve rode with them. They dropped their bombs right on the runway.

The briefing for tomorrow’s mission to Nagoya was held this evening. It would be against the Mitsubishi factory on the northeast suburbs, a target which Copeland not so affectionately termed “Old Reliable”. He figured it to be a rough mission.

Back in Hawaii today, the Haas replacement crew had to attend a 1030 briefing on the remainder of their route to Kwajalein and Saipan, but according to copilot 2/Lt Don Weber it was a repeat of what they'd already been told at Mather. Then as a reminder that they were now in a war zone, the crew were required to clean the guns on the plane. After that was finished, at about 1400, the officers were allowed to go into Honolulu. Weber thought it was “quite some town”, with most of the locals appearing to be of Chinese or Japanese origin. He bought a picture folder card and had some small pictures made to send home. Meanwhile, the enlisted men, or at least CFC gunner Cpl Willie Greene, were able to get over to Hickam Field to have a look around there. That evening some of the men were able to take in what Weber called “a really good USO army show”. Then they made ready to leave in the morning.

15 Feb 45

On this day Production Line Maintenance went into effect in the 500th Bomb Group. PLM primarily meant the creation of specialized teams, such as Engine Change Teams, and the centralization of maintenance at the Group rather than the Squadron level. Maintenance did improve dramatically as time went on, but how much of it was due to this reorganization and how much was due simply to increased experience became a matter of debate.

Also on this day the 73rd Bomb Wing carried out what was planned as a high-altitude, precision attack on the Mitsubishi Aircraft Engine Plant in Nagoya. The 500th Bomb Group scheduled 24 planes for this mission, of which 23 were airborne.

The participating planes and crews were:

First squadron
Z-8, “Mission to Albuquerque”, Fitzgerald
Z-12, "Wabash Cannonball", Curtis
Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Sullivan
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Hatch
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
Z-11, "Holy Joe", Pearson
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Arbon
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Gray
Z-31, Hughes
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Kappil
Z-6, "Draggin' Lady", Engle

Second squadron
Z-48, Black
Z-49, "Three Feathers", Feathers
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", McClanahan
Z-47, "Adam's Eve", Adams
Z-43, Setterich
Z-26, McClure
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", D. Jackson
Z-41, "The Baroness", Barron

Z-51, "Tail Wind", Mahoney crew, was intended to be a part of the second squadron but failed to take off due to a blown pusher rod housing.

Take-off was from 0658 to 0708 from both runways. Bomb load was 13 x 500 lb general purpose bombs, except for Z-8, which carried 14 x 500 lb GP's and Z-11, which carried 12 x 500 lb GP's. (Each B-29 had slightly different lift characteristics. Some could carry more, some less. Generally, the older a plane, the less capable, hence the tag "war weary").

The 500th planes were organized into two combat squadrons. The first squadron, consisting of 12 planes, was led by Maj Freeman Parsons, Group Operations Officer, riding with Maj Robert Fitzgerald and crew in Z-8. The Group and the second squadron were led by Lt Col William McDowell, CO 883rd Bomb Squadron, flying with Capt Vance Black and crew in Z-48. Other staff officers flying this mission were Maj Johnston, Wing RCM (Radar Counter-Measures) Officer, with 1/Lt Harold Arbo and crew in Z-28; and Capt Dorfman, Wing Gunnery Officer, with 1/Lt Richard Sullivan and crew in Z-7. Also, by special order of Gen LeMay, a Maj Julius P. Faris, presumably from XXI Bomber Command HQ, flew on this mission as a "command observer". Gen O'Donnell dumped Faris on the 500th Group, which further assigned the major to fly with the Irby crew in Z-52.

Squadron and Group assemblies took place as planned north of Saipan, and the formation headed off toward Japan at 1,000 feet, with the second squadron high and to the left of the first.

Only about 130 miles north of Saipan, Z-21 developed a bad oil leak in #1 engine and had to turn back. The cause was later determined to be a burst pushrod housing hose. Some time later, Z-29 aborted due to a bad leak in #3 engine. Then the flight engineer on Z-48, which carried the Group leader, discovered that his fuel transfer pumps did not work, so she had to turn back, bombing Pagan Island on the way home. This left 20 planes in the Group formation. Z-49 (Feathers) took over the lead of the second squadron, and Z-47 (Adams) assumed deputy lead.

The Wing routing and formation instructions were very similar to those of the previous mission. Wing Assembly Point was again Nishino Shima. From there the Groups would head off for the IP in a column of combat groups in order of 499th - 500th - 497th - 498th. At the IP the formation would move into a column of combat squadrons to go over the target. The goal was to have all squadrons over the target within eight minutes. But once again, all the elaborate staff planning went for naught.

The Wing assembly was actually accomplished ahead of time and the Groups headed for Japan at about 1145.
and began their climb to altitude, but at approximately 28 degrees latitude the formation encountered a huge weather front with thick clouds extending from 500 feet up to about 10,000 feet and continuing almost all the way to Japan. This front totally wrecked the formation. The planes had to spread out in order to avoid collisions and lost sight of each other. Z-3 and Z-11 became totally lost, and the latter plane's radar was out. Both turned back. Now there were only 18 500th planes left on the way to Japan.

When the bombers finally emerged from the clouds about 100 miles from the Japanese coast, no two planes were together. The crews scanned the skies hopefully for other B-29's, any B-29's, to form up with to go in to the target. Nobody wanted to go in alone if they could help it. A few planes were lucky enough to find some friends.

1/Lt James Farrell in Z-34 fell in with seven other B-29's from various Groups and took No. 2 position in the second element. This ad hoc formation, led by T-32, went in and bombed the primary from 28,000 feet. On the way, they attracted a few fighters, one of which put some holes in Z-34's horizontal stabilizer. But the crew gave out better than they got, the ring gunner (regular ring gunner on the Farrell crew was Cpl Raymond L. Lower, from Twin Falls, Idaho) shooting down an Irving and damaging a Zeke. Z-34 additionally suffered some light flak damage over the target.

Jim Hanft, only a 2/Lt flying his second mission as AC in Z-33 (after several missions as copilot), hooked up with three 497th planes, and this small group of four B-29's, led by A-2, also made it to the primary, bombing from 27,000 feet. This formation was attacked by fighters as well, but Z-33 suffered no damage. As it turned out, Z-33's camera was the only one working in this formation, and it got some good strike photos. Col Wright, CO 497th Bomb Group, was so pleased with the pictures that he wrote an official letter of commendation for Hanft and his crew.

Five other 500th B-29's – Z-49, Z-47, Z-6, Z-9 and Z-45 – bravely pressed through to the primary target individually despite some fighter opposition, reportedly from Tonys, Tojos, Zekes and Irvings. The fighters shot up Z-6's (Engle crew) horizontal stabilizer and the tail gunner's compartment, seriously wounding the tail gunner, Sgt Romeo Rendina, but the plane still bombed successfully from 26,300 feet. Rendina's life was saved, according to the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary, by "prompt first aid by Sgt Johnston and Lt Engle...." Sgt Lester E. Johnston was the radar operator, 1/Lt Robert E. Engle was the airplane commander. Tragically, after helping to save the life of his tail gunner, Lt Engle would soon lose his own.

Z-49 (Feathers crew) also suffered some damage from the Japanese fighters but today the biggest threat came from so-called friendly fire. Just after bombs away at 29,000 feet another B-29, not identified by number in any reports, approaching from directly ahead, opened fire from her forward turrets. It seems incomprehensible that a large four-engine bomber could be mistaken for a much smaller Japanese fighter, but the 73rd Bomb Wing Gunnery Report for this mission blamed the dead-ahead approach and a tendency to open fire at too long a range, before the target was properly identified. Whatever the cause, Z-49 was suddenly struck with a devastating burst of fire that “shot out the Airplane Commander's controls, ruptured the nose wheel tire, [and] shot out the propeller governor on the right inboard engine”, part of which then flew off and punctured the just emptied forward bomb bay. The bomber immediately went into a 30-degree dive. Fortunately, the copilot’s controls still worked and 2/Lt Homer Bourland from Vernon, Texas, pulled hard on the yoke, preventing the plane from spiraling into a fatal spin and bringing it back under control. However, the #3 propeller was running away and the engine had caught fire. The fire could not be extinguished and the engine could not be feathered. Capt Feathers ordered the crew to prepare to bail out if the fire reached the engine wing tanks. Their future did not look promising.

While all this was going on, Z-49's crippled condition had attracted Japanese fighters but her gunners successfully fended them off. The ring gunner, Cpl Elmer Burch of Spartanburg, South Carolina, claimed an Irving destroyed and the tail gunner, Cpl Huston Powers, claimed an Irving damaged.

