



# The Crow Flight

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The *brief*, a 7th AF magazine, sold for 15 cents. Following is a reproduction of the 26 Dec.'44 issue, sent in by **Ned Burris, 47th Bomb Sq.** An Aug. 8, '44 edition (with pic of Yvone) of *brief* will be printed in a later *The Crow Flight* newsletter.



*Veterans of a year in action, the groundcrews of this B-25 outfit know planes as no pilot does.*

## *It's the Sergeant's Plane*

By CPL ROGER ANGEL

**IF YOU** are a groundcrewman, you are not likely to get any decorations. You become a veteran by staying on the ground and you don't go home when your plane finishes a certain number of missions. You and your plane stay behind.

In the Hawaiian Islands today there is a veteran medium bomber group of the 7th AAF. This B-25 outfit, commanded by Col Murray A. Bywater, fought thru a year of frontline service in the aerial battlefields of the Marshalls, the Carolinas and the Marianas. Its Mitchells flew perilous low-level bombing and strafing missions. They flew medium-altitude sorties, some straight, some shuttle. They destroyed Zekes and Tonys from Mille to Ponape, faced ackack from Nauru to Guam. The

group has, with the exception of replacements and a few additions, the same planes that arrived at Tarawa and Apamama to go to war last December. They look like---and are---veterans. Most of them have from 30 to 80 bombs painted on their noses; many have small plates screwed onto their wings, cowlings, fuselage and tail surfaces--plates that cover what once were jagged flack and 7.7 millimeter holes.

Most of the men who ran up the strings of bombs on the noses of the 25's are no longer with the group. They finished their jobs and went home. To get the history of the planes today, you have to talk to other veterans in the group's four squadrons--the crew chiefs and their men. They are the sergeants who know the bombers as no pilot ever knew them. The planes belong to them.

### **Typical Crew**

A typical crew chief is T.Sgt Robert H. Timson of Columbus, Ohio. Quiet and good looking, Timson is married and has three boys. He is chief of plane number 498. Like all the other planes in the group, his plane is known by the last three digits of its serial number.

Timson has been with 498 since it flew its first mission from Tarawa last Feb. 20. He and his four-man crew (engine specialist Cpl Clyde Christopher, Sevierville, Tenn., Armorer Cpl Richard Lovelace, Cedar Springs, Mich., and mechanics Pfc Iver M. Villa, Meeker, Colo., and Pvt Arnold B. Thomas, Neb.) have serviced 498 thru 63 missions. They have seen it take off on flights against Mille, Maloelap, Wotje, Ponape and Mauru. Over all these targets (Cont. p.2)

Crew chief  
**M.Sgt Glen N.  
Wheeler,**  
Orlando,  
Florida, cleans  
the bore of the  
75 mm cannon  
in the nose of his  
bomber.



the plane picked up only two small flak holes, one in the right wing between the engine cowling and the fuselage, the other in the right vertical stabilizer. Both of these holes appeared during raids over Nauru---a target known for its heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire. But 498 missed only three scheduled flights.

The only man ever hurt on 498 was S. Sgt George Freeman, an engineer-gunner from Indiana who stepped on a pile of loose machine-gun brass during violent evasive action over Ponape and sprained his ankle.

Today 498 is in good condition. It is old and its fabric bears the marks of Down Under sun and salt-water, but it is ready for further action. Timpson's line chief said that 498, when it arrived in Hawaii at the end of nine months in combat, was in the best condition of any plane in his squadron.



In Hawaii, B25s which went down under to Tarawa last December, get much needed overhaul.

Before they got 498, Timpson and his men serviced another plane---294, the "Island Queen." This B-25, later shot down in combat, gave Timpson and engine specialist Christopher a hair-raising couple of hours on Feb. 1 when pilot 2nd Lt H. C. Taylor brought it back from Mille with an unexploded 20 mm shell lodged in the right wing, just above the fuel cells. The ground men had to get the shell out. Working with the care of a pair of safe-crackers, the two men gently laid open the wing and removed the gas tank. To their relief, they found that the pin on the shell had been bent out of line when the missile hit, making it harmless.

