

Our first combat mission was to the ever famous Truk. We were briefed for flak and fighters and told that it was always possible that we would be attacked by the enemy.

The takeoff was uneventful but the preparations were not. I lined my crew up and inspected every little item of clothing & equipment that each member should have. I talked to them about being on the alert, and as this was to be our first mission, I told the gunners to be especially watchful for enemy aircraft & to shoot small bursts.

We took off and assembled with our formation which was the second squadron. Our position was what is known as "Purple Heart Corner" – we were no. 3 man in "C" element – and to keep a good tight formation was indeed a job. The entire trip took 7 ½ hours. About noon, we decided we would eat. We had a contraption along known as a food warmer. It consists of 12 trays similar to those found in any electric refrigerator. These trays were sub-divided into 3 compartments, thus allowing three different kinds of food to be taken per man and strangely enough not to get all mixed up together as is the usual Army way. Also included in this food warmer is 12 cans of coffee. All in all, it is a nice little thing to have along, but apparently the Army didn't think so, because that was the first and last mission we ever had a hot meal.

After eating, we all put on our flak suits, helmets, gloves and various other things that are suppose [sic] to help us from getting hurt in the event of flak or fighters. Then after having checked everyone on interphone, we settled down to wait the initial point – that being the point that you start your bomb run.

Two red flares fired from the lead ship would indicate that we had reached our I.P. and from there on to keep the formation close together & to expect anything to happen. Needless to say, this was it. If everyone felt the excitement that I did, the ship must have been literally shaking. Our run over the target proved uneventful and after bombs were away, I turned the ship over to Lt. Woodward my co-pilot & proceeded to fire up a muchly [sic] needed cigarette. As I recall, I had just gotten comfortable when the formation made a turn into us. Woody did not realize it until it was too late and we found that we were all of a sudden flying formation with our 4 engines. At this same time, our CFC gunner called fighters over the interphone and everything and everyone went berserk. I grabbed the controls and tried desperately to find anything that even resembled another

B-29 and while I was doing this, our guns were going off, causing me to jump every time. To make a long story short, we rejoined the formation and the fighters proved to be another squadron of B-29s in the distance.

The trip home, to Tinian, was without excitement. However, we all knew that we had an awfully lot to learn and a short time to do it in, as our next mission would be the empire.

Hot & tired, I took a shower and then jotted down little things on paper that each man, including myself, would have to be told about. All in all, it was a good mission, in that we learned that we weren't nearly as good as we thought we were and that from then on, we would be playing for keeps – and we weren't far wrong.

Our mission to Truk was in the latter part of Feb. and it wasn't until March 9, 1945 that we were again off to get those little yellow b-----.

From the first, everybody on the crew had but one ambition – that was to bomb Tokyo. We all felt that it would be great to bomb that city – and needless to say, we were to get our wish – and also a lot of things that we didn't wish for.

We were called together on March 8, 1945 at about 1000 for target study. Upon entering the briefing hall, we knew at once where our bombers were going, but we didn't know when or what to expect, although we had a natural suspicion that it would be high altitude, daylight bombing. Much to our surprise, we were told that it was a nite incendiary raid on Tokyo at low altitude. That of course, caused one hell of a lot of excitement and chatter. All of us thought it was a good joke but suddenly our sixth sense told us it wasn't and we were all gripped up with fear, excitement and and [sic] a dread of the unknown. We studied our target and many many questions were asked as to the altitude, time and possibilities of our coming back from this mission.

That evening at 1400 we all filed into our briefing hall, full of apprehension as to what lay ahead of us. My entire crew was grim and I just wondered if the same thoughts were going through their minds. Undoubtedly they were, because my crew is made up of what is so often called the average American.

Briefing was long, and we were told of air sea rescue, the flak and fighters to be encountered and the many other things that might be of help to us.

After general briefing, each crew member went to a specialized briefing which deals with the gunners, the navigators, the bombardiers and the pilots individual jobs.

Our trip to the line in the big GI truck was shortened a little by everyone. It was an out-let for all of our anxiety and needless to say we all felt better.

It is indeed a tremendous sight to see B-29s taxiing out to take-off position for an empire strike. Hundreds of airplanes are air borne in the shortest possible time, making use of 3 runways (we now have 4) at 1 minute intervals. The big birds roar down the runway, some just barely getting off at the other end. I might add here that take-off is something that each individual in his own way sweats out – whether it be the man on the ground watching or the crew in the ship – as our ships were always heavily loaded – sometimes as high as 138,500 lbs. and that is one hell of a lot of weight to be in air. The ship was designed to weigh 120,000 # fully-loaded. The loss of power on any one of the 4 engines would be fatal and each man knew this.

Much to our relief, takeoff was uneventful and we were off to the empire. We all tried to relax but the six of us that are in the front couldn't quite get to the point where we could rest.

Iwo Jima was our first check point and we were watching for it as eagerly as a young boy watches a basketball game. At this time, Iwo had not been secured as yet and we had to miss it by at least ten miles or run the risk of getting shot down by our own Navy.

We hit Iwo as briefed and proceeded on course to Tokyo. As always, there was a terrific front between Iwo and the mainland and every possible kind of weather was encountered – rain, hail snow, sleet, very troubled air and something relatively new to me, St. Elmo's fire. It strikes your airplane and looks like blue lightning dancing out in front of you. It gets on the props & as the prop goes around, it literally becomes a pin-wheel. It is pretty to watch and after one gets over his first fear you get where you don't mind it so much.

We came out of the soup (overcast) some time later only to find that our position was uncertain. However, we continued on our course and it wasn't many minutes before we saw a red glow in the distance. This was Tokyo.

This was our target and the bombers that had gone over before us had done a good job as we were over 100 miles from it.

We all got ready and in we went – driving across Tokyo. Boy, at 250 mph at 6200 ft., it was quite a thrill. The fires were so bright the inside of our ship was red and the heat and smoke was terrific. After bombs away, we turned abruptly to the North and ran into a high cloud. It turned out to be a thermal caused by the fire (cloud of smoke) and it tossed our B-29 around like it was a peanut. When we came out of the thermal, we all thought we had been hit by flak. It had taken Woody and I both to hold the ship. Gas fumes were flowing through the interior like water flows from a faucet. My first thought was to get the hell out of there and fast. We kept thinking if only we can get over water, we'll have a chance as our submarine was only 30 miles off coast. We finally made it and started looking around. To our happy surprise, the ship was still intact & we flew happily home. The deep feeling that comes over you after bombing your target is not easy to tell. However, we were all happy and glad that we had helped to deal a cruel blow to the Emperor and his people.

Rest is what we needed after that 14 hour mission, but rest is not what we got.

Written by Rockleigh Dawson (Capt) of our B-29 crew after our 1st major mission which was the incendiary raid on Japan's largest city, Tokyo.