Z-47 (Adams crew) managed to avoid the fighters while bombing from 31,000 feet, but she ran into a couple of them on the way out to the coast and picked up bullet holes in the fuselage, #4 prop ring cowl, #3 engine nacelle and right-hand side wing flaps. Z-9 and Z-45, bombing from very high altitude, 31,800 and 33,200 feet respectively, encountered no fighters.
The remaining 11 planes bombed targets of opportunity alone, except for Z-8, which bombed Hamamatsu together with three 499th planes. Z-7 also bombed Hamamatsu, but alone. Z-2, Z-28 and Z-31 bombed the city of Nagoya individually. Z-12 bombed Wakayama; Z-52 bombed Hamajima; Z-26 bombed Shizuoka; Z-41 bombed Uji-Yamada; and Z-22 bombed Kinomoto. Z-43 attempted to bomb Toyohashi but experienced a complete rack malfunction and the entire load had to be salvoed. None of the 11 planes attacking targets of opportunity encountered any fighter opposition.

In summary, seven planes bombed the primary target and eleven planes bombed targets of opportunity. Even though strike photos showed several bombs hitting a large assembly building in the target area, getting only seven planes over the target was not a good showing. Clearly, the poor weather on the way to the target was the major factor in the failure of this mission.

Now there was the minor matter of getting home. For at least one plane, the badly shot up Z-49, the odds didn't look good. The fire in #3 engine had not spread, but not long after leaving the Japanese coast the runaway propeller flew off to the right and smashed into #4 engine, putting it out of commission. That left only two working engines, both on the left side. Back on 27 January, Chico Carrico and crew in Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", had proven that it was possible to make it back from Japan with two engines out on one side; now Z-49 would attempt to duplicate the feat. Finally, the Feathers crew got a bit of good luck when they ran into a rain squall which extinguished the fire. OK, that was a little better, the crew could at least stand down from preparing to bail out, but things still weren't exactly looking good. The flight engineer, 2/Lt John Irving, from Montchanin, Delaware, calculated that they had about 6 hours and 30 minutes of fuel left, and Saipan was 6 hours and 15 minutes away. It would be tight, but if the two good engines held up, they could make it.

And they had some help. Maj Robert Fitzgerald in Z-8, which had been given the unofficial name of "St Bernard" for its habit of rescuing stragglers in distress, had found Z-49 and would tag along all the way, providing navigational and moral support. On Z-49 Feathers and Bourland reduced the strain on the two working engines as much as possible by cutting back the RPM and manifold pressure. At the lowered settings they would gradually lose altitude from their current 20,000 feet, but they calculated they would still be at 800 feet when they reached Saipan, so it should work out all right. And that indeed turned out to be the case.

They made it to Saipan, and as they approached Isley Field, Capt Feathers carefully moved over into the copilot's seat to take over the only working controls for what promised to be a difficult landing. As he came in over the end of the runway at 50 feet, he cut the engines, leveled the wings, ordered the landing gear down, and glided in to a perfect dead-stick landing. Later, after an inspection, it was learned that in addition to the two mangled engines on the right side, there was a hole in one of the blades of the #2 propeller... but somehow it held up all the way home.

Finally, five minutes later, at 2315, after a whopping 16 hours and 15 minutes in the air (and according to ground crewman Sgt Bill Eilers still with 400 gallons of fuel left in her tanks!), faithful Z-8 and "Fitz" Fitzgerald, having brought another cripple safely home, became the last plane and crew to land.

In Hawaii the Haas replacement crew got up early, at about 0400, dressed and ate breakfast, then had an 0600 route briefing. The Althoff crew were probably there too. The Haas crew took off from John Rodgers Field at 0740 and headed west to join the war. The Althoff crew followed them 50 minutes later. About 715 miles out, the crews passed over Johnston Island, which copilot Don Weber referred to as "that little dot in the Pacific". The weather continued good, and somewhere between Johnston and Kwajalein they crossed the International Date Line and passed into 16 Feb.

16 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 February 1945

Work on widening and deepening the main drainage ditch through the area was essentially completed
today. A new grease trap is being constructed for the mess waste lines."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"16 Feb. - Critique at Group S-2 [Intelligence Section] for Squadron and Group in AM and PM. No ground school. [Ground school was classroom instruction.] Capt. Feathers brought back #49 from Nagoya on 2 engines. [This actually happened the night before.] Believed he was hit by B-29's over target, total time 16:20. Crew ball games -- Feathers beat Black 16 to 2."

The Haas and Althoff replacement crews reached their destination of Kwajalein in the late afternoon or early evening without incident. They were given chow and quarters for the night and then they hit the hay – except for CFC gunner Willie Greene and tail gunner Paul Grove of the Haas crew, who were detailed to guard the plane. The Althoff crew probably had to supply two guards as well, but we don't know who. Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew had time to reflect that he was getting farther and farther from home, "but come what may, a war is to be won cost what it may."

17 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"17 February 1945
A 125 cu. ft. reefer was delivered to the Squadron Mess."

On this day hard-working Sgt William Eilers of the 881st was transferred from the ground crew of Z-8, Crew Chief M/Sgt George Lucas, to become Assistant Crew Chief on Z-9 under M/Sgt Carl Williams.

The Althoff replacement crew beat the Haas crew off the atoll this morning, leaving Kwajalein at 0800 hours. After an uneventful trip of 6-1/2 hours, they arrived on their new home of Saipan and were soon assigned to the 881st Squadron, 500th Bomb Group.

After an 0730 briefing and some breakfast, the Haas replacement crew took off from Kwajalein at 0930 on the final leg of their journey to Saipan. As another reminder that they were now in a war zone, they took off with loaded guns, which they test-fired after they were safely airborne. Once again the weather was good and the plane performed well. They reached their destination without incident.

Things moved quickly on Saipan. Within a brief period of time the Haas crew had their assignment. They were now part of the 882nd Bomb Squadron, 500th Bomb Group. They also got a new crew number, #230A. The A meant replacement. The original crew #230 had been the Van Trigt crew, which had been broken up after ditching on 29 Dec 44. They also learned, as all replacement crews would learn to their great disappointment, that the shiny new plane they had flown over and had come to think of as theirs was actually not theirs. It belonged to Uncle Sam. B-29 44-69735 was taken away and assigned to the 499th Bomb Group. Welcome to the war.

18 Feb 45

The 500th Bomb Group flew three weather strike missions on this date, all by the 881st Bomb Squadron. The target and bomb load were the same for all three WSM's – Osaka Arsenal and 3 x M66 2000-pounders.

WSM-211 was flown by the Harlan Jackson crew in Z-3. Take-off was at 1404 local and the crew were apparently nearing Japan when they experienced radar and bomb door malfunctions. They aborted at 2046, jettisoned their bombs three minutes later, and returned home by 0005 19 Feb.
WSM-212 was flown by the Mather crew in Z-4. They took off at 1700 local and reached the target at 0053 19 Feb. Bombs were dropped by radar from 28,500 feet, but results were unobserved due to cloud cover. Many searchlights and moderate, fairly accurate anti-aircraft fire were observed over Osaka and other points, but no damage was suffered. Ten fighters were seen taking off from a field east of Osaka but they did not reach the B-29. Eight radar scope photos were taken on this mission. Z-4 returned to base at 0620 19 Feb.

WSM-213 was flown by the Hatch crew in Z-9. Take-off was at 2000 local 18 Feb. The crew reached the target at 0402 19 Feb and dropped their bombs by radar from 26,700 feet. No results were observed due to cloud cover. Searchlights were “numerous and accurate” along the bomb run over Osaka but for some reason no anti-aircraft fire was received. No fighters were observed. Z-9 returned to base at 0900 19 Feb.

CFC gunner Willie Greene and the other enlisted men in the Haas crew newly assigned to the 882nd got settled into what was known as Quonset B today and got to know their new hut-mates. Greene thought they were “swell fellows”.

On this Sunday copilot Don Weber and the other officers from the same crew were also getting oriented and learning the score on Saipan. Bombardier Frank Sharp, navigator Robert Wool and Weber attended morning Protestant services at 1030. The devout Weber observed that the services were well attended and commented that “maybe being overseas helps more of us to realize how important our spiritual welfare now is.” At 1300 today the new officers met with their Group commander, Col John E. Dougherty.

After speaking with some of the veteran crews, Weber became a little uneasy upon hearing of the tough missions and heavy losses. “Frankly, this looks like the B-29 deal is at the present getting a bit of a rough ride.” Weber heard that his old outfit, the 505th Bomb Group, was just across the channel on Tinian, and that they had already lost 9 out of 28 planes [the 505th flew its first combat mission on 4 Feb - JEB], including some men he knew. “Schroeder crew is lost, and Lowry broke his neck in ditching. Francis Sult [sp?] his CP [copilot] was saved as was Hansen & navigator and some others.” This was all rather discouraging news for a green crew.