### Hard Luck Plane

Not all planes get thru their missions with one or two holes in the wing or fuselage. Take the B-25 "O You Pretty Woman"---otherwise number 920. Crew-chief T.Sgt Augustus C. Hall, Littlefield, Texas, believes his is the original hard-luck plane of the squadron. On three of its first five missions from Apamama, it came back with several holes from accurate Japanese automatic weapons fire over Mille, Jaluit and Maloelap. These early missions at low level were among the toughest flown during the entire year by the group.

920's third mission was a headache, not only for Hall, but to a number of other chiefs. By a queer



M. Sgt Jack Daniel, S. Sgt Francis Major and M. Sgt. J.L. Sadler overhaul a B-25 engine

freak, 920 and two other plane--833 and 831---came back with their left tire shot up. One by one the three planes came in, touched ground and skidded off the runway.

Hall patched his plane after the mishaps on the first, third and fifth missions, and 920 began to run up a string of successful missions in one piece. But later in the year, when the group was flying sorties against shipping and harbor installations at Ponape, 920 returned from its mission with almost as many parts missing as there were flying. The pilot, Capt. Cole, brought the shattered plane into its base at Eniwetok with no brakes. It rolled the length of the landing field and stuck its nose wheel over the embankment at the end of the strip. If the other two wheels hadn't stopped against the embankment, 920 would have rolled into the water and Sgt Hall would have had to start with a new plane. As it was, all he had to do was to repair the damage done by 84 pieces of flak that pierced the fuselage, engines and wings.

(Continued P7)



CPL William Acunto repairs cowling. T.Sgt D. C. Krill and S.Sgt George E. Low install a new tire on their veteran bomber

### Hangar Queen

Occasionally a plane comes home so badly shot up that it cannot be repaired. When that happens, the plane is not junked, but becomes a "hangar queen," to be used for spare parts. Such parts are scarce at forward bases and become increasingly valuable. When one of the group's four squadrons went into action at the beginning of the year, it had enough spare parts for 30 days combat. Beyond that, every single worn out or shot up unit had to be replaced with parts salvaged from other planes.

One B-25 that was retired to become a supply depot was number 831, which crash landed at Apamama. It was too wrecked to take to the air again, so for several weeks chiefs used it for spare engine parts and pieces of metal. Crew chief S.Sgt John R. Raymond, Abilene, Texas, finally pirated the biggest piece of 831, when his own ship, "Stinky," came back from Jaluit one day in bad shape.

"Stinky's" entire tail surfaces and vertical stabilizers had been riddled by bursts of flack that almost but not quite succeeded in bringing down the plane. The tail was too weakened to be repaired, so Raymond took the whole tail from 831 and transferred it to "Stinky." Today his plane is one of several in the theatre whose nose and tail have flown different numbers of missions.

This technique of plane-merging is a fairly common one. A spectacular example occurred early this year. Capt James Scott Brown led a special mission to Wotje to wipe out a Jap destroyer. The enemy warship was not found, but the flight made a run on three Jap freighters. Capt Brown, in hitting a 200-foot wooden freighter with three 500 pounders, got so close that his wing tip took a mast and most of the rigging off the ship. The entire left side of the plane, from nacelle to the tail, was damaged and pieces of the enemy ship trailed from the B-25 all the way home.

When Capt Brown landed his plane, ground men found a Japanese flag imbedded in the left engine cowling. A length of steel cable wrapped around one prop; another piece was trailing from the wing and the bomb bay door carried a piece of iron pipe. The bomber became a hangar queen.

Then T.Sgt Charles Reese's 895, "Luscious Lucy," came in a few days later for a landing on her nose. When 895 came to a stop, she was nothing but scrap metal from the pilot's compartment forward. Reese and his flight chief, M.Sgt Arvine A. Green, Boonsboro, Md., cleared away the debris and then calmly removed the entire nose section, including the wheel and cannon, from Capt. Brown's plane.

In a couple of days "Luscious Lucy" was back in one piece. It looked good as new, but because the crash had strained the fuselage, the plane was sent back to Hawaii. However, the crew that flew it back called it "the best flying ship in the squadron."



