



Vignettes #3

Editor's Note: In February and May of 1994, we published MEMORIES numbers 50 and 51 in which brief sketches made up the contents of the issues. This issue follows those in format.

Operation Blue Streak--The 40th's Last Mission

Date of event: July, 1946

Date written: 1990

Written by: Neil Wemple and E.W. "Scoop" Martin (deceased)

Editor's Note: Operation Blue Streak was an adjunct to Operation Crossroads. The latter was the atomic bomb drop at Bikini, 1 July 1946. The Blue Streak assignment of the 40th was to fly B-29s on north-south routes along the west coast to pick up evidence of radiation fallout from the Bikini test. In addition to Blue Streak, the 40th made other contributions to Operations Crossroads. *Dave's Dream*, the plane that dropped the third atomic bomb (#1 Hiroshima, #2 Nagasaki), was piloted by Woodrow "Woody" Swancutt who had served with the 40th. William H. Blanchard, former CO of the 40th, commanded the 509th, the Group charged with the bomb drop. John C. Eigenmann was A/C on a plane that flew a blast gauge mission during the bomb drop.

Scoop Martin wrote of the event: In 1946 what was left of the 40th was stationed at Davis-Monthan in Tucson. About 200 of us remained, and we were under the command of Lt. Col. Joseph D. White. The 40th was ordered to take part in the atomic bomb test at Eniwetok. Three aircraft were sent to Kwajalein. The rest stayed at Davis-Monthan. Our job was to monitor the radiation fallout on the west coast from California to Alaska. The operation was classified Secret. My job was to take the regular carburetor air filters out and install filters that would detect radioactivity. After the planes returned from patrol, we would remove the filters and turn them over to atomic bomb officials. After three months the Blue Streak operation was completed. Only the test officials could tell if any radioactivity was detected. They never let us know if they detected any. After this mission we were transferred to Ft. Worth where the 40th was deactivated.

Neil Wemple tells how he remembers it: Sometime in July, 1946, I received word that my former squadron commander, Lt. Col. James Ira Cornett, would be coming through Tucson. While at the base he expressed a desire to fly a B-29 again. Although 3,965 B-29s had been turned out, they were now in short supply. Many were in "moth balls" and stored at aviation depots such as the one at Davis-Monthan which had more than 9,000 military planes of all types in storage. They were under the Air Material Command.

We satisfied Col. Cornett's desire to fly by going on a "radiation filter" mission. Scientists wanted to measure the strength of radiation particles in the atmosphere along all of the western states after the Bikini bomb was dropped. A filter was placed in the air scoop of the #4 engine for that purpose. Each day a B-29 flew at a certain altitude on a five-hour, north-south flight and sampled the radiation strength. Upon landing, a very secretive man would immediately extract the filter from the #4 engine and disappear. This was the type mission Col. Cornett and I flew. We flew with three pilots. I logged time as an Instructor Pilot, and Cornett did most of the flying from the left seat. The co-pilot sat in the right seat most of the flight. During the flight I reminded myself that it was Cornett who first checked

me out in a B-29 at Pratt in the autumn of 1943. We were among a very small number of pilots qualified to fly the B-29 in those early days.

The Bet

Date of event: Sometime shortly after April, 1945
Date written: 1965
Written by: Gen. Curtis E. LeMay in his book *Mission with LeMay*
(suggested for MEMORIES by J. Ivan Potts)

After elements of the former 20th Bomber Command came to Tinian, their first mission against a daylight target was a steel plant in the southern part of Japan. Butch Blanchard's outfit was going on the trip. Well, they hadn't been flying daylight against Japan, and they were at a new home base, and so on. I felt justified in betting five bucks against Butch that his Group wouldn't do a very good job on the Japanese target.

They went up there, and they put down a perfect pattern on that steel mill. Afterward, when he showed me the photographs, I reached in my pocket and got out five bucks.

"Sign here," said Butch. He took the bill and had it framed. Afterward someone stole the bill while Butch was working in the Pentagon. Too bad! It was still the most profitable five bucks I ever invested.

The First Bombing of Singapore

Date of event: 5 November 1944
Date written: 24 September 1945
Written by: Lt. Col. William C. Kingsbury (Article from the Redlands, CA; Daily Facts provided by J. Ivan Potts)

In the battle of the Philippine Sea, the Jap battleships were damaged. Naval Intelligence knew they were headed for Singapore. Gen. Marshall ordered the dry docks at Singapore to be bombed. We did not believe we could do it and come back alive.

We sharpened our pencils and figured hard on that one. The distance was 4,200 miles--the longest mission ever flown. If we got into trouble over the target, it was 2,000 miles back to friendly territory. The best we could hope for was to get back with 350 gallons of gasoline in reserve. None of us thought we were going to get back.

