

Memories of World War II
By Newell Penniman Jr.

Dedication

The dictionary defines history as a 1. tale, story 2. a chronicle record of significant events(as effecting a nation or institution) usu.including an explanation of their causes 3. a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events 4. events that form the subject matter of a history.

Newell W. Penniman Jr. was part of a significant event that shall always be part of our nation's history. The following memoirs are dedicated to the family members of this special person who made the supreme sacrifice to serve our country. Over approximately a ten year period Theresa Penniman documented Newell's most memorable experiences of his service during World War II. His story is documented for his children, grandchildren and generations to come. May we never forget the past that has helped to shape our country to become what it is today and may we never forget the ultimate sacrifice that one of our own family members made for us. Thanks Dad were so proud to have you as our father.

Acknowledgements

One cannot read the following memoirs without acknowledging Mildred Penniman who appeared as an angel looking down upon her son keeping him safe. Newell Penniman Sr. should be acknowledged for his endless prayers for his son's safe return.

The most obvious person to acknowledge is Newell W. Penniman Jr. for sharing his life altering story with us. The memoirs wouldn't have come to fruition without the patient hand written records created by Theresa Penniman. Thank you.



Memories of World War II 1941-1945

By Newell Penniman Jr.

1941

At age 18 on Sunday, December 7, shortly after 1:30 the regular radio programs were interrupted for a special news announcement. Japanese planes have bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The next day on Monday, December 8th as a student at Bentley College in Boston, I went to a nearby restaurant for lunch. At 12:00 noon President Franklin Roosevelt spoke to the nation by radio and announced that on "December 7, 1941 a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the Naval Air Force of the Empire of Japan. A state of war exists between this country and Japan and that we will not stop until Japan is totally and unconditionally defeated."

1942

In April, some Naval Air Corp officials came to Bentley College seeking volunteers for naval pilot training. About two others and I took the lead and reported for a pre-enlistment physical. I failed because having passed every other part of the physical; my left eye was 18/20 not 20/20 as needed for passing. Disappointed that I had not passed the eye exam I went back to concentrating on my Bentley studies. At about age 19 in November a fellow student informed me that he had just become an Army Air Corps aviation cadet and he wore glasses. He told me the eye exam was easy. The next day I went up the road about half a mile to Massachusetts Avenue Armory and without any

problem passed everything including the eye exam, which they said was 20/20. I was so happy I sent a telegram to my father in Peabody telling him that I was now an aviation cadet waiting to be called to active duty when I finished Bentley in June of 1943 according to the recruiting sergeant.

1943

In late January I arrived home from Bentley on a Monday evening around 7:00PM and my father said, "You received a letter from the war department today." He had opened it, which I didn't mind but forget about finishing Bentley in June. I was to report for active duty just six days later on the last Sunday in January. On that Sunday I was very sad as my father who had been both mother and father since 1937 when my mother died would be left home alone with just memories of our close relationship. I was worried as to whether losing his wife and my mother, he would be able to survive also the loss of his only child. I did however, want to go to fight for my country so looked forward to my new career for the next several years.

We were shipped from Boston to Atlantic City, New Jersey on that Sunday and spent the next four weeks getting fitted into uniforms and into the routine of daily calisthenics and drilling left, right, etc. and taking several tests including a more rigid physical than we had in Boston. My left eye was still 20/20 and never ever tested again during my service career. We were then shipped to Greensboro, North Carolina for just seven days before being shipped to Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania where we were to attend Susquehanna College.

Truth be told I suspect we were called up too fast for the Air Corps to handle such a huge number of new cadets at their classification centers during this period of time. At

Susquehanna we attended college courses on subjects for the Air Corps testing, which indicated we were lacking knowledge. I didn't have to take any math courses but did have to take political geography and an extra year long course of physics in just three months. We also had to take 10 hours of training in a Piper Cub plane, an awful small light plane which held a student and pilot instructor and room for no more. During these hours we learned take offs, landings, stalls, and spins.

Although I completed the 10 hours, I changed my mind about flying and although I wanted to be a pilot, I just couldn't see how such a small plane could fly. This lack of confidence in a plane's ability to fly caused me to change my mind about being a pilot. In May I turned 20 and then in the second week in June we were shipped to Nashville, Tennessee. The classification center for the air cadets was for the northeast section of the U.S.A. I was rated very high for navigator and bombardier training and was given my choice. I chose navigator feeling it would give me an education, I could later use in ship navigating or planes.

The most trying time of my service training was over the next 10 weeks. Those selected for pilot training were in and out of Nashville in about two weeks. The few selected for navigator, or bombardier were held to fill a couple of railroad cars for the trip to navigation and bombardier schools. On September 8th we were shipped to Monroe, Louisiana, Selman Field to begin navigation training. The 10 weeks before shipping out to Selman Field had been filled with nothing but kitchen patrol, cleaning up mess halls, and cleaning potatoes. It also meant taking all kinds of crap from sergeants who knew we would eventually be officers and wanted to rub our noses in it before the tables were turned.

From September to the last week in November 1943 we were in what was called Navigation Pre-Flight School. This consisted of class work covering military rules and regulations and a brush-up of math. The day after Thanksgiving we were shipped to Tyndall Field, Panama City, Florida for six weeks of aerial gunnery school. We started out with a few hours of skeet shooting to learn how to lead a moving target. Also we had stationary 50MM machine guns like those on B24's and B17's. There were probably about 30 of these 50 caliber guns facing targets backed up by a hill. When the orders, "Commence Firing" was given, what a racket! Earplugs when using guns were unheard of at that time.

We also took a course on radio transmission and receiving messages in the Morse code, (S.O.S = ...—...). This was done so the navigator could take over for the radio man if he was wounded and unable to take or send messages. We also had about eight hours of aerial training shooting the 50 caliber machine guns at a moving target towed by another plane. All this time while I could, I would make reverse charge phone calls to Dad to help keep up his morale and let him know I was doing okay. On some occasions I would have him telegraph some extra money when I was short. The pay as an aviation cadet was only about a third of what a second Lieutenant made.

1944

We were shipped back to Selman Field for advanced navigation school. Now in addition to increased class work we would begin to fly in navigation training planes carrying three cadets to a plane. The pilots were all very good, but considered too old for flying combat. Now I was on my way to a commission as a Second Lieutenant and receiving my navigator wings. We were at Selman Field in training until June 10, 1944

when we graduated and I became a Second Lieutenant, Newell W. Penniman Jr. who proudly wore his navigator wings. I was given 10 days leave and after over a year and a couple of months I arrived home to see a very proud father waiting for me at the train station, when he saw me for the first time as an officer and a gentleman. I was pretty proud also.

When we had graduated from navigation school they had taken the top third of the class, which I was fortunate enough to have been in and assigned to Radar School in Boca Raton, Florida and I was to report there on June 21st after my leave. While on leave Mrs. Dorgan, the mother of one of my lifelong friends, Phil Dorgan insisted that although I was Protestant she'd take me to a young Father McNiff who had just been ordained for a blessing that hopefully would see me safely through the war. Phil passed the Naval Air Corps physical in 1942 after I told him how I had passed everything except my left eye. He was now a captain in the Marine Air Corps. In October 1944 Phil was killed when the B-26 he was flying crashed in the Honolulu area. It always struck me as ironical that the blessing may have seen me through the war. Phil had not been home when father McNiff gave me the blessing and was destined to die in a plane crash several weeks later.

On June 21st I reported to Boca Raton, Florida for training as a navigator radar bombardier. It was now apparent that we who had been assigned to radar school would in a few weeks end up on a B-29 base. The radar training taught us how to navigate by LORAN, a long-range naval radio system, and also to bomb by radar if in the daytime or night we were to bomb a target that we could not see visually. At that time it was unthought of that in a few months we would be bombing at night and at the very low level

of 5,000 feet. The B-29 had been manufactured as the world's most modern bomber carrying over 10 tons of bombs at 30,000 feet and higher at record speeds.

While we were at Boca Raton, my closest friend, Archie Miller from Pennsylvania and I decided on a day off to go down town to Miami for the day. Boca Raton was about halfway between West Palm Beach to the north and Miami to the south. We stopped at a hotel for dinner that night. Earlier in the day we had been having a beer in the cocktail lounge overlooking the swimming pool when I saw a man and a small dog walk by and I said, "Archie, that man looks like the Duke of Windsor." He was the man who had abdicated his position as King of England in the late 30's so that he could marry an American divorcee by the name of Wallis Simpson. Later that evening as we had just been seated in the main dining room for dinner the orchestra struck up the English National anthem and everyone stood up. It was then announced over the public address system that the Duke and Duchess were entering the dining area. We remained standing until they were seated. What a surprise and honor to be dining in the presence of such well-known people.