While the Haas crew had an easy day, things were apparently different in the 881st Squadron, where the new Althoff crew had some lectures and, according to right gunner Joseph Altott, “Practiced wet ditches.” This apparently meant going down to the beach and practicing getting in and out of life rafts.

The briefing for tomorrow's mission was held tonight, and the new Haas and Althoff replacement crews attended even though they wouldn't be going.

**19 Feb 45**

On this day the 73rd Bomb Wing mounted another high-altitude, precision strike against their old nemesis, the Nakajima Aircraft Engine Plant in Musashino near Tokyo, Target 357. This was the seventh mission flown against this tough target, and it would prove to be a costly one for the 500th Bomb Group. The 500th scheduled 24 aircraft, of which 22 were airborne. The two planes and crews which failed to take off were Z-23 (Tackett), “Ramblin Roscoe”, and Z-5 (Kappil), “There'll Always Be A Christmas”, for reasons unknown. Z-22 (Limpp) also experienced some sort of mechanical problem but it was fixed in time for the plane to take off a little late.

The 22 planes which made it into the air were divided into two combat squadrons. Leading the Group and the first squadron, which consisted of 12 planes, was Group CO Lt Col John E. Dougherty, flying with Maj Robert Fitzgerald and crew in Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque". Deputy Lead for both the Group and the first squadron was Lt Col Ralph A. Reeve, CO 881st Squadron, riding with Capt Donald W. Thompson and crew in Z-2, "20th Century Limited". Leading the second squadron, which consisted of 10 planes, was Capt Austin W. LaMarche in Z-27.

The participating planes and crews were:
First squadron  
Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque", Fitzgerald/Dougherty  
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Thompson/Reeve  
Z-7, "Hell's Belle", Sullivan  
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Limpp  
Z-11, "Holy Joe", Pearson  
Z-12, Samuelson  
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Calhoun  
Z-31, Rouse  
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", McClanahan  
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Mahoney  
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Clinkscales  
Z-43, Cheney  

Second squadron  
Z-27, LaMarche  
Z-26, McClure  
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey  
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray  
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", D. Jackson  
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hanft  
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Irby  
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Braden  
Z-41, "The Baroness", Ryan  
Z-46, "Su Su Baby", Standen  

In addition to Dougherty and Reeve, other command and staff officers flying this mission were Capt Berry P. Thompson, Group Navigator, riding with Maj John Limpp and crew in Z-22 (this was the Limpp crew's first mission, so Thompson probably came along to provide some experience); Capt Richard E. Hale, Group Bombardier, riding with Capt Eugene Mahoney and crew in Z-51; Capt Walter Landaker, 883rd Squadron Bombardier, flying with Capt McClanahan and crew in Z-45; and 2/Lt Robert E. Holmes, 883rd RCM (Radar Counter-Measures) Officer, riding with 1/Lt John Ryan and crew in Z-41.  

New arrival 2/Lt Don Weber, copilot on the Haas replacement crew of the 882nd, wasn't going on this mission, but he was curious to see what a Wing mission take-off looked like, so he got up early this morning, ate some breakfast and went down with some others toward the end of the runway to watch the heavily laden bombers labor into the air.  "They use all the runway and then drop down from the end over the cliff.  Quite a sight it is."

Take-off was from 0642 to 0649, except for Z-22, which got off a bit late at 0700 after fixing a mechanical problem.  It took her about two hours to catch up with the first squadron, but she made it.  

Bomb load was 13 x 500 lb general purpose bombs for most planes.  Three planes, Z-8, Z-33 and possibly Z-26, carried 14 x 500 lb bombs.  

Squadron assemblies took place as planned, and the first squadron headed off for the Wing Assembly Point, which again was the island of Nishino Shima.  The second squadron lagged behind for some reason but eventually caught up.  The Clinkscales crew in Z-53 passed close enough to Iwo Jima to see part of the naval bombardment for the invasion of that island taking place this day, and some B-29's picked up radio transmissions of Navy pilots carrying out ground support strikes.  The invasion of Iwo Jima was welcome news to the B-29 crews, who would no longer have to skirt that island and would soon be able to use it as an emergency field. 

The 500th was first in the Wing order on this mission.  Arriving a little early at the Wing Assembly Point, the 500th made two complete circles to allow the following Groups to catch up.  At 1224 the 500th led the Wing formation due north for Japan and began the climb to altitude.  Wing instructions were again to form first into a column of Groups, then at the IP into a column of squadrons, with the goal of getting all squadrons over the
target within eight minutes. Once again, this objective proved too difficult to achieve.

The first obstacle was two mild weather fronts encountered on the way which spread the formation out a little. The second problem was that navigation was slightly off and the formation hit the Japanese coast about 15 miles to the left of scheduled landfall, which was Hikisahoso Bay. However, this error was corrected and the formation flew on to the IP, the city of Kofu. Here the scheduled turn to the right was made and the formation headed toward the target at 26,000 feet on a course of 085 degrees.

At this point, the first squadron still had 12 planes, but the second was now down to nine, Z-41 with the Ryan crew having aborted some distance north of Nishino Shima due to a bad oil leak in #1 engine.

The first squadron was still led by Z-8, with Z-2 and Z-7 in No. 2 and No. 3 positions respectively. Z-22 was trying to close the diamond on this element but was lagging behind. The left, high element was a bit loose but still roughly together, with Z-45 in the lead, Z-51 on her right wing, Z-53 on the left, and Z-43 closing the diamond. But the second, low element on the right was in disarray. Z-11 was in the lead, with Z-10 still keeping station on her left wing, but the other two planes in this element, Z-12 and Z-31, were straggling well behind.

Flying in Z-11 with the Pearson crew as radar operator today was S/Sgt Jack Heffner from Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Heffner had been part of the McNamer crew, until McNamer was transferred to Wing and the crew was broken up on 9 Feb. From his windowless radar room Heffner could not see the action but he could certainly hear it on the interphone and feel the plane's movements. Afterwards he put together a detailed and vivid account of this mission, which he called the “longest and toughest [one] for me as yet.”

Two minutes behind the first squadron, the second squadron was not in much better shape. Z-27 was still leading, and Z-26 was close up on her right, but Z-29 had fallen well back on the left wing. In the right, high element, Z-35, the leader, was going too fast, even pulling ahead of Z-27 and the lead element. This had caused Z-34 on the right wing and especially Z-33 on the left wing to fall behind. The left, low element, led by Z-52, was in better shape, but Z-42 on the right wing was lagging a little, and Z-46 on the left somewhat more.

The Japanese had obviously had plenty of warning of the bombers' approach. As the 500th planes reached the IP and made their turn, they could see enemy fighters already waiting at altitude. There was something else they could see, or rather not see -- the target. The Nakajima factory area was covered by clouds and a heavy haze. A visual run would not be possible. Someone, presumably Lt Col Dougherty, made the decision to divert to the secondary target, the urban and industrial area of Tokyo. Course was accordingly altered to 088 degrees.

The change of target was immaterial to the fighters waiting overhead. They just wanted to bring down the big silver bombers that were ravaging their homeland, and some of the pilots were prepared to give their lives to do so. One of these pilots, 2/Lt Osamu Hirosi, carefully positioned his twin-engine Ki-45 “Nick” ahead and above the bomber formation, picked his target, and dove almost straight down. Sgt Glen Doan, ring gunner on the Pearson crew, saw the Nick coming down fast (in the heat of the action he misidentified it as an Irving) and got some bursts away but Z-11 was not Hirosi's target. Instead, the young Japanese pilot passed over that plane and squarely struck the lagging Z-12 with the veteran Samuelson crew. Hirosi hit the bomber just behind the wing at the rear pressurized compartment. The Nick disintegrated and the B-29 broke in two, with the tail section further breaking up and the forward section heading vertically toward the ground trailing smoke and flames. About 10,000 or 15,000 feet below, the left wing broke off and what was left of the B-29 was then lost in the low clouds.

Heffner in Z-11, 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew in Z-8, and 2/Lt Randall Maydew, navigator on the Thompson crew in Z-2, all reported seeing as many as six parachutes, although one was on fire and soon collapsed. After the war it was confirmed that there were at least three. The radar operator, T/Sgt Robert Evans, was thrown out of his compartment by the collision and then parachuted into captivity. The right and left gunners also parachuted down, but Sgt Charles Weiser was killed by Japanese civilians when he reached the ground and Sgt Robert Janecek was badly burned and died on 6 March in a Japanese hospital from lack of medical attention. Evans would survive the war.
On board Z-11, Heffner reacted to the destruction of Z-12 and the Samuelson crew with shock and dismay. He later wrote, “I knew every man on the crew very well, and it sure is hurting.” He was particularly close to fellow radar man Evans; they had been together all thru training. Evans had even given Heffner his leather jacket to send home in case something happened. And now it had. Heffner could only hope that Evans was one of the men in the parachutes. It was not until after the war that he would learn that his hope had been realized.