Sgts John Majauskas, Fred Higgengottam, H. I Wilson and Henry Sirave take ten under wing.

### Line Chief

Today Sgt Green is line chief of one of the group's squadrons. An old Air Corps man, he was once in the cadre of the famous 19th Bombardment Squadron. He has been with his present group since January, 1941. Many of the planes in Sgt Green's squadron are flying today because of the ingenuity and sweat of himself and his men. And many of the planes are better planes today--after 60, 70 and 80 missions--than they were when they started.



Line Chief Green Cleans a famous B-25

When the B-25s first went into action over the Marshalls they flew almost entirely at low level.

They were dangerous missions. Opposition was intense and a good many planes came back after sustaining heavy damage. And to add to the chief's troubles, it was found that propeller control brackets on the B-25s had a bad habit of breaking. To fix this, the mechanics added stronger metal plates, and fastened the broken parts to them. Many of these makeshift parts held for the rest of their combat missions and were not replaced until the planes arrived in Oahu. In the meantime, the manufacturers modified the part in later B-25 models. (Cont'd. P8)



But on the whole, the B-25 are amazingly sturdy and do their best to make things easy for their chiefs. Take T.Sgt John K. Lapp, Clorieta, N.M., and his plane "Beachcomber." "Beachcomber" was pretty badly shot up once over Ponape. Then, on a later mission, it came home with a hunk of Jap metal in the accessory section of the gearbox. Lapp extracted the slug, noticed that the damage wasn't too extreme, and tested the engine. It worked O.K., so he screwed a plate over the hole and left it alone. Since then "Beachcomber" has flown 40 missions without a cough, but with a hole in its gearbox that the designer didn't plan on.

But the classic example of tough B-25s in the group is the plane known as 891, "Lefty's Wolf Pack," or "Hello, Moe." With 84 missions, it is the veteran of the group. Originally this plane belonged to Maj William K. Pflingst, a squadron CO, who flew the first missions in the "Wolf Pack." Then the late Lt Col Solomon T. (Ted) Willis took over the squadron and renamed 891 "Hello, Moe." In it he flew some of the most extraordinary missions a B-25 was ever put thru. Histactics over Jap harbors and airstrips made him the most talked-about pilot in the CPA. After one busy afternoon over Ponape, Col Willis flew 891 home to learn that Tokyo Rose was frantically calling him "a suicidal maniac."

After Col Willis' tragic death in a ground accident, Maj (now Lt Col) Pflingst took the plane again. He flew the final missions in it. Today 891 is "in" and ready for more missions. Despite its rugged combat history, its chief, T.Sgt John G. Anderson has found it necessary to make only one complete engine change on the plane.



One More Mission added by Chief Timpson

### Time Savers

Time is almost as precious to chiefs as spare parts. Keeping planes in the air every day is a job that requires long hours of day and night work. Sgt Green and his men have devised many time-and-labor-saving mechanisms, which are now standard in the entire group. For example, they built a unit that cut the time spent in installing new wings. A portable unit containing air compressors and instrument testers was mounted in a jeep trailer so that it could be brought to the planes. Sgts A.F. Bertram and T.A. Cody made an electrical testing apparatus so that the delicate balancer of instruments and voltage between the two engines on each plane could be made in a matter of minutes.

Sgt Green himself worked on a new mount for the tail machine guns in his planes. Gunners had complained that their guns--placed down by their knees--- were too difficult to control and that their green-houses limited visibility. Their guns lacked mobility necessary on low-level raids.

Green removed the old mount and installed a piece of tilted armor plate. On top of that he placed single machine guns. Only the hood over the gunner was left in. Ammunition belts were raised so that they didn't interfere with the gunner's movements. The results were immediately noticeable. One plane shot down two Zeros, which the gunner said he never would have seen from the old position. "If we hadn't had the new setup, our tail gunner would have had the hell shot out of him," Green said.