Upon completion of radar school we were given another two weeks at home ending on August 26th. Then I was to report to Lincoln, Nebraska to await assignment to a B-29 training base where we would be assigned to and meet the crew that would be with us for the duration of the war. At that time we were not sure whether we would live through the war or die on a mission or become prisoners of war. From the first day we met the crew we bonded immediately. We were lucky as some of the other crews did not all get along as well as we seemed to. My airplane commander, Wayne Maki, was a tall



strapping blue eyed, blond person of obvious Finnish decent. He was also a Stanford graduate, age 27 and in my opinion the best pilot in the 20th Air Force. Many of the other pilots in the group also looked up to him for his ability. However, he was also fearless and on more than one mission to come, would take chances that I feel he was lucky to get away with the risks that he took. The Airplane Commander was the person that the entire crew put their trust in. We would have flown into the gates of hell with Wayne, knowing that he would bring us back safely. Also on the original crew were Claude A. Johnston, Pilot, Rochester, N.Y., John A. Sabol, Bombardier, Homestead, Pennnsylvaia, Maurice A. Seagall, Fight Engineer, Irvington, N.J., Clarence E. Hitchcock, Radio Operator, West Virginia, George M. Hester, Central Fire Control,Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Robert J.Tawell, Right Waist Gunner ,Blaiaville, Pennsylvania, Howard Kelly, Tail Gunner, Colquit,Georgia, and Thomas C. Rhodus, Radar Operator, Kansas City, Montana.

After training as a crew from the first of October 1944 to two weeks into December we were given a 10-day leave ending two days before Christmas. We were all disappointed that we couldn't stay home to observe what might be our last Christmas. All our training missions had been routine except for the one in early October in which the number two engine caught fire. Engine fires were a fairly frequent problem of the B-29's. We landed with the fire engines ready to follow us to the end of the runway to extinguish the still burning engine. A Boeing Field Representative engineer later remarked after inspecting the damaged engine that the A/C, Maki, should have had the crew bail out. The fire was just inches away from the wing tank and could have blown the airplane up and all of my crew with the explosion. However, in those days we were young and had a fatalistic outlook. If your number is up, it's up.

We had one training mission from Nebraska to Havanah, Cuba, Batista Field. This was to get the navigators to experience navigating over large bodies of water. We knew at that time we were probably headed for the Pacific area of combat. Another long training mission was from Nebraska to Puerto Rico. There we flew two long missions over water to South American ports and back to Puerto Rico. Also at that time the gunners were keeping their eyes open for possible sightings of enemy submarines if one was close enough to the surface. They saw none.

We returned to Grand Island just in time to leave for our ten-day leave before going over seas. The down side was we had to report back to Grand Island on December 23rd. We had quite a few "eat, drink and be merry" outings as who knew what the coming year would bring. It was a very trying time when at 2:00 AM December 23rd, when departing for Logan Airport to catch an early morning flight to Omaha, Nebraska via New York LaGuardia Airport, I said goodbye to dad after telling him I had a feeling I would survive the missions that were to come. I am sure he would have died a short time later if he ever received the knock on the door from an Air Force officer announcing, "The War Department regrets to inform you that your son was killed in action." I carried the burden of surviving for Dad's sake on all my missions. I had also prayed to God and my mother, who died in 1937. I always had the feeling that she was with me from the take off to the landing every time I flew.

We left Grand Island Nebraska on December 27th and had a two-hour trip by car to Kearney, Nebraska where we were assigned to our brand new B-29 numbered 2405, which at that time cost one million dollars, a lot of money in those days. The B-29 was

the largest most potent bomber of its time. It could fly higher, faster and carry a heavier bomb load than any other existing bomber.

One lasting memory of Grand Island was when we returned from our Christmas leave on December 23rd. Two days later on Christmas day my bombardier, John Sabol and I were coming out of the bar at the officer's club into the visitor's lounge when Lloyd Rinne who I had been with all through navigation, gunnery and radar school called me over to introduce me to his mother, father and sister who lived in Nebraska and were visiting him for the last time before we shipped out to Kearney Air Force Base. I was sort of sorry or envious that he should be with his family for Christmas and my father and I were 2000 miles apart. Poor Lloyd's crew was the first of the 6th Bomb Group to land on Tinian on January 18, 1945 and also the first crew of our 24th squadron to be lost in a combat mission in April 1945. Every Christmas season Lloyd and the fate of his crew always comes to my memory and since that time I have tried to stop being envious of any other person.

1945

After celebrating the arrival of the New Year, 1945 at Kearney, Nebraska we then departed for Mather Field, Sacramento, California our Port of Aerial Embarkation. Due to bad weather at Sacramento we were directed to land at Muroc Air Base near the Mohave Desert where the weather was perfect. We had to spend about four days there before Mather Field was cleared to receive us and several other 6th Bomb group planes that had also joined us at Muroc. As we were getting ready for take-off for Mather Air Field Maki taxied our plane to a hanger where a jeep was sent to pick up a crew man's

luggage. Our tail gunner Howard Kelly was in the dispensary with an abscessed tooth and would not be leaving with us. Even at that early time air-crews were getting very superstitious and leaving one of us behind bothered all of us but what could we do? We would not see Kelly again until after our first three missions with a tail gunner who was borrowed from another crew not flying those same three missions.

Needless to say we were all very happy when Kelly caught up with us. Because of bad weather and the issuance of equipment including 45 caliber pistols etc., and having several lectures on what to expect while navigating 2000 miles over nothing but water for ten hours before arriving at Honolulu. We were now awaiting the clearing up of bad weather in order for us to take off. We were alerted one evening that we would be departing by 4:00AM the next morning after the third day at Mather. I called my father for what would be the last time before if lucky getting back to the good old U.S.A. The only thing is I forgot and called him at 10:00 PM, which was actually 1:00AM in Peabody when dad answered. He forgave me for the error. I told him that the next time he heard my voice it would be all over and that I would be on my way home. I then went to the post chapel all by myself and prayed that if I was destined to be killed in the war that it would be on our first mission or I would survive the tour of missions.

Later on when we had completed our first mission, I felt God was telling me I would survive all the missions that were to follow. It helped to give me the belief and strength to face the missions to come. After the prayer I grabbed three hours sleep before my crew reported to the field for take-off at 4:00AM, as the weather was still bad, the take-off was postponed and we were sent back to our quarters to await the next day to give it another try at 4:00 AM. The next morning it was still raining but it was not as bad

as it had been the day before. We were finally cleared for take-off. Maki taxied to the beginning of the runway. He had the brakes on holding the plane in place then brought all four engines up to max power. The engines were now roaring when the green light from the tower came on. Maki released the brakes and our big B-29 started slowly moving and then faster and faster about a mile down the runway Maki lifted us up and we were on our way to join the fighting of W.W.II in the Pacific.

As we flew over San Francisco Maki pointed out the Golden Gate Bridge, as he knew the area well. I said to myself "Dear God please help me to see that bridge again on the way home and help me to survive what dangers are to come." Armed with my prayer in the chapel and the thought that my deceased mother was and would stay with me through the missions to come, I faced the future with a confident feeling although naturally apprehensive of what I might face in the following months. About two hours later the sun began to come up and we were well out over the beautiful Pacific Ocean. Just ten hours after take-off we were getting ready to land at John Rodgers Fields in Honolulu.

We stayed there for about three days, we had a couple of sessions in which Marine combat veterans briefed us on how we should conduct ourselves if we had to bail out over Japan and become P.O.W.'s. One thing I remember them saying was to get to a Japanese military army or navy personnel to surrender if you could. Civilians who might have been hurt or had loved ones killed in an air raid might just kill you on the spot. The military people would be more inclined to make you a prisoner to see if they could get information from you concerning the number of planes on Tinian, etc. The marines also told us to get rid of our 45 caliber pistols before being captured so that we could not be

executed on the spot by irate military personnel or civilians. We had about four hours on our last day on Honolulu to do a little sight seeing but all the streets and buildings were crowded with military personnel only and we were looking for young chicks. The enlisted men on the crew went their own way. They bumped into a bunch of Seabees who gave them navy hats with instructions to attach them to bombs in the bomb bay on our first mission over Japan. They gave me one of the hats, which I decided to use as a lucky piece on all our missions.

I'm hopping ahead of myself right now but I would on all missions to come, spit on the hat, as we were getting ready for take -off. I would remove the hat only when it was necessary to put on my flak helmet. After the short leave of four hours, the next day we took off for a very small island called Kwajalein it was a very small island it that looked like a huge aircraft carrier. The marines had taken it from the Japs about one year earlier with no Japanese survivors. We just stayed there overnight but we did have a chance for a swim in the nice warm Pacific Ocean on January 17th. It was probably snowing in good old Peabody.

On January 18th we took off for what was to be our home, Tinian Island for the next eight months. The flight took about eight hours and then we picked up Tinian on our radar. About ten minutes later we were circling to land. As we prepared to land I got up on the flight deck and watched as we approached the over mile long runway that was all white coral. Later this and the other runways at North Field would be paved by Seabees with black asphalt. By the end of World War II, Tinian was the largest bomber base in the world. History would be made here in January in more ways than one. We were the second 6th bomb group plane to land that day and the ground crews that had been there

since early December 1944 were elated to see us knowing that now they would from this time on be busy keeping the 6th planes in tip top condition, loading them with bombs and making sure all the engines would be ready to hold up for the long flights the planes would be going on.