Taking off from Chakulia, we could only carry two 1,000-pound demolition bombs per plane. We made it to Singapore all right. We went in at 22,000 ft. for the best job the 58th Wing had ever done. Bombs from the 25th hit square on the dry dock gates.

There was a light cruiser in the dock. Water rushed in. The cruiser rolled over on its side. Following formations destroyed it.

After leaving the target, I asked the flight engineer for our gasoline reserve. He said we did not have enough fuel to make it home. As it turned out, we picked up a very fine tail wind and got back with 500 gallons in reserve. I think we lost 4 planes out of 75.

Tinian After the End

Date of event: Late summer of 1945

Date written: 8 September 1997

Written by: Robert Stanworth

An interesting thing happened about a month or so after the war ended. The older crews had gone back home as had most of the members of the crew I was on, and things were pretty quiet on Tinian. Then, a hospital ship with about 625 nurses docked. These nurses had been at sea for several weeks. They had left California before the war ended and took a very circuitous route through the South Pacific to avoid Japanese ships or submarines. I don't know why the ship was not ordered back home, but we were very happy that it wasn't. The Seabees had built a 5,000-bed hospital on the southern end of Tinian to take care of casualties expected from the invasion of Kyushu. The nurses came ashore and were housed at the hospital. At first the ladies were isolated, but after a week or so we were able to visit them, and soon after that we were allowed to ask them for dates. It was amazing how fast things changed. Almost every outfit had built a club with a dance floor, bandstand and bar. Dance bands were organized, and they were very good. A liquor locker had been established so the bars were well stocked. Three members of our crew who hadn't gone home were very lucky to have a Japanese-made car. It gave us an advantage when it came to getting dates. A few times we would get canned turkey, cheese and bread from the mess hall and take the girls to the bluff on the east side of the island for a picnic. Below the bluff area there were caves, and usually we would go down there to explore them. The nurses were with us for about two months or so, and then they were sent to Japan.

I believe it was sometime around December when we were sent by Liberty to Luzon. After we had been there at Clark Field a few weeks, I read an article in the Pacific newspaper. It told of a Japanese general who, with several hundred soldiers, had come out of the caves on the east side of Tinian and surrendered to a small Naval contingent that was stationed near the short runway that was part of West Field. Thank goodness the Good Lord looks after the ignorant.

Visits to Japan—This Time the Easy Way

Date of event: 1955-56 and 1958-59

Date written: 1962-68

Written by: Jack Halpern

I was employed by Curtiss-Wright Corp. as a Tech. Rep. assigned to two naval aircraft carriers. My first cruise was aboard the *Bon Homme Richard* in 1955-56. That cruise lasted 6½ months. My second cruise was aboard the *Shangri-La* in 1958-59. That one lasted 8½ months. Our first trip out took us to the Jap port of Yokosuka. Between Hawaii and the Jap port, we all had to attend a lecture on the subject of "Japanese Culture." We were told how best to get along with the Japanese we would meet. Certain subjects were a no-no. We were never to mention anything about the B-29. Emphasis was given to the wartime operations of the B-29 as a subject not to be mentioned. This was repeated several times. I think the briefing officer knew I had been a tail gunner on a B-29, and the reason for stressing this subject was for my benefit.

When we arrived in port, the Japanese were fully cooperative. At the time U.S. forces were still occupying Japan. All of the G.I.s told me the Japanese were extremely friendly. Again I was told they still expressed bitter feelings towards people who flew B-29s. Resentfulness was intensified whenever the subject of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was mentioned.

As a civilian with the assimilated rank of Lt. Cmdr., I was free to go wherever I wanted, making sure I was back on board the day before we were to ship out. When we were anchored in a bay in southern Japan, I bought a train ticket for a train trip (nine hours) to Hiroshima. The Japanese are a super clean people who strictly observe the rules of hygiene. But this train trip was an eye opener. And modesty in the matter of breast feeding in public is something that is most definitely not observed, at least not on this train. On arrival in Hiroshima I hailed a cab to the nearest hotel. The next day I toured the city in a cab and then went to the Peace Park to see their museum. Supposedly, the museum is located directly at Ground Zero. (The Hiroshima bomb detonated 1,800 feet above the ground.)

Inside the museum they had numerous exhibits of clothing, utensils, human body parts. In one display case, they showed some stone steps that were at the entrance to a building. Many people were sitting on these steps at the time the bomb went off. All that remained were shadows outlining the shapes of the people sitting there. The people and the building were vaporized. It is a museum that portrays the Japanese as victims. I was the only American in the building, and people looked at me with a foreboding bitterness. Under my breath I said to myself, "Don't look at me like that. If you hadn't done what you did at Pearl Harbor, you would never have this museum." I left the museum and never felt any sense of guilt.

