

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 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 talked 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 it? 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 the not

inconsiderable amount of an additional \$60 per month in flight pay. 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 was working at their plane, the air raid alert sounded. The crew 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 fiancée! 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.

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 move based on the theory that the ship's guns protected the entire crew but one that was definitely not appreciated 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