After about a five minute drive over at that time dirt (later asphalt) roads we moved into our 6th bomb group area. Our first shock was they had tents set up for us. There was no running water for shaving or showering, just like being on a camping trip. The only wooden building at that time was the mess hall. The chapel was one huge tent, but this was our home and the fact that we were alive while others were dying in combat made us just laugh at the small inconveniences we had to put up with. What we had spent two years training for was now to become a reality. We were in a combat zone and in about three weeks would be on our first mission. Our plane was loaned to a crew in another group to fly on a mission a week after we had arrived in Tinian. They made it to Japan and back but we were very concerned for the safety of our plane. It was to be our plane to and from the target for the 35 missions and we felt real close to our plane, which we named "Big Joe". If he made it we made it. Joe was the name of our ground crew chief.

Superstitions were very common right from the start. Washing your flying suit was considered unlucky. The cap the Seabees gave me went on all 35 missions. As we approached a target and put on our flak helmets and flak jackets similar to bullet proof jackets worn by police officers, I would remove the Seabee cap, spit on it and throw it on my worktable. I would then make the sign of the cross, pray that Mom was with me and start directing the plane towards the target. As it is not possible for me to recall the

happenings of each of my 35 missions, I will start with the first mission try to recollect those missions that stand out most in my mind. Before doing that I would like to recall what would happen before and after each mission. Usually a rumor would get started that a mission was pending and for about a day there would be a lot of guessing as to whether we would be over the target in daylight or darkness. The reason for concern was in the nighttime on most missions the enemy would have large searchlights which they would bracket us in. When this happened the inside of the plane was lit up much brighter than what our normal aircraft lighting was. The enemy would keep us in the lights until we dropped our bombs, then they would turn onto other B-29's still approaching the target. Some lucky B-29's would not be picked up in the lights at all. Also during night raids over the targeted area once they got us in the lights anti-aircraft batteries would open fire and the bursts of flak could be seen and all you could figure was thank God the ground fire is not as accurate as the lights that were on us. In addition to the anti-aircraft fire every so often the gunners would spot enemy night fighters shooting at us.

Our gunners would return fire but at nighttime it was also very difficult to hit any of the fighters and the ones we encountered were not anywhere near as adept as American night fighter pilots. Also on night raids around the May and June period there were sightings of suicide enemy planes called Bakas in which the Baka was released from underneath a twin engine Japanese plane and the pilot in the Baka had about two or three minutes to try to ram a B-29. Thank God we didn't see too many of these suicide planes. In missions in which we were over the target in daylight we had a different scenario. Sometimes we would be in or above clouds and we would have to bomb by radar, as we could not make a visual sighting of the target.

On daylight raids when the enemy anti- aircraft batteries were firing at us instead of seeing a burst of flame as in night raids we would see a burst of black smoke known as flak. Our concern as to whether we would be over the target in daylight or at nighttime would be answered soon after entering the briefing hall, which was also used for religious services. Once all the crews had assembled in the hall we would be talking among ourselves when a strong commanding voice from the rear of the hall would yell, "attention". We would immediately stand at attention and remain standing until our commanding officer, Colonel Gibson proceeded down the center isle and up onto the stage where all the data concerning our upcoming mission was covered. He would turn to us and say, "At ease".

At this point we would all sit down. Several different officers would then make presentations concerning first the target, then anticipated weather conditions from Tinian to the target, the altitudes we should fly at and what we could expect in the way of enemy anti- aircraft fire and enemy fighter plane opposition. At any point during these presentations we were allowed to ask questions. At this point the pilots, navigators, bombardiers, flight engineers, radio operators, and gunners would have brief meetings to cover anything pertinent to their position on the plane. I was a dual rated navigator radar-bombardier which meant that on all night missions or day missions where clouds were obscuring the target I would direct the plane's course to the target and call off the dropping angles to the bombardier who would make any necessary adjustments to his Norden bombsight.

Before each mission the mess sergeants would try to give us an especially good meal. We would then check out our parachutes and Mae West inflatable vests.

Fortunately, we never had to use our Mae West inflatable vests, but they were nice to have on should we need to “ditch” our plane. Having been fed, briefed on the mission, and obtained our gear we would then board two crews to a truck for a five-minute drive to the flight line and our respective planes. After we stored our gear in the plane all the crew with the exception of the two pilots and the flight engineer would assemble in front of the plane and do what we used to jokingly call “winding up the propellers”. The first man would start pushing the propeller followed by the rest of those in line. When the last man had completed his turn we would move on the next propeller. We would do this to all four propellers. This procedure was done to detect any oil locks in the engine cylinders before the pilot could start the engine. Although we did it on every mission from the first to the 35 our crew never encountered a problem. Finding no problem we would board the plane and proceed to our stations.

At that point we would hear the airplane commander say, “clear right starting engine number one.” The waist gunners could see from their positions if any mechanic or person whom the airplane commander couldn’t see were dangerously close to the propeller. The gunner would respond, “Engine one clear.” The airplane commander would proceed to start the engine. The same procedure would be followed for each of the four engines. Now with all four engines reaching moderate R.P.M.’s the airplane commander would order the bombardier to close the Bombay doors and we would start to taxi toward our take off position approximately a half mile away. Having nothing else to do I would usually climb up into the astrodome and look forward and back and be comforted to know that there were many other crews flying the same mission. I also used to wonder if including my own crew members they or the other planes in back and in

front of us was just as apprehensive, as I that this might be the mission we might not survive.

In later years at various group reunions we all did have the same concerns but nobody said anything. As we finally taxied into take-off position I would look out my window and I would see a man standing about one hundred yards holding a red signal light. I would usually wave to him, but being such a distance away he probably did not see me, although there were a few day time missions that I thought I saw him wave back at me. Our airplane commander Maki would also be watching him. When the signal light turned green Maki would take his feet off the brakes and we would feel the plane start to move forward slowly at first and then very quickly increase in its speed as we headed down the runway. The description of this take-off procedure was pretty much the same for both day and night missions. Whether it is day or night we were loaded with over 7,000 gallons of high-octane gasoline and an average of about 10 tons of bombs.

About three days after arriving at Tinian we went down to the airfield because we had heard that there had been a B-29 that crashed during take-off. Although the white coral runway had been cleared of the debris there was a big black scorched area where the plane had crashed. We also observed bits of yellow rubber and the remnants of someone's Mae West jacket. It was not a pretty sight. From our first to our 35th mission we realized each time we started down the runway we could have a fatal accident. A little better than half way down the run-way which extended over a mile long the airplane commanders would hit a point that if an engine failed or a tire blew they would have to make a decision quickly as to whether to continue or not. By this time we would be rolling along at between 140 and 150 miles per hour.

To jump ahead for a moment at one point in around May we had three plane crashes on a night mission, one on Saipan and two on Tinian. Our take-off was delayed about three quarters of an hour while we were eventually directed to alternate runways. In other words, when we go airborne on a mission we considered it fifty percent completed as the combination of gasoline, bombs, ammunition for the guns, and the speed of the B-29 had all the ingredients for a fatal crash. The tension on the take-off was such that everything was silent except for the commands of the pilot and the roar of the engines.

Our first combat mission was flown on February 8, 1945 to an island in Japanese possession called Truk. It was only half the distance of our later missions to Japan. It was a daytime mission at about 18,000 feet and took us a little over seven hours to complete. We were a little nervous as a crew. As we started our bomb run we saw for the first time these puffs of black, which was flak from the enemy anti- aircraft guns. None of the planes in our group encountered any damage and no Japanese planes appeared to challenge us.

Three days later we went on an air sea rescue mission searching for a B-29 that had gone down in the Pacific the previous day. The search was not too far from Iwo Jima and failed to turn up the missing plane and crew. One week later we were sent on a second mission to Truk. Everything was identical to the first mission to Truk except this time a couple of brave Japanese fighter planes made two or three passes at our formation. We suffered no damage from them but for the first time we could hear our gunners firing at the fighters and we experienced the sensation of seeing the flashes from the distant wings of the Japanese planes.

Once again we suffered no damage from the enemy fire and the two Jap fighters were too far and fast for our gunners to hit them. On February 25th we flew our first long-range mission and the target was Tokyo. We assembled off the coast of Japan and then we headed for Tokyo at 35,000 feet. We had to go to this height to get above the clouds in the assembly area. Although it was noontime and the sun shone above us we would have to bomb by radar. One of the two bombay areas had an extra gasoline tank necessary for us to be able to fly that far back and at that altitude.

As we got over Tokyo and just before the bombs were released we encountered moderate amounts of anti-aircraft fire but none of the Sixth Bomb Group planes suffered damage. Photo-recon B-29's indicated that we had burned out one square mile of Tokyo. By the time we got back to Tinian darkness had set in. We landed in the dark and it felt good to know that we had just completed our first combat mission to Japan. The gunners had informed us they had seen to it that the caps given them by the Seabees in Honolulu had made their way to Tokyo as promised. After landing, something new happened. We were driven to a large tent in which we were offered a nice glassful of I think about 140 proof medicinal alcohol mixed with grapefruit juice. It really hit the spot. As we were sipping the drink we were interrogated by our intelligence officers as to what we saw if any Japanese fighter planes, (the most prevalent was the Jap Zero) the amount of flak observed and the weather conditions over the target.