Perishing in Z-12 was one of our diarists, the gifted and thoughtful AC 1/Lt Stanley Samuelson. He was a man of superior intelligence and talent, a fine pilot, a credit to his country and deserving of a better fate. He would no doubt have achieved great things had he survived the war.

On the Japanese side, 2/Lt Hirosi was probably killed instantly but his rear observer, Cpl Kimio Kato, miraculously survived. Kato was thrown from the plane and knocked unconscious, but his parachute opened automatically and he floated down and landed in a tree.

The other straggler in the first squadron, Z-31, was also singled out by fighters. The first pass set fire to the bomb bay tanks. Additional accurate attacks put the upper forward turret out of operation, severed control lines to the tail, and depressurized the plane. Observers in other planes saw Z-31 lose altitude and slide to the left, then go into a spiral, with at least five fighters following her down and pecking away. Finally, the bomber went into a vertical dive and was lost in the haze. No parachutes were reported, but in fact right gunner Sgt Harry McGrath, who was wounded in the leg, and radar operator Sgt Melvin Johnston, another good friend of Jack Heffner, managed to bail out. Both men would survive captivity.

The gunners on the other B-29’s were unable to pay close attention to Z-12 and Z-31 going down, as they were busy fighting for their own lives against what many called the most aggressive and concentrated fighter attacks they had seen yet. Over 200 individual attacks were reported, mostly by twin-engine Irving’s, and generally from ahead and behind. Some gunners inferred from the unusual number of attacks from the rear that the Japanese realized that the 20mm cannon in the tail position had been removed.

The enemy fighters continued to go after the first squadron, particularly its broken right element. Z-10’s right wing was hit and a bullet zipped into the forward cabin, narrowly missing the copilot. Up front, deputy lead Z-2’s #4 engine was hit, the oxygen system was damaged, the antenna was shot away, and her ring and right gunners were slightly wounded. Z-43 was holed in the vertical stabilizer.

In the melee Z-11 was hit in the #3 engine. Soon, according to Heffner, the damaged engine “started throwing huge chunks of frozen oil.” Then the prop ran away and the engine started burning. Unable to maintain altitude, they dropped out of formation. In the rear, Heffner could feel that they were losing altitude fast and expected a crash or maybe a ditching if they could make it out to sea. But apparently the steep dive was an attempt by AC 1/Lt James Pearson to extinguish the fire in the engine. And it worked. They were able to level off at 3,000 feet with no more fire, but with the propeller still running away. It was only a matter of time until it flew off, and no one could predict in which direction it would go.

While the Pearson crew was fighting for survival, the second squadron was getting attention from the fighters too. Many were observed making a diving pass on the first squadron, then pulling up and attacking the second squadron from below. Several planes were hit. Z-33’s left elevator trim tab was severed and a bullet put a hole in the tail gunner’s oxygen line. Z-52’s left horizontal stabilizer was shot up. Z-42 was holed in the right wing.

Z-46 on the far left of the second squadron formation was shot up very badly, with hits in the left wing, ring cowl, vertical stabilizer and fuselage. One engine was knocked out and the controls for the other three were damaged, making the plane very difficult to handle. The left gunner, Sgt John Miller, from Maynard, Massachusetts, was wounded in the right hand, and the airplane commander, 1/Lt William Standen, from Idaho Falls, Idaho, was hit in his left foot, which began bleeding badly. Despite his painful wound, Standen refused to leave his position for medical treatment. With the controls damaged, both AC and copilot were needed to fly the plane. Standen also refused to jettison the bomb load, even though they were falling steadily behind the rest of the formation and were still under heavy fighter attack. Instead, he and his copilot, 2/Lt Jess Chambers, fighting the sluggish controls all the way, kept the bomber on course for Tokyo and their drop point.
Meanwhile, ring gunner Cpl Edward Heiberger from Dubuque, Iowa, was firing away at multiple targets, trying to keep the aggressive fighters at bay. "I could almost reach out and touch the fighters. A few dived in so close when they turned their belly up the whole sky was blotted out!" Heiberger's guns got so hot that they cooked off while he was rotating the upper aft turret and almost shot their own tail off.

B-29 gunners fired thousands of rounds this day and many of them found their mark. Claims were as follows, with the gunner's name indicated where known:

Z-45 -- ring gunner (Sgt William Agee), two Zeke's damaged; bombardier (Capt Walter Landaker), one Nick damaged
Z-22 -- ring gunner (Cpl Arthur Henry), one Tony destroyed and one Irving probable
Z-29 -- left gunner (Sgt Richard Johnson), two Zeke's destroyed; ring gunner (Cpl David Willis?), one Tojo damaged
Z-2 -- ring gunner (Sgt Walter Pudlo?), one Irving destroyed; bombardier (2/Lt Robert Wittwer?), one Irving destroyed
Z-35 -- ring gunner (Sgt Thomas Moore), one Irving destroyed
Z-34 -- right gunner (S/Sgt Marion Shew), one Irving damaged
Z-46 -- right gunner (Cpl Louis Pepi), one Irving damaged; tail gunner (Cpl Edgar Parent), one Irving damaged; bombardier (2/Lt William Trotter), one U/I twin-engine destroyed
Z-7 -- right gunner (S/Sgt Lisle Neher?), one ABC (sic) probable
Z-11 -- left gunner (S/Sgt Harold Danchick), one Irving destroyed; bombardier (2/Lt James Skinner), one Tony destroyed
Z-53 -- left gunner (Sgt Donald Chambers?), one Irving probable; tail gunner (T/Sgt Elmo Glockner?), one Irving destroyed
Z-10 -- left gunner (Sgt Douglas Bulloch), one Irving probable
Z-42 -- tail gunner (Sgt Sammie Stulz?), one Hamp probable
Z-51 -- ring gunner (Sgt Bruno Szwarce), one Tojo damaged; right gunner (S/Sgt Warren Cook), one Irving probable

Total claims came to 10 fighters destroyed, 6 probables and 6 damaged.

Despite their losses and the fighters continuing to buzz around them, the bombers swept on undeterred toward the target, now the city of Tokyo. Because the bottom haze covered the whole area, a radar drop was necessary. Bomb bay doors in the first squadron opened and at 1547 99 x 500-pounders rained on the city from 25,800 feet. Two minutes later, the second squadron, following at 25,900 feet, added 105 more bombs, for a total of 51 tons dropped that day by the 500th Bomb Group. It would have been more but Z-53's bomb bay doors failed to open and Z-43 had a complete rack malfunction, while Z-45, Z-29, Z-35 and Z-34 suffered partial rack malfunctions. Z-46, trailing the rest, got most of her bombs away, but also had a partial rack malfunction, although they wouldn't find that out for a while. Unfortunately, due to the undercast, no bomb results could be observed.

Beginning at about the IP, Japanese anti-aircraft had been active, and sometimes accurate, especially over Tokyo. Flak shredded the right wheel well door on Z-52. Already damaged Z-46 was holed in both the right and left sides of the nose section and her left blister was cracked. Z-2 was hit very badly, a shell putting a hole in her right wing "large enough to put two barrels through," according to Heffner on Z-11. Fortunately, the shell barely missed hitting the wing spar and a fuel tank, so the damage wasn't fatal. Still, the crew soon had to feather the #4 engine due to an oil leak. Z-2 also suffered cracked top and right blisters.

After bombs away, the squadrons broke away, first to the left, then back right to 90 degrees and on out to the coast. Fighter attacks quickly tapered off, as the enemy pilots probably turned their attention to the following Groups, but the 500th formation was maintained well out to sea before the B-29's broke up into elements for the long flight home. That flight would be especially long today for three crews – Standen, Pearson and Fitzgerald.

Z-46 with the Standen crew was badly shot up with one engine out, holes all thru the plane, damaged flight controls and two men wounded, the left gunner and the AC. But the remaining engines held and the plane made steady progress toward home. AC William Standen continued to ignore the pain in his bleeding left foot and...
remained in his seat to help his copilot fly the balky plane. At length they reached Saipan but then ran into another serious problem. The landing gear wouldn’t come down. They tried the back-up system but that didn’t work either. Finally, flight engineer T/Sgt Carl Taschinger, from St Louis, Missouri, said there was one more thing they could try. He climbed into the bomb bay and quickly rewired the landing gear circuit to the bomb bay door circuit. That did it. They brought the landing gear down using the bomb bay door controls. But there was no guarantee the gear would hold when they set down. Also, Taschinger had noticed when he was in the bomb bay that two bombs were still hung up there. Because of the danger of a crash-landing, Z-46 was ordered to come into nearby Kobler Field so it would not foul the Isley runway for later bombers. Standen and Chambers brought the plane in as smoothly as they could, while the rest of the crew said prayers and braced themselves. They touched down and the gear held. Heiberger called it a “wonderful landing, three man coordination. Our pilot operated the elevators, the co-pilot operated the rudders and the engineer cut engines as soon as we hit the ground.” They were safe.