The next morning I boarded a train for Nagasaki. I arrived there about 5:00 p.m. hungry and tired. After checking into a small Japanese hotel, I set out walking down a narrow street looking for a restaurant. By now, eating packaged cookies and cake and drinking bottle beer (my diet up to now) finally got to me. The first restaurant I came to had an entrance through strings of beads hung vertically. I pushed the beads aside and went in. There was no one eating at any of the tables; however, several men were sitting on benches around the edge of the dining area. My eyes immediately focused on a huge wall poster depicting a mushroom-like cloud hanging over a city that was on fire. I silently wondered, "What in the hell am I getting into now?"

A young girl about 18-20 came to my table and handed me a menu. The menu was all Japanese, of course. The only thing I was able to read on the menu were the prices of the meals, they were priced in yen, the yen sign being Y with horizontal lines through the Y's stem. I reckoned the highest price would fetch the best meal. (In 1955, the rate of exchange was 360¥ to a dollar.) I picked the most expensive meal—300¥. The young lady brought my order and after a quick glance at it—sushi (smelly raw fish) inside white cooked rice—I hesitated for a moment. But I was so damn hungry, I ate every bit of it along with the greasy veggies.

When I finished, the same young lady and a young man came to my table, and both said they would like to talk with me. They spoke broken but understandable English. I knew not one word of Japanese. After engaging in a strange form of exchange—broken English to Japanese and Japanese to English—I pointed to the big wall poster of the mushroom cloud and said I would like to see where the atomic bomb exploded above ground zero. The two said they would take me to the Peace Park the following day if I would come back. I told them I would return at 9 o'clock the next day. I walked back to my hotel three or four blocks away.

The next morning I returned to the restaurant and the young lady, who was dressed in conventional western clothes when she waited on me the night before, was now dressed in a gorgeous Japanese kimono. The young man was dressed in western clothes. Standing around the dining room were 25 to 30 elderly folks. The young lady's mother and dad, owners of the restaurant, had contacted all of their relatives and friends to come and see the "American." The mother and all the other women were dressed in fashionable kimonos. The men were dressed in Japanese-style, long, shawl-like coats. Before we left the restaurant to tour the city, the young couple told me they had just been married a few days before I came to Nagasaki, and I was the first American they had ever spoken to. I told them they were the first Japanese I had ever spoken to.

We boarded a trolley, and they told me we were now riding on the same route they had ridden before the bomb went off. They had always visited the park before it was named "Peace Park." The most prominent feature of the park was a huge stone statue about 30-35 feet tall, showing a man sitting with his arms outstretched symbolically pleading for peace, hence the name Peace Park. At one end of the park stood a Catholic church in total ruins. My new friends told me that the Japanese wanted it to stand as a reminder. The girl also told me her father took them to this same park on the same trolley route and rode the trolley until the twisted rails kept the trolley from traveling any further. Then they walked several blocks in to the park. The imposing statue of the man with his upstretched arms was impressive. It dominated the entire park. Never once did I detect any bitterness in the voices of my two guides when they narrated the story that unfolded around the peace park.

By now it was getting late, and I had a long train ride ahead to get to the quay where the carrier was anchored. When we got to the train station, my young guide excused herself briefly. When she returned she had a small box which she said was a present for me and my wife. We waved and emotionally said our good-byes. When the train came and I was on board, I opened the box to find a small silver replica of the statue in the peace park. (We still have that statue more than 40 years after it was given to me.)

MacArthur, in order to encourage G.I. travel in the country, directed that all train stations display signs in Japanese and in English that told you (1) The previous station at which the train had stopped, (2) the station at which the train was stopped and (3) the next station the train was heading for. The stations came and went on the trip back until I happened to glance at the sign in one station. The sign jumped out at me. *The next stop would be OMURA!* In about a half minute, I would be at OMURA, the target of our mission of October 25, 1944 (see MEMORIES #62). This was the mission on which we were hit and after getting back over China had to bail out. When the train stopped, I hurriedly caught a taxi and in broken English, broken Japanese and sign language, I conveyed the information to the cab driver than I wanted to go to the air base. In my excitement of actually being in Omura, this time on the ground and only two or three blocks from the entrance, I absentmindedly told the taxi driver that I had been a tail gunner on a B-29. Before I could finish the sentence or say another word, the cab driver abruptly stopped the taxi and yelled for me to get out. He said, "You B-29 NO GOOD." I wasn't going to pay the fare, but considering what the consequences might be, I paid it. I walked to the entrance of the air base. The gates were closed, and a sign in Japanese and English said, "Air Base Closed." I peered through the gate, but could not see much of anything. I was disappointed at not getting into the air base; however, I was delighted to have had an on-the-ground look at the target of our mission. I hailed a taxi, and this time I kept my mouth shut about B-29s, got to the train station and boarded a train heading back to the carrier.



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