It was now 9:00PM and we had been up since 4:00AM therefore the intelligence officers dismissed us so we could hit the sack. We didn't know it at the time but General LeMay was very concerned about the bombing results of the Twentieth Air Force since he had taken over command in the fall of 1944. Up to this time flying at the high altitude of

30,000 feet the bombing results had been to put it simply lousy. General LeMay decided to change tactics. While he was refining his plans to improve the bombing accuracy the days began to pass without any missions being flown. After about five days we were ordered to fly a mission to an uninhabited island about 70 miles north of Saipan. We were to come in on the island at a 50-foot altitude and drop time-delayed bombs.

Rumors began to pile up one being that we were going to lead the invasion of Japan by coming in at that 50 foot altitude while the marines were attempting to land on the beachheads of Japan. Thank God this rumor was not true. For your information the term latrine rumor was a common expression in the service. The term came about because often times when two or more servicemen were in the latrine they would strike up a conversation concerning what was going on now or in the future with the Sixth Bomb Group. Usually fifty percent of the time the latrine rumors would be false so I seldom passed them on. Along about ten days after our first combat mission to Tokyo, the rumor spread like wild fire that we were going to be flying a low level-bombing mission to Tokyo at night.

General LeMay's plan we would find out the next day was to fly a mission at 5,000 feet at night at a top speed of 290 miles per hour straight across Tokyo. General LeMay had concluded that flying at the lower altitude we would not have to have an extra gas tank in one half of the bombay space. Therefore we could carry twice as many bombs and also save on gasoline consumption. He also figured we would carry no ammunition for the several machine guns on the plane which would tend to take some of the weight off of the plane to partly offset eight of the additional bombs that we would be carrying. General LeMay was gambling that the crews flying the mission in the dark and at low

altitude would catch the Japs off guard and their defenses would be set for us to be coming in at the high altitudes they were used to seeing us at. He admitted that the change in tactics was a big gamble. If it went well he would be vindicated, if it went badly he would be replaced.

Rumors aside, on the March 9th the Sixth Bomb Group was scheduled for what was called the first blitz mission to Tokyo. As we assembled in the briefing hall we saw the huge map of Japan with a line drawn taking us over Tokyo Bay. What was rumor was now a reality. However, we would be going in at 5,000 feet not at 50 feet. We were all stunned at the details of the mission. Some thought Lemay had lost his mind. Many others like myself thought it would be a suicide mission when many crews would not return. As explained previously the mission except for the target, Tokyo, was the same as the routine on all other briefings. The ride down to the airfield was very quiet with no chatter as with the other missions. When we got to our plane the silence continued as we went about our pre-take off duties. I'll never forget when the Catholic Chaplain came by in his jeep. The bombardier and I were the only two crewmembers in the front of the plane when the Chaplain asked us if we would like to have a blessing for the plane. The bombardier was the only Catholic on the crew who for some reason or the other said no.

The chaplain then proceeded to go to the next plane on the line. I would have liked to have the blessing and I was stunned as the Chaplain disappeared. I found out later on though that maybe the same Catholic Chaplain was down the end of the runway as the planes started to take off. He was blessing each plane as it lifted off the end of the runway and headed for Tokyo. Maybe although I didn't know it, the blessing we received was what helped to bring us back.

With planes taking off from Guam, Tinian and Saipan we had a string of 300 bombers probably stretched out over 60 or 70 miles without any night-lights on. A couple of times I climbed up into the astrodome and could not see any planes in front or in back of us. I would not see any B29's until we reached the target area. After about three and half hours per instructions we passed Iwo Jima, which the marines were still mopping up three weeks after they had invaded the island. They were taking this island so that the B-29's that suffered severe damage over the targets, had wounded on board or were low on gas would not have to ditch in the vast Pacific Ocean. It cost the marines 6,000 dead but saved 25,000 B-29 airmen.

As we proceeded by the island I was surprised to see small arms fire and every so often a huge explosion, which seemed to light up the entire island. This was done to catch the remaining Japs. The Japs lost approximately 20,000 trying to run from one position to another in the darkness. We would have to use Iwo Jima as a landing spot for a safe haven three times. Once we used it for wounded on board, gas shortage and a damaged number two engine. The second time was when we were low on gas. The third time was when we were on the longest mission of the war to North Korea it was planned to land at Iwo because we had to pick up more gas to get back to Tinian. A few miles past Iwo we encountered a line of thunderstorms for about 20 minutes in which we saw St. Elmo's fire wrapped around all four propellers. Ironically the radio operator reported that Tokyo Rose, a Japanese disc jockey and also spreader of propaganda was playing "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes".

A short time later the radio went silent, the first B-29's were closing in on Tokyo. As we left the area where we encountered the thunderstorms we broke into a stretch of a star

lit night. I began to pick up the peninsula on the eastern side of Tokyo Bay. We could see a red glow in the sky, which was about 75 miles away from us, it was Tokyo burning. Things began to get tense now because at 5,000 feet we didn't know what it was going to be like over Tokyo. As we hit our turning point to head across the Tokyo Bay the airplane commander had been instructed to increase the air speed to 300 miles per hour, which was the top reading on the B-29 speedometer. This was the first and only time we ever went into a target at this speed. A short few minutes later we had crossed the bay heading for our target area. I had directed the plane this far and the bombardier looked for an area not on fire and it was "bombs away" on that area. The airplane commanders had been instructed to take a violent climbing turn to the left to get the hell out of the way of other B-29s coming in to drop their bombs. Although still on high alert we felt relieved to know that we had hit the target and were now on our way back to Tinian.

At the time of the mission briefing we were told that there would be American submarines ready to surface to pick up any B-29 crews that might have to ditch in the ocean due to battle damage. One would be stationed at the entrance to Tokyo bay, one at 10 miles and one at 20 miles out. It did help us when we were told this at the mission briefing to know that if we did have to ditch which would be very difficult in the dark, that at least we would have a chance. I didn't know until several years later when I read an account of a sub commander's war story that he was looking through his periscope at the mouth of Tokyo Bay when he saw a mid-sized Jap aircraft carrier attempting to escape to the open Pacific Ocean which he proceeded to sink. I am pretty sure that was the same carrier I saw docked near the Yokohama Navy Yard as we flew over on our way to the target.

This was a history-making mission. There were 300 B-29s that flew the mission that night. An estimated eighty thousand Japanese were incinerated. The Japanese were looking for us at 30,000 feet and could not for the most part adjust their anti-aircraft guns to the 5,000 feet that we were flying at. As we headed back to Tinian in the dark and later in the daylight we would not see another B-29 until we landed back in Tinian. I thought for a while that we were the only B-29 that had made it. Looking back on it it still amazes me how 300 B-29's could fly so far in the dark for about 10 hours including the time over the target without any mid-air crashes. I have noticed in the Boston Globe that around March 9th or 10th in their "Day in History" article, this historic day in 1945 is noted each year. It was the largest man made fire to this day. None of the twelve planes that went down that night were from the 6th Bomb Group.

Now that we had the first so called "Blitz" mission behind us we were to embark on four more low level incendiary missions over a period of 9 days. The first of these next raids was to Nagoya, which was a much smaller area than Tokyo. The buildings were a more modern construction and less flammable than the huge area of flammable shanties that we encountered in Tokyo. The altitude that we came in at was bumped up to about 12,000 feet. Although not one crew was lost the results of the raid were disappointing.

We were in the lights in a short period of time and the reconstruction photos showed we only burned out about three square miles. We felt a little more secure at the higher altitude and our air speed was back to 190 miles per hour. On March 13th the next blitz mission was to Osaka on the inland sea of Japan. The Japanese had us in their lights for a short time on this mission. The bombing results were fair when compared to the first low

level Tokyo raid and as I recall we burned out seven or eight square miles of the target area. Three days later we were in the air again the blitz target this time being Kobe.

Once again they had us in their lights for a few minutes and our gunners reported seeing and shooting at some of the Japanese fighter planes. As we were turning away from the target another one of our gunners reported another night fighter that he spotted and shot at apparently missing. At this particular moment I had a strange feeling the likes of which I never had before or since that moment. It was a very eerie feeling that although I was thousands of miles from my hometown Peabody that I had been in this particular spot at some time in the past. I still to this day can recall that feeling I had. On March 18th we returned to Nagoya again and using a little different timing on the closeness of the groups over the target the results were better than the first time. The Sixth Bomb group didn't lose any planes on this mission.

To repeat Le May's strategy of hitting Japanese targets their four largest cities at nighttime and at extremely low altitudes caught the enemy completely unprepared to retaliate. This ended the fire raid blitz over a period of nine days. Both the aircrews and ground crews were pretty exhausted and we had run out of all the incendiary bombs on the islands of Guam, Tinian and Saipan. We would not fly any more incendiary raids until the middle of May. I must repeat that loaded with bombs and close to 8,000 gallons of gasoline these nighttime missions would really get the adrenalin flowing. As you would arrive at the top of the runway for take-off the airplane commander Maki would run the engine up to the fast idle prior to take-off especially on night missions. I'm sure all the crew members wondered as I did if our luck continues or would that be our last mission.