The four gunners on the Standen crew – Heiberger, Miller, Pepi and Parent – agreed that someone or something had been watching over them on this mission. Parent ventured that they had “angels on our shoulders.” Many years later, Heiberger would take that phrase as the title of a book he would write about his WW2 experiences.

1/Lt William G. Standen would be awarded the Silver Star for his bravery and achievements this day. (Standen was an enigmatic figure. His ring gunner, Ed Heiberger, wrote in his book that Standen had lost his wife and daughter in a drowning accident and that their copilot for the first four missions, 2/Lt Murray Taylor, had requested and received a transfer to another crew because Standen, in Heiberger's words, “didn’t care if he lived or died.”) Regardless of the motivation behind them, Standen's actions were fully deserving of the medal he received.

As bad as the situation was on Z-46, it was worse for Z-11 and the Pearson crew. With only three engines running and a runaway prop on the other, the crew prepared as best they could for whatever might come. They threw out everything they could to reduce weight and then assumed their ditching positions, which they maintained for some time. Finally, the runaway prop broke loose and flew exactly the wrong way, off to the left toward the fuselage, cutting like a buzz-saw deep into the right side of the plane. The right bomb bay door was torn off and several flight control cables, as well as the controls to the #4 engine, were severed. The plane was still flying, but with difficulty, and no one knew how long she could stay in the air. She could break apart at any time.

Fortunately, the Pearson crew had one good thing going for them. Maj Robert Fitzgerald in faithful old “St Bernard”, Z-8, with Group commander Lt Col John Dougherty aboard, was alongside them. Maj Fitz had alertly seen Z-11 in trouble and and followed her down. Now he was intent on keeping them company all the way home, which would require a lot of skill, since Z-11 was making only about 150 mph. But Fitzgerald had one of the best flight engineers in the business, 1/Lt Herschel Connor, who was a master at stretching fuel, and he worked his magic again today. Eventually, after many tiring hours, Saipan came into view.

Now there was only the little detail of landing a plane cut partly in two. Pearson carefully made a good approach and set the plane down softly. The landing gear held and the plane began to roll rapidly down the runway. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief... but a little too soon. Some hydraulic lines had evidently been severed and when Pearson tried to apply the brakes, Z-11 swerved sharply to the left and off the hardtop. The out-of-control bomber hit a truck, knocked over a cletrac, bulldozed thru an embankment and smashed into a another B-29 parked on her hardstand, A-9, “Skyscrapper II”, of the 497th Group. Jack Heffner was thrown from his radar room forward into the gunners' compartment, “not missing anything and nothing missing me.” But his worst injury turned out to be only a banged up nose. Three other men on the crew suffered minor injuries. No one was seriously hurt.

The men on the ground were not as lucky. The truck driver was badly injured and the cletrac driver was killed instantly. And as for the two planes, both would go to the scrap heap. Heffner described the scene and the aftermath: “[T]he nose [of Z-11] was ripped off completely to the wings and twisted around, the fuselage battered in all directions, cowlings, landing gears and everything imaginable lying all over. The tail was at least 20-25 ft. in the air, the tunnel twisted, making it impossible to get thru. We had to wait for a rope to climb down. A-9 was knocked off its stand and into the embankment. It was also cut in two, the tail lying all over and the
fuselage flattened. By the time we got out, they were washing the blood away with a hose, and a huge crowd gathered. Our crew was intact, the pilot injured slightly, and we got out of the scene immediately. Taken to the dispensary for slight treatment, received a double shot, wonderful stimulant, ate a meal, and a very tired and jittery crew called it a day. Three planes out of the four in our formation, or rather element, will never fly again, but one of the crews will be back another day, less exciting, I hope."

Finally, quietly and without fanfare, Z-8, her good shepherd task completed, set down, after an amazing 17 hours and 45 minutes in the air, at 0028 on 20 Feb. All other 500th planes had made it back safely more than two hours earlier.

In sum, the 500th had lost three planes and two crews — and had cost the 497th a plane — while shooting down 10 enemy planes and dumping 51 tons of bombs on Tokyo... but not a single one on the primary target. Target 357 retained its hex on the 73rd Bomb Wing.

There was frustration at all levels of the XXI Bomber Command, the 73rd Bomb Wing and the 500th Bomb Group over their continuing inability to consistently hit the primary target in general and Target 357 in particular. Tempers were getting short. Capt Hale, Group Bombardier, who had flown this mission in Z-51, did not shrink from sharing his opinion on the matter with his superiors. In his Bombing Data report he essentially threw down a challenge to men he obviously regarded as desk jockeys: "Suggest staff Bombardiers in Group, Wing and Bomber Command be ordered [Hale's underline] to fly combat missions [sic] so that some of the problems encountered may be understood and correct solutions thought out."

The crewmembers lost on Z-12 were:

AC 1/Lt Stanley H. Samuelson
Copilot 2/Lt Jack S. Martinson
B 2/Lt John J. Wright
N 2/Lt Charles R. Kingsley
FE 2/Lt Elwyn M. Shinn
Radio T/Sgt Albert T. Kramer
Ring G Sgt John J. Goulouze
RG Sgt Charles R. Weiser
LG Sgt Robert J. Janecek
Radar S/Sgt Robert P. Evans (survived as POW)
TG Sgt Forrest M. Hargrove

The crewmembers lost on Z-31 were:

AC 2/Lt George C. Rouse, Jr.
Copilot 2/Lt Jack A. Kutchera
B 2/Lt Robert J. Sullivan
N 2/Lt Donald G. Thompson
FE 2/Lt Howell R. Young
Radio Sgt Stephen J. Woods
Ring G Sgt Harry E. McGrath (survived as POW)
RG Sgt Harry W. Thompson
LG Sgt Eugene E. Gilbreath
Radar S/Sgt Melvin L. Johnston (survived as POW)
TG Sgt Clinton W. Simonson

While the rest of the Group was flying the mission today, the new Haas crew of the 882nd were still getting some basics squared away. They had to turn in much of the equipment they had been issued in the States to the Personal Equipment Section. This included parachutes, life rafts, gas masks and Mae Wests. They would draw those items back out whenever they flew a mission. The new crew also had to attend a lecture by the Flight
Surgeon at 1330.

When he was finally free, at about 1430, copilot Don Weber went visiting. He hitched a ride over to the east side of the island to the 4th Marine Division area. There he found what he was looking for, an old friend from home, one Harland Fischer, a grizzled veteran of now 2-1/2 years. The two men had a great time catching up on old times. Fischer and his buddies generously loaded Weber down with some Japanese souvenirs, including towels, pictures, a bayonet and a pair of flying goggles. Finally, Fischer's motor pool sergeant gave Weber a ride back to the 500th area.

Some of the Haas crew, including CFC gunner Willie Greene, “sweated in” the 500th planes as they returned tonight. Greene noted correctly in his diary that the 500th lost two planes, including one from his Squadron, the 882nd. That would be Z-31. But he had been given wrong information when he wrote that it blew up over the target.

In addition to the regular mission, the 500th Group flew three Weather Strike Missions today, all by the 882nd Squadron. Despite the name, there was no “strike” in these particular missions; no bombs were carried. They were purely for purposes of obtaining weather data and radar scope photos for use in planning future missions.

WSM-214 was flown by the Reeves crew in Z-32, “Fever from the South”. Take-off was at 0711 local. The designated areas for reconnaissance were probably the island of Amami Oshima south of Kyushu and the island of Kyushu itself. Weather data was obtained but no radar scope photos were taken because the “pressurization transmitter went out.” There was no opposition. Z-32 returned to Saipan at 1935.

WSM-215 was flown by the Pierce crew in Z-21, “Devils’ Delight”. Take-off was at 1258. The designated recon areas were islands south of Kyushu and Kyushu itself. Weather data and 10 radar scope photos were obtained. While over Nobeoka, a town on the east coast of Kyushu, at 33,000 feet, two night fighters were picked up on radar. These planes followed Z-21 out to sea for five minutes but did not make contact. Z-21 returned to Saipan at 0115 on 20 Feb.

WSM-216 was flown by the Warren Parsons crew in Z-30, “Constant Nymph”. Take-off was at 2030. The designated recon area was southern Honshu. Weather data was obtained but no radar scope photos were taken because “targets were not clear enough”. At about 0400 near Kobe two enemy night fighters were detected closing in from below at 30,000 feet. One fighter attempted several attacks, but each time AC “Alfalfa” Parsons took violent evasive action and ruined the Japanese pilot’s approach. Z-30 returned to Saipan at 0956 on 20 Feb.

20 Feb 45

After their close call of yesterday, the Pearson crew of the 881st Squadron went up to the remnants of Z-11, “Holy Joe”, today and posed for pictures in front of both sections of the now sundered B-29. The bandage on radar operator Jack Heffner’s nose is clearly visible in the photos. 1/Lt James Pearson told his crew that they had been put in for rest leave in Hawaii.

