

remaining engines caught fire, but Z-49 made it down safely. 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 toward 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 on 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. 2/Lt Osamu Hiroshi 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 Hiroshi's target. Instead, the young Japanese pilot passed over that plane and squarely struck Z-12, with the veteran Samuelson crew, lagging behind. Hiroshi 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, with whom he 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 contemplative 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 undoubtedly have achieved great things had he survived the war.

On the Japanese side, 2/Lt Hiroshi was apparently 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 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 Irvings, 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 Zekes 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 Szwarc), 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 gone, 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. 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 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 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, 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 parked B-29 on her hardstand, A-9, "Skyscraper 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 out a challenge to men he obviously regarded as desk jockeys: "Suggest staff Bombardiers in Group, Wing and Bomber Command be ordered to fly combat missions [*Hale's underline*] ... so that some of the problems incountered (*sic*) may be understood and correct solutions though(t) 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. Goulooze
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	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