At that point when he gave the plane, "Big Joe", full power and released the brakes we knew that within a few seconds we would be off the ground and into the air on our way to the mission target. After the fire raids had been completed until more incendiary bombs arrived at the Marianas we were asked by the Navy to assist them by flying mining missions to the major seaports such as Tokyo Bay, Nagoya Bay, Osaka Bay and Kobe Bay and the Shimonoseki Straits. The last listed being as important to the Japanese as the Panama Canal was to the United States. As we were switching to mining missions that would be done by radar sighting the word came down that all radar operators and navigators-radar bombardiers would have to take a brief refresher course to increase our radar accuracy.

Although I didn't think I needed it I had to go along with the orders and put in a few hours on the flight line where the radar review sessions were conducted. I'll never forget one day when cutting across North field I heard a loud engine roar and looked over my shoulder in the direction it was coming from. It was one of the few days when there was a low overcast over Tinian. I saw a P-47 fighter plane break out of the overcast and seemed to be heading for me. Sometimes some idiot pilots would like to buzz people on the ground by coming close to the person and scaring them into hitting the deck as they flew by. It was strictly illegal and any pilot caught doing it could face a court martial. As the plane headed towards me I started running and was about ready to hit the deck when the pilot and plane crashed several feet away from me.

When he hit and exploded I could feel the wave of heat and saw a large ball of fire, that's how close he was. I started to run towards the wreck to see if I could give any help and although I could still feel the heat of the explosion I looked to the clouds above

thinking I might see him floating down in a parachute. It all happened so fast and seeing no parachute I started hearing the ammunition on the plane exploding at the same time the fire engines were approaching. I decided to hasten my departure from the scene. I reported my experience to the Intelligence Officer of the 6th Bomb Group. He took note of what happened and thanked me. A couple of days later he told me that a veteran combat pilot with the rank of Major who had completed the required number of missions to go home was asked to check out a plane that had a problem. Being a major he may have already told his parents or wife that he was all through combat missions and would be coming home when he made the mistake of volunteering to fly one more time. What a shame, what a waste!

Back to the mining missions, On March 27th our first mining mission was to the Shimonoseki Straits located at the northwest end of Japan. Once through the straits you were about three or four hundred miles from Korea. At this point in the war it was about the only major source of oil and food supplies left for the Japanese. The Sixth Bomb Group lost two crews on the mission and another group, the 504th, lost one. That night the anti-aircraft fire and searchlights were heavy and accurate. For some reason or other we were not picked up by either. At least three of the crews that night were shot down and later turned up as prisoners of war at the end of hostilities. One other crew was never heard of again. They probably crashed into the ocean. It was one of the costliest mining missions of all those that we flew.

Several years after the war most of my navigational logs wherein I kept track of our altitude, air speeds, compass headings etc. on each mission were returned to me by John Sabol the bombardier on our crew. At the end of our 35 missions I immediately returned

to the United States as I will explain later he did not. He accepted a promotion in rank and stayed on for several months and in my absence my logs were presented to him. In reviewing the logs I noticed that the one covering that mission had a notation in it that "take-off" was delayed fifteen minutes due to plane inter-communication problem. I sometimes wonder if we had taken off on time might we have been one of the crews shot down and taken prisoner or never heard from again. At the request of the U.S.Navy after completing two or three more mining missions we then started bombing Japanese military airfields on the island of Kyushu.

On the Okinawa invasion on April 2nd, Japanese pilots were raising havoc on the U.S. fleet off of Okinawa. The Webster Dictionary definition for Kamikaze is (during World War II) a member of the special corps in the Japanese air force charged with suicidal missions against U.S. war ships.) When the navy had requested our help in briefing the navy had lost more ships in the Okinawa invasion than they had lost during the entire history of the U.S. Navy. After what they were doing for us using submarines as rescue vehicles during our night fire raids we were only too pleased and honored to give them our assistance. For the next few weeks we were sending out crews night and day to bomb the airfields.

The one crew I knew from the Sixth Bomb Groups that was lost during these raids was that of Captain Preston. It was his crew that one of my best friends Lloyd Rinne, navigator was lost. They had gotten north of Saipan when they ran into engine problems and had trouble getting rid of their bomb load. They crashed off of Saipan and all the crew in the front end of the plane including my friend was killed. All those crews in the back end of the plane were able to survive. They were all able to do this because of the

training all crews went through in order to survive a fiery plane crash in the ocean. I talked to one of the survivors a few days after the crash and he told me how as they were trained they swam under water until they could see that there was no fire on the water caused by burning high-octane gasoline. Some small navy ships based in Saipan were at the scene very shortly after the crash and picked up all of the survivors. We stopped the raids on the airfields at the end of April.

In May we flew a few mining missions one of which stands out in my memory. We were mining a port in the inland sea of Japan when shortly after "Bombs away" which was the release of aerial mines bombs, my compartment filled with the smell of smoke. The smell even drifted into the front of the plane where the airplane commander Maki was seated. I reacted to the smell very quickly feeling all of the equipment in my compartment to see if anything felt hot and then returned to my seat. Maki came charging into my compartment and yelled, "Why aren't you checking where the fire might be?" I replied that I had and all my equipment seemed in good shape. However, the smell persisted for a few more minutes. It turned out that when we got back to Tinian the ground crew a day later traced the problem to a firing solenoid that was located in the gun turret. It had burned out when the gunners had shot some practice rounds on the way to our target. I'll never forget that mission because to have a fire aboard the plane could mean that we might have to bail out and in the darkness of the night over enemy territory gave us a few scary minutes.

The rest of our missions in May were uneventful with one exception. On May 16th we were on a day mission to Nagoya. As we were on the bomb run, I heard chatter over the intercom among the gunners of a Jap Zero fighter plane coming straight at us from

twelve o'clock. Our gunners were firing and everyone was quite tense because some Japanese fighter pilots had rammed B-29's as a way of bringing them down. For some reason or other this Jap pilot did not want to die for the Emperor. I heard the bombardier say "he's getting closer and as I looked out my side window I saw the Zero flash by just a few feet from the end of our wing, close enough for me to make out the side features of his face. To this day I don't know whether he had a last minute change of mind or what. He could have easily rammed us. This was one of the several times I felt that God and my mother were with me.

On the night of May 23rd we were scheduled to fly our 20th mission the most memorable of our 35 missions. It was a return to Tokyo at an altitude of 14,000 feet. General LeMay had decided to bring us in over Tokyo over land from the west instead of from the east as on the March 9th raid. As we hit our initial point up past Mount Fuji and turned on our bomb run to the target area in Tokyo I heard the airplane commander noting that there were anti-aircraft search lights beginning to pick up planes out in front of us. As I had done ever since the first combat mission when we were about 20 minutes from the target area, I alerted the crew to put on their flak equipment consisting of a jacket and a helmet.

As I continue on with my story about this 20th mission (Tokyo) this equipment played a prominent part of my story. To repeat the aircraft commander noted enemy anti-aircraft lights ahead so I decided to take a peek out the window to my left to see what was going on. We were on the bomb run which meant we would not change course again until we heard the bombardier say, "bombs away". As I looked out the window I saw another B-29 bracketed by about five different searchlights. You could see enemy fire being

directed at this B-29. I would estimate the difference to be about three or four hundred yards from us. Suddenly a flash went the length of the fuselage and the explosion caused the plane to break into three parts.

As I watched the tail appendage drop off and go straight down, the fuselage with the right wing attached dropped off toward our plane and the left wing went to the left. There were no parachutes and I am sure that the plane was from the 6th Bomb Group because a Lieutenant Snyder and his crew were never heard of again. This all happened in about twenty seconds. I now turned back to the bomb run that we were on. As I started calling the slant range angles to the bombardier I heard the A/C, Wayne Maki, yell to the radioman to drop chaf which was made up of strips of tin foil. This would give false readings to the enemy anti-aircraft lights and guns. As Hitchcock, the radio man, went to put the chaf down, he bumped his head against the gun turret in our compartment and his flak helmet fell off. However, he continued with his chore and did not put his flak helmet back on.

Several anti-aircraft lights now bracketed our plane. I reached the point of saying to John Sabol, the bombardier, "no more slant ranges". A few seconds later Sabol announced, "bombs away". At this point the A.C. asked the radioman to check to make sure the bombs had been released. As this was happening Hitchcock had still not put his flak helmet back on. As he was looking into the bomb bay to make sure there were no more bombs hung up, I turned for a quick glance at "Hitch" and heard what sounded like a shot gun blast, smelled gun powder and looked around quickly to see Hitchcock start to stand up holding his left forehead. A night fighter plane had come up one of the

searchlight beams and hit us in the bombay and also knocked out our number two engine. Thank God we had dropped all our bombs just seconds before we were hit.