The joyful relief of the Pearson crew at having cheated death was tempered by the somber duty of having to collect the personal belongings of the lost Samuelson crew in their shared quonset and deliver them to S-2. Heffner noted in his diary, “Four and a half crews gone out of twenty [in the Squadron].”

But the war went on. The 500th Bomb Group was tasked to fly three Weather Strike Missions today:

WSM-217 was flown by the Barron crew of the 883rd Squadron in Z-47. The goal was to collect weather data and radar scope photos from Okinawa and other islands in the Ryuku chain. (The invasion of Okinawa would take place on 1 Apr 45.) No bombs were carried on this mission. Take-off was at 0628 local. Mission was accomplished with 15 radar scope photos of the assigned area. Z-47 returned to base at 1927.
WSM-218 was flown by the Gregg crew of the 883rd in Z-50 with the target as the Osaka Arsenal. Bomb load was 4 x 2000-lb bombs. Take-off was at 1305. Z-50 reached the target at 2135 and dropped her bombs from 28,000 feet. Two explosions were seen but no damage results could be observed due to darkness. Some searchlights were observed in the target area but there was otherwise no opposition. No radar scope photos were taken because the radar was inoperative at higher altitudes. Z-50 returned to base by 0350 21 Feb.

WSM-219 was flown by the Hughes (former Cordray) crew of the 882nd Squadron in Z-24, target Tokyo dock area. Bomb load was 4 x 2000-lb bombs. Take-off was at 2128. Hughes and crew reached the target at 0544 21 Feb and dropped their bombs from 27,300 feet. There was no fighter opposition but there was some anti-aircraft fire and up to 25 searchlights, one of which picked up the bomber right after bombs away, virtually blinding the crew and preventing results from being observed. No damage to the plane was sustained. No radar scope photos were taken because “Radar scope [was] not clear enough to take photos.” Z-24 returned to base by 1145 21 Feb.

Apparently the new Haas crew of the 882nd was originally scheduled to fly one of these WSM's, probably 219. At least that's what both copilot Don Weber and CFC gunner Willie Greene wrote in their diaries. This was probably an effort to get the new crew's feet wet on what was considered to be a relatively easy mission. But when operations found out that the crew had never done any radar bombing – a necessity on such a night mission – they were replaced.

The enlisted men of the new Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron met their Group commander, Col Dougherty, today. To CFC gunner Willie Greene he seemed like a "rough guy".

Also today the crew attended the critique of yesterday's mission to Musashino. The discussion must have been quite frank. Weber wrote in his diary, "They still have enough bad mistakes made." One of those mistakes, according to 2/Lt Robert Copeland, copilot on the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, was that "one ship in the sqdn. almost dropped their bombs on us."

The new Althoff crew in the 881st had yesterday and today off. Right gunner Joseph Altott wrote that they played softball and football during the day and watched movies at night.

21 Feb 45

Another replacement crew, AC 1/Lt Willie O. Sasser, arrived on Saipan today and was assigned to the 500th Bomb Group, with further assignment to the 882nd Squadron and designation as Crew #231A (the “A” stood for replacement – the original Crew #231 was the Grise crew, lost on 13 December). Like the Haas and Althoff crews, the Sasser crew had trained at Pyote, Texas. They had left Mather Field in California on 13 Feb, so they must have been held up in Hawaii for a while.

As normal, the officers and enlisted men were assigned to separate quonsets. Rudolph “Rudy” Nelson, the radio operator on the Sasser crew, remembered that when the seven enlisted men in the crew carried their bags into their new home and set them down on empty bunks, the men already in the hut told them they were inheriting “hot bunks”, since the two previous crews who had occupied those beds had been lost. Quite a welcome. As it turned out, the luck had apparently switched on those beds. The Sasser crew survived the war but some of the others didn't. Nelson wrote, “We learned early not to get close with the people in our midst because it was too hard when they didn't return from a mission.”

Meanwhile, the new Althoff crew of the 881st flew an area familiarization mission today, up and down the island chain.

There was a Wing critique of the 19 Feb mission today. Copilot Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st, attended and commented that "It was brought out that the ships lost over the target were all stragglers.”

Copilot Don Weber of the still unblooded Haas crew of the 882nd got up at 0645 this morning, ate breakfast, and then turned in his quota of 20 pieces of clothing to the Quartermaster laundry. The crew had ground school
all morning from 0800 to 1200, covering such topics as map reading, weather strikes and censorship. In the afternoon navigator Bob Wool and radar operator Bill Lange received some instruction on radar, while bombardier Frank Sharp had some on gunnery. The crew was supposed to meet at the dispensary at 1400 but that was canceled, so some of the EM went swimming.

Aware that he would soon be entering combat, and discouraged at the recent losses in the Group, Weber was feeling a bit down. He wrote a rather pessimistic letter home to someone named Dorothy tonight, even though he didn't want to worry her or his folks... but it felt good to tell someone how he felt.

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"21 Feb. - Ground school -- intelligence gave a program of target study to continue for approximately three days. Ball team beat 882nd. Lt. King and crew reported to squadron."

22 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"22 February 1945

Captain Bricker's crew returned from recreational DS [detached service] in Hawaii, looking well and reporting a fine time."

The Bricker crew (#113) had ditched on their first mission on 18 Dec 44. Seven men survived the ditching and were rescued by a sub. After several weeks on the sub, they were returned to Saipan in January and then sent on rest leave to Oahu, which was SOP for any crew which had undergone a ditching or similar harrowing experience.

Today the Haas crew, or most of it, of the 882nd Squadron went on a training mission to Rota, a still Japanese-occupied island between Saipan and Guam. Since no air opposition was expected, the four gunners did not go. The seven who did go got up, ate breakfast and gathered at Squadron Operations at 0830. Then they went up to the line, climbed into Z-28, "Old Ironsides", taxied out and took off. This was supposed to be radar bombing practice, but it turned out that the radar wasn't working, so the four bombs they carried had to be dropped visually on Rota. The crew returned to Saipan by 1500. Waiting for them was the Arbon crew, which was the regular crew for Z-28 at this time. Arbon and his men were anxious to check their plane over and get her all ready for a mission expected on the 24th.

After surrendering the plane, Haas and crew went off to chow and then cleaned up. Copilot Don Weber didn't think much of the food they were getting. "The food is quite poor right at the present & we have high hopes of it improving soon."

Today S/Sgt Jack Heffner of the Pearson crew of the 881st was issued clothing to replace that which had been lost three days earlier in the crash of Z-11. Heffner also noted in his diary that his old copilot on the McNamer crew, 2/Lt William Lewis, had been given his own crew today, replacing Capt Jay Brown, who would eventually be transferred to Wing and later to the 497th Bomb Group.

Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st got a phone call this evening from an old friend named Bob Smith, a B-24 copilot. Copeland hadn't even known Smith was on Saipan. But he went over to see him, presumably at Kobler Field, and they had a nice talk.
"23 February 1945

At about 1250 today, while on a routine local [slow-timing] flight, Z Square 6 ["Draggin' Lady"], piloted by 1st Lt. Robert E. Engle, developed mechanical trouble, tried to land at Isely, couldn't make it -- tried to land at Kobler, failed and finally landed with wheels down in the ocean just inside the reef north of Kobler Field on the west side of the island. The plane almost stood on her nose and Lt. Engle and 2d Lt. Glenn E. Pavey were trapped in the nose and drowned. Of six sailors who were passengers five escaped and one (named Granach?) was killed. M/Sgt Dooley H. Rogers [flight engineer] and Sgt John L. Lippa [radio operator] were wounded."

Slow-timing flights like this required only a minimum crew – AC, copilot, flight engineer, radioman, and a couple of gunners to act as scanners. The navigator, 2/Lt Gerald Auerbach, had wanted to go along to calibrate the compass, but Engle decided against that and Auerbach stayed on the ground. Lucky for him. Not so lucky for the sailors who came along for an airplane ride, a common practice at the time.

Only eight days earlier, Lt Engle had saved the life of his tail gunner, Sgt Romeo Rendina, (see 15 Feb entry), but today he was unable to save himself. Some time later, when the wreckage of Z-6 was dragged onto land, Engle's crucifix was found still attached to the steering yoke.

With Engle and Pavey dead, Rogers with an injured back and Lippa with a broken leg, the crew was broken up and the remaining men were assigned to other crews. Rogers and Lippa would later return to duty with the 881st.

Despite the tragedy unfolding on the west side of the island, regularly scheduled training went on as usual in the 500th. The new Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron had ground school this morning, beginning at 0800. Today they got an intelligence briefing, which didn't impress copilot Don Weber very much. What he basically got out of it was that aircraft plants were the principal target.