From the ground man's point of view, Sgt Green said, Apamama was, despite a number of bombings by Jap Betties, heaven. The surroundings were ideal and there was always shade to work in. On the other hand, Saipan, where Green's was the only B-25 squadron, was hell. Until one of the planes skidded off a rain-covered runway and crashed, there were practically no spare parts. Worst of all was the fact that when Green's squadron arrived, the runways were still strewn with razor-sharp pieces of shrapnel, which ripped up tires. Thirty-three tires blew out in the first month. Rubber grew so scarce that Green had to borrow some extra tires from P-47 squadron on the islands. And finally, Saipan was tough because there was so much to be done. During their bombing of Guam, the planes were flying an average of two missions a day and the ground crews worked all day and most of every night to keep their plane flyable and to accomplish Basic maintenance.

### Long Hours

But if most of the ground crewmen bitch mildly about long hours of work they admit that they feel rather lost when they have nothing to do. One chief, TSgt Carl B. Young, Healdsburg, Calif., explained this feeling. "I don't know why it is, he said, "but I always worry a lot more when I don't have a plane than when my plane is on a mission. We all do a lot of sweating when our planes are in the air, but it seems I don't sweat so much when my plane is out." (Cont'd p 9)



Sgt Young should know what he is talking about. He was chief of "Devil's Spouse," which failed to come back from a mission over Wotje. Now he has "Rose's Beau," which under him has an almost perfect record. Two crews have flown the plane for a total of 73 missions, 61 of them without missing a scheduled flight. It has never been touched by flak or bullets.

The business of sweating out their planes is never easy for the men on the ground.



When a plane doesn't come back, its chief is lost. He waits about forlornly, thinking first about the men in the plane, and then about his plane. T.Sgt Billie Earnhardt, Kannapolis, N.C., was crew chief of "Vicious Virgin II." One day the plane failed to make it back to Tarawa after a mission to Nauru. Earnhardt stood on the flight line helplessly until some body told him that the crew had been picked up in the water 60 miles from Tarawa. "I never sweated so much in my life" he said. "I didn't know what to do. And it turned out that I was about the last man to find out that they'd all been picked up. Nobody thought of telling me."

Two days later Earnhardt took over another plane. But it wasn't quite the same for the ground men. They were

happy that the crew had been picked up, but they had lost a plane. Their plane. Earnhardt's assistant crew chief, Cpl T.D. Manross, Erie, Pa. put the feeling into words. "After you've had a plane for a while you know what's good about it and what's wrong with it. It sort of belongs to you. When you lose it, you have to get acquainted with another plane, but it takes a little while before it seems like yours. I don't know what it is about these planes, but you get attached to them." (End of Article.)



Is This Moon Over Miami Or Moon River?

Anyone recognize this Navigator? I'd say it looks like Kem Sitterley except that, as I remember, Kem has a fatter ass. (How do I know, you ask? We had community showers, smart ass.) Maybe Dick Sternberg?

**MORE ON REAR ENDS** - Art Ferriera, 396th Reunion Money Guy sent the following: "The scheduled events (see p.5) sound terrific. I'll definitely make reveille at 0500, just to collect the autographs of anybody who shows up! These days my rear end is as leaden at 5:00 AM as it was on the morning of a Milli raid from Tarawa." At the time he wrote that, Art was not aware that "BB" will lead the exercises and will be topless. Wonder what his reaction will be when he learns that? Bet he'll want to add 30 or so "side-straddle-hops" to the exercise program. That should conjure up some awesome imagery! It might even get the lead out of his rear end. Help Kem's rear end? Naw, way too far out.

**WINDY, AIN'T IT?** - Three WWII vets, (all Navigators) each with a hearing loss, were taking a walk one fine March day. One Nav. remarked to the other, "Windy, ain't it?" "No," the second Nav. replied, "It's Thursday." And the third Nav. chimed in, "So am I. Let's have a beer."

**FOR THE NAVIGATORS** - The instructor of a WWII navigator training class was explaining about latitude, degrees and minutes. The instructor said, "Suppose I asked you to meet me for lunch at 23 degrees, 4 minutes north latitude and 45 degrees, 15 minutes east longitude?" After a confused silence, a voice volunteered, "I guess you'd be eating alone."