The hit in the bombay was by a 22MM explosive shell and it also destroyed our hydraulic system used to lower the wheels and our braking ability to stop when landing. After "Hitch" had tried to stand up I told him to lie down within an arms length of me so that I would be able to put on his chest chute to assist him in bailing out if it became necessary. "Hitch" now was unconscious. Some gas lines in the bombay area had been ruptured by the exploding 20MM shell causing the fumes to become so heavy in the plane that Captain Maki came by on his way to get into the rear bombay door to check on which gas lines had been ruptured. As he went by me he told me I had better go on oxygen as the fumes were so strong in my compartment and he had ordered our bombardier who had taken some first-aid courses to get back in my compartment and do what he could for Hitchcock. The searchlights were now off of us and we were out over Tokyo Bay when I gave the co-pilot the compass heading for Iwo Jima. No way could we make it back to Tinian after losing all the gas that we did.

All of a sudden I heard this yell over the intercom, "close the bombay doors, close the bombay doors" and even I yelled out to close the bombay doors. The bombardier had not yet had the opportunity to come back to assist in treating Hitchcock so he closed the bombay doors. It seems that when Maki went into the rear bombay he had not taken his parachute with him as it usually remained in his seat unless he was going to bail out. He went into the bombay area to check out what gas lines had been damaged by the explosive shell and as he entered the fumes were so strong that he lost his balance and fell onto the

bombay doors. The doors sprung open and as Maki by reflex grabbed for the side of the bombay area he held on until the doors closed.

While this episode was going on that is Maki hanging on for his life without a parachute out over Tokyo Bay, God was surely with us that night especially for Wayne Maki. As the bombay doors closed letting fresh air in Maki was able to pull himself out of the bombay area to safety in the rear of the plane. He then returned to his position as airplane commander. In the meantime, the bombardier had given the unconscious Hitchcock a unit of plasma to help offset shock. I then gave the airplane commander the compass heading to get us to Iwo Jima. Because there was cloud coverage that night, I was unable to shoot any stars to verify our location. I gave this airplane commander a course correction of about three degrees to the right because I was going to do what was called a land-fall on Iwo Jima. What I needed was to have the sun come up high enough above the horizon to get a shot looking at the sun using the sextant and getting the angle of the sun above the horizon.

When doing a land-fall you had to be sure of which side of Iwo Jima left or right you were on. It was critical that you knew whether you were left or right because if you thought you were on the right side but you were actually on the left and you turned left you would fly about 4,000 miles over water. By that time you would have been long gone over the Pacific. I told the airplane commander to give me a course correction of two more degrees to the right. I had a strong feeling that God was guiding my decision. I could do nothing more right now because the sun was beginning to peak over the horizon it was not high enough for me to get an accurate celestial shot of the sun. We cruised along for about another twenty minutes (would I have loved to have a cigarette but the no

smoking ban was still in effect) then over the intercom the tail gunner announced, "Tail gunner to airplane commander there are two B-29's at three o'clock, over." I jumped up into the astrodome and there they were.

The airplane commander came back to my position and asked if I thought we needed assistance. I told him that I could not use my radar because of the gas fumes and I'd feel a lot better if one of the two B-29's could stay with us until we could see Iwo Jima visually. One of the B-29's swung over in front of us and we followed it for a brief time when we saw Iwo Jima dead ahead. The B-29 ahead of us was now headed for Tinian. I had not been able to use the radar set and the clouds above prevented me from getting any celestial fixes. I had been navigating and making a couple of corrections by hunches or maybe God's help to keep me pretty much on the correct course otherwise we would not have been so close to those two B-29's. Now as we headed for a landing on Iwo with wounded on board with our hydraulic system not working the airplane commander issued the following order:

First gunners in the rear get ready to open your parachutes nearest to your exit as soon as we hit the runway, CFC Sergeant Hester start cranking down the wheels and everyone be prepared for a rough landing. There was a low overcast over Iwo and when we broke out of the clouds we were about half way down the runway and had to go around for another try. This was not Maki's fault. He was being instructed by the people in the tower and they did a lousy job of trying to bring us in. Maki checked with the flight engineer on the amount of gas we had left and he determined that we had enough gas for one more try. Remember we had lost our number two engine over the target plus many many gallons of gasoline. We now had circled around and were making a second attempt

at landing. This time the tower did a better job at brining us in but we were still quite a distance down the runway before we touched it. The wheels hit and the gunners let the chutes go. Now that we were on the ground I hopped out of my seat and went up to the flight deck and stood behind Maki. We were still rolling along pretty good which means actually fast. One other thing we had fired a red flare as we landed indicating that we had wounded on board so an ambulance would be on its way to us as soon as we stopped.

I remember as we could see the end of the runway coming up and the Pacific Ocean ahead of us there were a lot of marines on the ground at the end of the runway. Maki threw open his window and started waving his hand trying to signal them to get out of the way. We now went off the end of the runway headed toward the ocean when Maki ground looped the plane and we ended up almost facing the end of the runway that we just came off. The ambulance was there in seconds to pick up Hitchcock. I proceeded to climb out of the plane to get a cigarette when somebody yelled, "Here comes another one". Another B-29 which had a braking problem also came off the end of the runway and ground looped in the opposite direction from our plane their wing tip missing our wing tip by only a couple of feet.

As Hitchcock was being removed from the plane I put my nice warm jacket over him to keep him warm. He was still unconscious and his wound had bled on my jacket. I never saw that jacket again. Hitchcock was lifted out of the plane into an ambulance and it sped off to the hospital. I tried once again to have my cigarette. As I lit it, a marine Corporal said, "It looks like you had a rough night". I said, "They were certainly waiting for us. Thank God the marines took Iwo. We had just enough gas left to land here."

There were still quite a few people gathered around the plane inspecting the damage to the bomb bay door and the number two engine. A jeep drove up and a lieutenant announced to our Captain Maki stating that he and his crew would be taking off in another fifteen minutes in another B-29. Among the onlookers was a Major who was also a chaplain. I saw him and was close enough for him to hear me say, "for the love of Jesus Christ are they going to make us take off before we even know whether Hitchcock is going to live or die? This is stupid." The Major disappeared and within about five minutes the Lieutenant and jeep reappeared and announced, "Captain Maki you and your crew will be taking off in an hour and fifteen minutes." I'm sure the chaplain heard my words of disgust and made quick arrangements for the change in our take-off time. In about a half hour another jeep appeared and we were informed by the driver that Sergeant Hitchcock would live but he had a compound fracture of his skull and that his fighting days were over. He would be shipped home to the dear old U.S.A.

As luck would have it Captain Maki and a limited crew of myself, Sabol and Segal but no gunners, would have the opportunity to fly down to Guam and visit Hitchcock for a short while. He couldn't talk very well but he recognized us. After expressing our feelings for him we left thinking well at least Hitchcock lived through the war and the rest of us on the crew would have to sweat out surviving 15 more combat missions. The trip back to Tinian from Iwo was in a plane some other crew had to leave at Iwo because of engine problems caused by enemy fire. Once a crew left their plane there they would fly a few missions on the plane they adopted at Iwo. In other words, we would fly the plane that we brought back from Iwo until our plane had been repaired and flown back to Tinian.

We flew three missions on the borrowed plane before "Big Joe" was returned to us. By this time we were very superstitious and very happy to be back in the plane that had brought us through 20 missions safely. Because we would need a replacement for Hitchcock and after what we had been through on that mission, we were given a weeks rest on the island of Tinian. We were also given a jeep to explore Tinian and a case of beer for our enjoyment in other words a small vacation. I should add now that on most missions we had beautiful sunsets and sunrises as we flew to and from the targets. When we were not on missions we could occupy our time by swimming in the warm Pacific Ocean, playing softball and tag football. In the evenings when not flying we would have movies the latest released by Hollywood. We would have visits from Hollywood stars in person before some of the movie would begin. Jackie Coogan and Ester Williams come to mind. We also had the Officers Club where we would have beers etc. until closing time. While on the small vacation I received orders promoting me to the rank of First Lieutenant, which pleased me very much. All and all it would be two weeks and a day before we would fly another combat mission on June 7th and that would be to Osaka.

One last thought the 6th Bomb Group lost three crews that night over Tokyo. Two were from our squadron and I'm sure that Lieutenant Snyder's crew was on the plane that I saw blown apart over Tokyo. We flew only five missions in the month of June ending with a fire raid on a town called Moji on June 29th. Looking back on our flight records the 6th bomb Group flew only six missions during the entire month compared to seven in May and eight in July. There was some talk or rumors going around that they were taking it easy on us in June. In addition to losing about sixteen planes on the night we were hit

most of the same crews that returned on that night would have to go back again on May 25th to the same general area of Tokyo where we were hit.