Weber was understandably nervous about the next mission, which his crew expected to go on. He had heard a lot of stories about planes being badly shot up and coming back on two or three engines, but, he consoled himself, they had made it back. This afternoon the crew's sidearms were checked, reinforcing the notion that they would be going on tomorrow's mission. But later they learned that the mission was postponed a day.

Copilot Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew went to the hospital this morning to get his eyes looked at. They'd been bothering him lately. But he still had to go to ground school afterwards. Later, Copeland sadly described in his diary the fatal accident with Z-6 and the Engle crew that occurred today.

S/Sgt Jack Heffner, radar operator on the Pearson crew of the 881st, received notice today of the award of the Purple Heart for injuries suffered on the mission of 19 Feb.

24 Feb 45

From the 881st Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 February 1945 [date is actually typed as 23 Feb but this is clearly an error]

Lts. Engle and Pavey were buried in the 27th Division Cemetery at 1430 today. Chaplain Hickey conducted the simple, impressive ceremony. Lt. Col. Dougherty [500th Group CO], Lt. Col. Brandon [500th Group Deputy Commander], and Lt. Col. Reeve [881st Squadron CO] were among the officers present. Twelve honorary pallbearers among the crew members and friends of Lts. Engle and Pavey volunteered."

From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"24 Feb. - No ground school scheduled. Wing briefing at 1600 and Group briefing at 1830 for Mission #27,
urban area of Tokyo. All out mission with 313th and 314th Wings participating.”

This morning Robert Copeland of the Fitzgerald crew went back to the hospital for a follow-up and “my eyes are a lot better.” In the afternoon Copeland spent three hours helping work on the new Officers Club.

The new Haas crew of the 882nd had nothing official to do on this Saturday, so they filled it with personal activities. Copilot Don Weber did some reading – Without Armor by James Hilton, “not such a bad book” – then wrote letters home to his parents and to the parents of Harland Fischer, his Marine friend with whom he had spent some time on the 19th. At 1830 the crew attended the briefing for tomorrow’s mission and learned that they would indeed be going, but not all of them, and not as a crew. The seven men going – AC Otto Haas, navigator Bob Wool, radar operator Bill Lange and gunners Willie Greene, Harry Ruch, Bob Wilson and Paul Grove – would be split up among several veteran crews on six different planes as part of an orientation process. Copilot Don Weber, bombardier Frank Sharp, flight engineer John Gafford and radio operator John Hoover would be sitting it out this time, a situation that Weber felt “does suit me quite O.K.”

Weber noted in his diary that many of his friends from replacement crew training at Pyote AAF had now arrived on Saipan. The Gillert crew had also been assigned to the 882nd and was in a hut just across the street. The Booze crew was over in the 881st Squadron. And he had heard that the Geer crew was also here. [The Geer crew had been assigned to the 497th Group. - JEB]

25 Feb 45

On this date the 73rd Bomb Wing conducted a high-altitude incendiary attack against the city of Tokyo. For this mission, the 500th Bomb Group scheduled more aircraft than ever before, 31 of its own plus four attached from the 499th Bomb Group. Of those 35 planes, 32 made it airborne, including 30 from the 500th and two of the 499th planes.

Also for the first time, the 500th had enough planes to form three combat squadrons. Group and first squadron leader was Lt Col Joseph “Toby” Brannock, flying with his favorite crew, 1/Lt Hale Hays and crew, in Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe"; deputy squadron leader was Capt Joseph M. Savage, Jr., newly promoted to 882nd Squadron Operations Officer replacing Maj Frank Roberts, lost on the 23 Jan mission, and riding with Capt Cecil Tackett and crew in Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees". (The "Pride" was back in action after making it home on two engines on 27 Jan.) Also riding with the Tackett crew on this mission was 2/Lt Norman Garrigus, 882nd Squadron RCM Officer, to operate the radar jamming equipment. Second squadron leader was Maj John Gay, 883rd Operation Officer, riding with Capt Vance Black and crew in Z-48; deputy squadron lead was Maj Charles Adams in Z-47, "Adam's Eve". Third squadron leader was Deputy Group Commander Lt Col Harry Brandon, riding with Maj Robert Luman and crew in Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas"; deputy squadron lead was Capt Horace "Hod" Hatch in Z-9, "Nina Ross".

The participating planes and crews were:

First squadron (12 aircraft)
Z-23, "Ramblin Roscoe", Hays
Z-24, "Pride of the Yankees", Tackett
Z-28, "Old Ironsides", Arbon
Z-29, "Gravel Gertie", Shorey
Z-32, "Fever from the South", Parsons
Z-30, "Constant Nymph", Reeves
Z-22, "Georgia Ann", Limpp
Z-35, "Pacific Queen", Gray
Z-26, McClure
Z-33, "Slick Dick", Hughes
Z-34, "Frisco Nannie", Farrell
Z-21, "Devils' Delight", Pierce

**Second squadron (11 aircraft)**
Z-48, Black
Z-47, "Adam's Eve", Adams
Z-41, "The Baroness", Barron
Z-52, "20th Century Sweetheart", Holmes
Z-53, "The Ancient Mariner", Clinkscales
Z-54, Schmidt
Z-50, "Fancy Detail", Gregg
Z-45, "Mustn't Touch", McClanahan
Z-51, "Tail Wind", Setterich
Z-42, "Supine Sue", Ryan
Z-27, D. Jackson

**Third squadron (12 aircraft)**
Z-5, "There'll Always Be A Christmas", Luman
Z-9, "Nina Ross", Hatch
Z-8, "Mission to Albuquerque", Thompson
Z-19, "Snafu-perfot", Sullivan
Z-4, "Black Magic", Oswald
Z-2, "20th Century Limited", Mather
Z-10, "Punchin' Judy", Kappil
Z-3, "Ann Dee", H. Jackson
(499th aircraft)
V-13, Boozer
V-7, Smith
V-1, Vacula
V-14, Bass

This would be the first combat for the 882nd's new Haas crew, most of it anyway, although they would be split up and not flying together. Seven of the crew would be flying with veteran crews for orientation purposes. AC 1/Lt Otto Haas would be flying as copilot on the Hughes (former Cordray) crew in Z-33; navigator 2/Lt Robert Wool as a passenger/observer with the Pierce crew in Z-21; tail gunner Cpl Paul Grove as ring gunner on the Hays crew in Z-23; and CFC gunner Cpl Willie Greene as right gunner on the Gray crew in Z-35. Left gunner Cpl Robert Wilson and radar operator Cpl William Lange would both fly with the Arbon crew in Z-28; and right gunner Cpl Harry Ruch with probably the McClure crew in Z-26.

Take-off was from 0737 to 0753 using both runways. Z-3, V-7 and V-1 failed to take off for unknown reasons, leaving the third squadron with only nine planes. Bomb load was 1 x 500 lb M64 general purpose bomb and 16 x E46 incendiary clusters, except for Z-34 and Z-54, each of which carried 1 x 500 lb M64 general purpose bomb and 15 x E46 incendiary clusters.

Squadron and Group assemblies took place as planned, and the group headed for the Wing Assembly Point, which once again was the island of Nishino Shima in the Bonins. There was one small change this time, however, due to the growing number of 313th and 314th Bomb Wing planes now participating in raids (this was the inaugural mission for the 314th). The 73rd Wing would assemble to the east of Nishino Shima, while the other two wings would assemble to the west. But the 73rd assembly did not go as planned. When the 500th Group reached the designated point, they found what seemed to be general confusion. Too many planes in too restricted an area. Some crews from the 500th saw the horrible sight of two B-29's from the 497th Group colliding here, with loss of both planes and two full crews -- 22 lives snuffed out in an instant. The 500th finally moved off toward Japan at 1252, twelve minutes behind schedule, behind another formation.

At about 25 degrees latitude, the formation entered a warm front, which caused icing on some planes as they passed through the moisture-laden clouds. The front also broke up the formation as the planes lost sight of each other in the clouds. Before the mainland was reached, two planes from the first squadron had turned back -- Z-
28 due to loss of oil in #2 engine and Z-26 due to severe icing which prevented climbing above 21,000 feet.

The 30 remaining planes made landfall, mostly in the vicinity of Hamamatsu, but as individual aircraft. It was pretty much a repeat of the 15 Feb mission, with some planes able to link up with others and bomb in small formations while others had to go in individually. Z-2's engines were overheating, so her crew opted to bomb Hamamatsu as a target of opportunity. The 29 other planes all bombed the primary, at one point or another.

Tokyo was entirely covered by clouds, however, so all drops had to be made by radar. With most planes acting individually, target approaches varied from 77 to 132 degrees and bombing altitudes from 25,000 to 30,700 feet. Eight aircraft -- Z-32, Z-22, Z-35, Z-34, Z-54, Z-45, Z-10 and Z-19 -- experienced partial rack malfunctions and got only some bombs off. Z-54 even made two runs over the target trying to get all her bombs off but was unsuccessful. Due to the cloud cover, no bomb results were observed and no strike photos could be taken.