Once again the Japs were waiting for us so between the two nights May 23rd and May 25th we lost about 25 B-29's. Before I move on, and I am sure no matter how much I try there will be things I will not be able to recall, however there is one moment I will never forget. On the day of the mission that we were to be hit, I was introduced to a replacement pilot who was assigned to our Quonset Hut the day of the mission as a replacement for another pilot. He was Second Lieutenant Joseph Novak, Jr. He was from the Chicago area and told his airplane commander he had a feeling that he would not survive his first mission. That was the last time I saw him because his feeling was correct. An enemy 20mm shell hit him in the face and he was killed on the spot. I didn't know of his premonition when we met. His airplane commander Sam Parks told me about it at our most recent reunion in Nashville, Tennessee in 2002.

We were to fly seven missions in the month of July. From memory I believe we got our plane "Big Joe" back about the last mission in June. Of the seven missions we flew in July, three were mining missions and four were night incendiary bombing missions of smaller towns in Japan. We had destroyed all the worthwhile targets in the large cities of Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka, Yokohama and Kawasaki. The total area of these 6 cities destroyed was: 105.6 square miles, Tokyo was 56.3, Nagoya 12.4, Kobe 8.8, Osaka 15.6, Yokohama 8.9, and Kawasaki 3.6. The two July raids that stand out in my memory were on July 9th and 11th. Both of these were mining missions to keep the Japanese from bringing materials from Korea through the Shimonoseki Straits to the inland Japanese seaports.



On the night of July 9th these straits were our targets. The straits were as vital to the Japanese as the Panama Canal is to the United States. My duty was to navigate us across the lower southwest part of Japan to a point in the ocean 35 miles from the Straits to begin the bomb run to drop the mines in the Straits. The crew wondered how I was able to find the spot over the ocean to start our run on the target. It was simple enough to do having radar set with a range of fifty miles. I knew this and my radar operator knew it the rest of the crew marveled at my ability to find a spot in the ocean 35 miles from land and in darkness. We started the bomb mine run toward the straits which were in complete darkness. As we got close enough to the target to have the bomb bay doors open and just seconds away from "bombs away" from the bombardier about six lights came on and had us perfectly fixed in them.

The ground anti-aircraft fire was extremely heavy but according to our top gunners was crossing about 100 yards above us. The bombardier announced, "Bombs away" and we headed safely into the inland sea of Japan. We had only been another minute or two when the tail gunner announced a B-29 going down in flames. It seems the Japanese had tracked the first plane through to get altitude of our planes. We had been the second plane through that's why when the lights came on we were surprised they were right on us. Usually on night missions you would see the lights searching for planes but on this particular night we were the second plane in the target area. We verified this after the mission by checking the times for the crews bomb drops. There was one crew ahead of us in the dark that night. The fourth crew over the target saw the plane getting hit in front of them and altered their altitude to avoid enemy fire. The plane that went down was piloted

by a Captain Schmid of the 6th Bomb Group. You talk about fate, Lt. Col. Dixon who had completed his missions in the South Pacific much earlier was on board as an observer.

Although he was now an Operations Officer meaning he was not an active pilot he needed to get four more hours flight pay for that month. He picked this mission to earn his flight pay. Knowing the area and approximate location of the inland sea where their plane went down, I'm sure they are resting at the bottom of the ocean. None of the crew including the observer Lt. Col. Dixon ever turned up as prisoners of war and are listed in our Pirate's Log, a historical record of the 6th Bombardment Group, as missing in action. Once again you talk about fate, if we had been the third plane in the target area instead of the second I would not be here to write this history.

One thing I probably should have mentioned earlier on is that on night missions each crew was on its own. Sometimes as in the March 9th Tokyo raid there were 300 hundred planes over the target in the dark unless spotted by the Japanese lights. On the May 23rd and May 25th raids there were over 500 hundred planes in the target area. Looking back on it also to my knowledge there was only one reported sighting of two B-29's colliding in the target area. You might say that this was another miracle. Unless the enemy anti-aircraft lights picked them up there was only one known collision out of all those planes in the darkness. It seemed that we had no longer returned from the July 9th mission when we were told we were going out again on another mining mission on July 11th. This mission was later called the longest mission of World War II.

We were to be in the air for about 10 hours before we would drop our mines in the harbor and head back to Iwo Jima to make a planned landing, as we did not have enough fuel to fly much longer than another half hour by that time. The mines were to be

dropped in a harbor of a town in North Korea named Rashin, which was, located about 30 miles south of Vladivostok, Russia. At the crew briefing for the mission we were told the following: "Whereas we do not have any history of this area to go on in case you get into any problem with your aircraft engines making an emergency landing necessary, you can go on to the Vladivostok airport. If this becomes necessary the aircraft commander should make contact with the airport tower and ask for an English interpreter to obtain landing instructions. While this is going on the navigators are to destroy all their maps and any other pertinent data and destroy the on board radar set. The bombardier is to destroy his Norden bombsight. These instruments had an inbuilt mechanism to destruct themselves.

We all looked at each other in amazement. Russia was supposed to be our ally and friend. Also while this was being done upon landing you are to request to see the U.S. military attaché. The only information you are to give until you meet him is your name, rank and serial number. As you will soon find out fortunately we did not have to land on Russian soil. Now I'll go back to describing the mission itself.

As I recall, we took off around 2:00 in the afternoon of July 11th. We reached Iwo Jima at about 5:30. At that point I gave the airplane commander a course correction heading us towards the southwesterly end of Japan. At that point our commanding officer, Colonel Kenneth Gibson, who was flying with us as an observer asked me if he could make a chicken sandwich I thanked him, but told him I only smoked on missions. I also forgot to mention I always took two Bennies to keep me awake. Incidentally we were the first crew to take off on the mission because we had such a V.I.P. on board. As we got to the southwest portion of Japan we were now in darkness as we began to fly over

Japanese land. I made a course correction at that point heading us for our ultimate target in northern Korea. Everyone was now on alert for any possible enemy action. We were all very pleased as I announced to the crew that we had just left Japan and were now out over the Pacific Ocean and heading toward our target which would take another three hours flying time to reach.

After about two and half hours I had the operator turn on the radar set. I knew this was a little on the early side but I was concerned that I would pick up the target early enough so I could alert the crew to put on their flak equipment. The altitude we were at that night was about 10,000 feet as I recall. At the briefing our intelligence officer could not give us any information on what we could expect in the target area in Korea so close to Russia. I made one major mistake in getting our equipment on too early. We were still about 20 minutes from the target and I began to perspire and the salty perspiration came down my forehead and into my eyes. I began having trouble seeing just as the target appeared on the radar set at a distance of about 45 miles. I didn't realize the radioman who was in the same section of the plane with me had moved in back of me to take a glimpse of the radar screen.

Suddenly a hand with a handkerchief began wiping my brow and very shortly I had no further difficulty seeing the radar set and the rapidly approaching target. I began calling the dropping angles to the bombardier and just as he announced "bombs away", I could see Vladivostok, Russia, on the radar screen at a distance of about 30 miles. I then gave the airplane commander the heading for Japan. After about another three hours we approached the northern part of Japan at about the same general area we had flown over on our way to the target.

However, by this time daybreak was occurring and I alerted the crew to get on their flak equipment as they had removed it after leaving the target area. It was a scary feeling to look down on the Japanese country and realize we were the only plane in sight at about five o' clock in the morning their time. Although everyone was on alert for Jap Zeros or anti-aircraft fire we continued for approximately two hours and then we departed Japan. I gave the course correction to the airplane commander for our trip to Iwo Jima. It was planned at the mission briefing that we would have to land at Iwo Jima to be refueled to get to Tinian.

After about an hour's time we took off again and headed for our home base, Tinian. It had taken us over 12 hours to reach the target the Rashin Harbor to drop the mines. A dispatch was made to the Salem Evening News about Lt. Newell Penniman being the navigator on a B-29 that had completed the longest mission of the war twelve hours before bombs were dropped. It stated that it called for "Midas like navigation" to insure having enough fuel to get back to Iwo Jima. The mission plan was to land at Iwo Jima to refuel in order to complete the mission to Tinian. After a short stay of a few minutes we were refueled and on our way to Tinian, mission completed after 20 hours and five minutes in the air. After the longest mission we were scheduled for a mission on July 18th to a target on the mainland of Japan at night with heavy demolition bombs.

A Captain Jordan's crew was scheduled for a mission to Korea to mine a harbor on the southern end of Korea. Captain Jordan for some reason I can't recall asked if he could swap the target in Korea for our scheduled target on the mainland of Japan. Captain Maki agreed so we were off to Korea for another mining mission. All the night missions would take on average 15 hours and we would be taking off before the sun had set and arriving

back at Tinian usually four or five hours after sunrise. On the night of the mission being discussed now as we were being debriefed we were told that Captain Jordon's plane had been badly damaged by enemy fire and they had to bail out. They were able to gather together on the ground and take cover in a cave where the Japanese surrounded them. They were ordered to come out but the bombardier and pilot chose to come out with their 45 pistols firing away and they were immediately killed. The rest of the crew spent the remainder of the war as prisoners of war which amounted to about four weeks when they were released to our military personnel.