The only good thing about the lousy weather was that it kept enemy fighters from making any attempt at interception. No fighters were seen. Flak was officially classified as light to moderate and ineffective, but it sure didn't look that way to Willie Greene of the Haas crew, seeing his first action as right gunner on the Gray crew in Z-35. The skinny teenager from North Carolina had been taken under the wing by veteran John Norton, who was in the same hut as Greene and was CFC gunner on the Gray crew. Norton, from far north International Falls, Minnesota, was, in Greene's words, "a nice guy". The black puffs of bursting anti-aircraft shells seemed uncomfortably close, and Greene admitted being "scared stiff", but he noticed that Norton wasn't fazed. In fact no B-29's were hit, and Greene would later come to see this as "really a soft mission".

All planes returned safely to Saipan, landing between 2112 and 2344, except for Z-30, which made it back but had to make a crash landing when her landing gear would not come down. The plane was badly damaged but the crew were uninjured.

Because of the poor weather and the disorganized nature of the bomb drops, only one square mile of Tokyo was burned out on this mission. But this modest achievement in the face of very adverse conditions helped convince General LeMay that much greater results could be obtained if the fire-bombing was carried out properly, that is, by large numbers of bombers dropping their incendiaries in concentration on designated areas. He would begin putting his theory to the test in March.

While most of the Haas crew were flying this mission, the four left behind had to find ways to occupy their time. Copilot 2/Lt Don Weber, bombardier 2/Lt Frank Sharp and flight engineer Sgt John Gafford got up early to watch the planes take off – after getting some breakfast, with fresh eggs! Radio operator Cpl John Hoover probably slept late, but he was up in time to accompany his three crewmates to chapel services at 1015.

After services ended, Weber was elated to find he had visitors. His friend Harland Fischer from the 4th Marine Division came by and brought along another hometown friend, Lee Hornbaker, who was also in the Marines. The three old friends spent the afternoon talking and riding around the island. It was a great visit.

Also visiting friends today was Robert Copeland, copilot on the 881st's Fitzgerald crew, which had not gone on today's mission. Copeland got together with his friend Bob Smith from a B-24 unit on the island and the two of them went out to Tanapag Harbor to see another friend, Al Sanders, who was assigned to the Y0185, a cement barge. Sanders treated them to a nice chicken dinner.

Speaking of food, Don Weber's prediction that it would be getting better in the 500th was borne out today. Besides the fresh eggs for breakfast, they had chicken and fresh potatoes for lunch and chicken soup and celery for supper.

The gunners on the new Althoff crew of the 881st Squadron had training yesterday and today on the CFC system and "Line Maintenance". They also got an hour each on the Jam Handy gunnery simulator. Right gunner Joseph Altott didn't explain what the Line Maintenance training consisted of, but it likely was an explanation of the gunners' responsibilities under the new centralized maintenance system which had gone into effect on 15 Feb.
Flying in this afternoon from Kwajalein was another replacement crew, the Law crew. Along with many other replacement crews, they had completed training at Pyote, Texas, in January, then were ordered to overseas staging areas. The Law crew went to Kearney AAF, Nebraska (some crews went thru Herington, Kansas), where they drew a new B-29 and departed on 14 Feb for Mather AAF, California. After lingering a week at Mather, probably due to some mechanical problems with the plane, they left there on 21 Feb, flying the usual route via Hawaii and Kwajalein to Saipan. The Law crew were assigned to the 881st Squadron.

**26 Feb 45**

Following the 25 Feb mission, staff officers wrote up their required reports. Only one hard-to-read page of what appears to be the Group Bombardier's Report for the 25 Feb 1945 mission is preserved in the microfilm records. There is no title page or signature block, but from the out-spoken style it appears to have been written as usual by Capt Richard E. Hale, for whom reticence was not a priority. He scolded his superiors again:

"Missions should be planned at least 48 hours in advance so that Groups may properly prepare. Numerous changes in bomb load and the use of a bomb that is new to all bombardiers [evidently Hale meant the E46 incendiary] is not only conductive [sic, obviously meant "conducive"] to gross errors but could be dangerous to the lives of the Air Crew. The 500 lb. E46 bomb is a difficult bomb to unpack, load, fuse and arm. When crews are rushed in any of these operations, the danger of accidents in handling and in the air are greatly increased. Bomb tables available for this bomb consist in this group of one (1) PROVISIONAL TABLE which is a photographic copy. This made it necessary to mimeograph copies of the table and instruct the individual bombardier in its use over a very limited time. Changes in A.P. [Aiming Point] were received after 2300 on the night after briefing and this made it necessary to brief the bombardiers on this point at the early morning weather briefing."

And just in case his superiors somehow missed how he really felt about the E46, Hale gave it another kick:

"Suggest the use of the E46 Cluster be discontinued. The weight of the cluster is 425 lbs. The weight of the bombs in the cluster is 228 lbs. This gives a dead weight of Cluster Adapter of 197 lbs. This weight seems too great for the type of bomb carried. Further, the bomb is difficult to handle and has a great amount of packing material which complicates the handling."

Meanwhile, in other parts of the Group, the routine went on. From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"26 Feb. -- Squadron and Group Critiques on Mission #27 in Group Briefing room. Lt. Col. McDowell gave orientation talk to the two new crews (Lt. King and Lt. Adamson)."

Copilot Don Weber of the new Haas crew attended the critiques and was impressed at how thoroughly the mission was discussed. The consensus was that the bad weather yesterday had kept the Japanese fighters down and the flak had been light, making for a good day. CFC gunner Willie Greene thought the mission was "a big success." However, the collision of the two B-29's of the 497th Group at the assembly area, which was mentioned in the critique, somewhat dampened any positive feelings. The contemplative Weber still had self-doubts about going into combat for the first time. "I feel pretty good but don't have the ambition I should like to have, I fear."

Copilot Robert Copeland and the other inhabitants of his quonset in the 881st Squadron area were engaged in a beautification project for their domicile. They had decided to have a lawn, with grass and even some flowers, and as a first step they started hauling in dirt, a lot of it. Part of today was employed in spreading and smoothing the dirt, and when they finished they realized they didn't have enough. So they hauled in more dirt this evening.

**27 Feb 45**
From the 883rd Bomb Squadron War Diary:

"27 Feb. -- Ground school, gave two hours of target study. Several major league ball players visited the group; Pee Wee Reese, George Dickey, Vandermeer and several others. Group staff beat 883rd staff 15 to 12."

The new Althoff crew of the 881st Squadron flew a training mission to Rota today, but right gunner Joseph Altott gave no details.

Meanwhile, the Haas crew of the 882nd had ground school this morning, the subjects including target study, malfunctions and cruise control. School lasted until 1130, after which the crew played softball. Later in the afternoon they went down to the ocean and some of them waded out into the surf. Bombardier Frank Sharp got cut up on the sharp coral and copilot Don Weber also picked up some scratches. Still later they played more ball. All this outdoor activity gave Weber a little sunburn.

On the morale front, some of the crew got their first mail from home today. One of the lucky recipients was CFC gunner Willie Greene, who got two letters from his father.

The new crews weren't the only ones who had to attend ground school. So did the veteran crews, including the Fitzgerald crew of the 881st Squadron.

28 Feb 45

Copilot Don Weber of the Haas crew of the 882nd Squadron woke up this morning with sore muscles from all the exercise yesterday. Clearly, he was out of shape and needed some physical conditioning. Also, his left forefinger, which had been bent back awkwardly while playing softball, was badly swollen. And his sunburn was worse than yesterday. But he got ready for the training mission they were supposed to go on, only to find out that their plane was unavailable. So they had ground school again in the morning, hoping to get the training mission in in the afternoon, but it was called off for the day and rescheduled for tomorrow.

Weber had still received no mail from home.

The gunners of the Althoff crew of the 881st cleaned their guns today after yesterday's training mission to Rota. Later they met their Group CO, Col Dougherty.

There was a briefing at 1800 for the crews going on tomorrow's training mission. This included both the Althoff and Haas crews.

Bob Copeland and his quonset mates in the 881st finished preparing their lawn today. It was now ready for the grass seed. In the afternoon Copeland got to do some flying, and all of it in the left seat. He was pleased about that part but not pleased with his performance. Always self-critical and striving to improve, Copeland wrote in his diary that he continued to level off too high.

Also flying today was S/Sgt Jack Heffner of the 881st. Although he was a radar operator, Heffner volunteered to fly as left gunner, or scanner, for Capt Ray Taylor as he test-hopped a new B-29, 44-69666, which had been designated as the new Z-11 to replace the plane destroyed in the crash-landing of 19 Feb. They were in the air for four hours. Heffner was not impressed with the new plane. "It's very slow, nothing like good old No. 7."