Most prisoners of war were very badly treated by the Japanese. Fortunately we did not experience being taken prisoner but from those that we have talked to since the end of the war have some very disturbing stories of starvation, torture and even execution during their prison time. You sometimes wonder if that could have been our crew if the swap by airplane commander had not been made. Someone was still watching out for us. We had just a few more missions to go and they were mostly nighttime incendiary bombing missions with not too much opposition, as they were against targets not as heavily defended as Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe.

Our 35th mission was started on August 5th at about six o'clock at night. Although it was an incendiary raid on a town named Maebashi we were carrying anti-personnel fragmentation bombs that night. I should have mentioned earlier in my memoirs on all fire raids at night certain designated planes would carry anti-personnel fragmentation bombs. Once the earlier planes would get the fires started on a mission the planes carrying the anti-personnel bombs would make their drops to discourage the people on the ground from coming out of their shelters to fight the fires the incendiary bombs were

starting. Coming back to our last mission, as the bombardier said "bombs away" I heard a terrific rattle against the belly of our plane which sounded almost like a machine gun from a fighter plane hitting the under side of our plane. All I could think was, "oh my god we're going to be shot down on our last mission?" A few seconds passed and no one was reporting any damage to our plane and we finally figured out it was the concussion from the fragmentation bombs that we had dropped from an altitude of 12,000 feet. I gave the airplane commander the compass heading to bring us back to Tinian. There was no cheering or showing of jubilation when we landed at the end of the mission. Our war was over for the foreseeable future.

After debriefing we went to the mess hall for a late breakfast. In keeping with military protocol the officers ate on one side of the mess hall and the enlisted men on the other side. A sergeant came running in and announced "that they had just dropped a super bomb over the Empire. The war would be over in a couple of weeks." We had been sweating it out for eight months and in a matter of a few minutes the atomic bomb had changed everything. I was told later in the day that I would be allowed to send one telegram to my father announcing that I would be coming home in a few days after having completed my 35th mission.

Because the telegram was not sent immediately it did not reach my father until Tuesday, August 14th. The President of my father's company told him that there was a telephone call from the Western Union office. When my father got to the phone he asked, "Is this the telegram from the government?" The answer came back, "It's from your son." He replied, "Please read it." He then asked her to send a copy to his home address. A short time after those bells began to ring, horns were blown and the word quickly spread

the Japanese have surrendered. He was able to relax and enjoy an impromptu parade that was made up in Peabody Square my old hometown. I didn't know about that going on in Peabody until I arrived home on August 24th.

Also getting back to Tinian two days after finishing our 35th mission I was told by our squadron commander that I could be promoted to Captain and become the group navigator if I didn't mind committing to six months over seas duty. Because of my relationship with my father and all the worrying he had done concerning my well-being over seas I just could not accept the offer. A few days after sending the telegram, I spoke with Captain Maki, our airplane commander. As I might have said before he became almost a human God to the crew. If he had made an error somewhere among our many missions when we were taking off with a full load of high octane gasoline and usually about ten tons of bombs I would probably not be here to write this. Captain Maki came to me and asked me if I might be interested in navigating a "war weary" B-29 from Tinian to the good old U.S.A.

My first thought was to stay with the crew but Maki told me he was trying to work some angle to get to Japan after the war ended and one way or another the crew would probably be going in different directions and not remain as a crew. Hearing this I grabbed at the chance to navigate a war weary B-29 to the good old U.S.A. The B-29 was scheduled to leave on August 13th for the U.S.A via Guam, Kwajalein, and the Hawaiian Islands, Honolulu. I said goodbye to all my crew including Maki and left with a made up crew on August 13th. We spent the night at Guam getting paperwork straightened out orders covering the trip and on August 14th we took off for Kwajalein. About five hours along on the trip the airplane commander Captain Schwager told me to turn my radio on

to the commercial band. That station covered the military service radio station. As I turned to that frequency I heard our national anthem and then the national anthems of all the allied countries and the announcement that the Japanese had agreed to unconditional surrender. The war was over!!

Although my war had ended on August 6th after the 35th mission it was just a great feeling that the four years of the U.S. involvement in war and the loss of fine American boys in the prime of their lives was at an end. It was all over. All I could think of was thank God everyone would be coming home. Then I thought of my friend Captain Dorgan who had perished in a plane crash in Hawaii September 1944, Phil would not be coming home. Now we could concentrate on getting home and back to civilian life. When we reached Kwajalein Atoll a few hours later they had had their celebration and all was very quiet. Without any fanfare we landed and were put up for the one night before leaving on the 10 hour trip to the Hawaiian Islands on Wednesday morning. We arrived at Honolulu about 2:20 in the afternoon and one Red Cross girl offered us coffee and doughnuts. By now the war had been over for a day and a half. We spent Thursday getting more paperwork for our transfer to the U.S.A. and on Friday evening we took off for the good old U.S.A.

You really could not appreciate the feeling I had heading for our great country, my home and my father. We did have trouble with the number two engine about an hour out of Hawaii and the airplane commander told us to get ready to put on our chutes in case we needed to bail out. After about 15 minutes the trouble seemed to diminish and the commander decided to keep going towards our destination. About seven hours later the airplane commander told me to turn to the commercial radio band. As soon as I switched

to the station, I heard some Glen Miller music and the announcement saying, "You are listening to radio San Francisco." I checked our radio compass and it was pointing to the exact direction we were heading so all we had to do was to maintain our present course. I decided to take a little nap in the tunnel. I told the bombardier to make sure we didn't vary from the course we were on and to wake me as soon as he saw land. I made this request so that I could see the Golden Gate Bridge on the way back in daylight.

The next thing I knew I woke up and couldn't see anyone sitting in my chair. I hopped down and saw the bombardier standing behind the pilots watching as they prepared for landing. We were about 40 miles inland. I never saw the Golden Gate. The time was about 7:00A.M. on Saturday morning when we landed and just as we hit the runway the number two engine again kicked up but we were now on the ground and safe. From the time we had an engine fire in Grand Island, Nebraska and the battle damage over Tokyo and the time we almost had a runway prop on another mission it was always the number two engine which was right outside my window that was the problem. It was great to get off the plane and stand on good old U.S.A. soil. Hawaii was not a state at that time.

I was home after eight months, 35 missions and memories enough to last me a lifetime. After deciding we would not fly the B-29 on to Mississippi I was given orders to proceed by train to Boston. I was told by several close friends and relatives my father was very pessimistic about my survival of the bombing missions that is, he thought I probably would not survive them. I called my father at 9:00A.M. Pacific time on a priority basis, which was given to soldiers returning from combat. The phone rang, but I couldn't hear anything until the operator said, "I have your party." It was August 18th and twelve noon,

Peabody time. I said, "Hello, Dad" and my father said, "Son" and I said "Dad I've just landed in California". There was silence and I said "Dad" again there was silence for what seemed like several seconds before I heard "Son" again and then we had a short talk. I suspect he had become emotional upon hearing my voice. I told him I had enough flying for a lifetime and that I would be coming home by train leaving California on Monday and arriving in Boston on Friday, August 24th at about 3:30 P.M. He said he would meet me at the North Station at that time.

After a relaxing trip to Boston with no tension of takeoffs or landings in a B-29, I arrived in Boston on schedule. As soon as I got off the train I saw my father walking towards me. Men didn't hug and say I love you in those days, but I knew it was understood. He said, "Can I carry your bag son?" and I said, "I've got it, thanks anyway". We then proceeded into the station where my cousin Barbara was waiting. She had driven Dad to Boston for the homecoming. That's about it. I started my service with Dad saying good luck son on January 30, 1943 and now on August 24, 1945 I was home in one piece and lucky to be alive. I returned to Bentley College in January 1946 and graduated in June 1946.

While in the service I received the following medals and awards:

- The Distinguished Flying Cross
- Four Air Medals
- The Asiatic Pacific Theater Ribbon
- Four Battle Stars
- Two Unit Citations

In addition, I was credited with 522:50 combat hours covering 35 missions, including gunnery school, radar school, training missions time, total hours flown while in service approximately 800 hours. After being home a few days I was invited to be a guest of honor at the Lions Club monthly meeting. A short time after that I was invited to be a guest of honor at the Knights of Columbus monthly meeting. The Knights of Columbus was a catholic oriented club and they knew I was Protestant so I considered it a real honor to have received this invitation from the Knights of Columbus. To my knowledge not many Peabody veterans received such an honor. The local papers had run stories about me from the time I joined the Air Corps until I arrived back in Peabody. The war was over and I had returned to my father who had sweated me out for just about three years. His prayers had been answered. I had survived the war.

I have done the best I can to write about my war years and experiences. However, you can't through jotting down your remembrances truly put the reader in your shoes. The tension of the take-offs with about 138,000 pounds gross weight including over 7,000 gallons of high octane gas and ten tons of bombs can never be passed on to a reader of these memoirs. It can't be done. You yourself would have had to have been there as we bounced down the runway hoping and praying. The only voices to be heard were those of the airplane commander and the pilot as they checked off increasing airspeed, etc. The rest of the crew were praying in silence. "Dear God please help us to survive another take off, another mission, and return us safely to Tinian, Amen."

"It's unfortunate you have to have wars, but it seems human nature that wars will always be with us."