

Ernie Pyle With the Navy:

B-29 Superforts Answer To a Crewman's Prayer

Big Bombers Afford Yanks Many Comforts on Journeys

By Ernie Pyle

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS.—The B-29 is unquestionably a wonderful airplane. Outside of the famous old Douglas DC-3 workhorse, I've never heard pilots so unanimous in their praise of an airplane.

I took my first ride in one the other day. No, I didn't go on a mission to Japan. We've been through all that before. I don't believe in people going on missions unless they have to. And as before, the pilots here all agreed with me.

But I went along on a little practice bombing trip of an hour and a half. The pilot was Maj. Gerald Robinson, who lives in our hut. His wife, incidentally, lives at 123 South Girard street, Albuquerque, N. M., on the very same street as our white house.

Ernie Pyle

I sat on a box between the pilots both on the takeoff and for the landing, and as much as I've flown, that was still a thrill. These islands are all relatively small, and you're no sooner off the ground than you're out over water, and that feels funny.

If the air is a little rough, it gives you a very odd sensation sitting way up there in the nose. For the B-29 is so big that, instead of bumping or dropping, the nose has a "willowy" motion, sort of like sitting out on the end of a green limb when it's swaying around.

The B-29 carries a crew of 11. Some of them sit up in the cockpit and the compartment just behind it. Some others sit in a compartment near the tail. The tail gunner sits all alone, way back there in the lonely tail turret.

The body of the B-29 is so taken up with gas tanks and bomb racks that there's normally no way to get from front to rear compartments. So the manufacturers solved that by building a tunnel into the plane, right along the rooftop.

Big Tunnel

Links Crewmen

The tunnel is round, just big enough to crawl in on your hands and knees, and is padded with blue cloth. It's more than 30 feet long, and the crew members crawl back and forth through it all the time. Maj. Russ Cheever reported that he accomplished the impossible the other day by turning around in the tunnel.

On missions, some of the crew get back in this tunnel and sleep for an hour or so. But a lot of them can't stand to do that. I've heard combat crewmen bring up the subject a half dozen times. They say they get claustrophobia in the tunnel.

There used to be some sleeping bunks on the B-29, but they've been taken out, and now there's hardly even room to lie down on the floor.

A fellow does get sleepy on a 14-hour mission. Most of the pilots take naps in their seats. One pilot I know turned the plane over to his copilot and went back to the tunnel for "a little nap," and didn't return for six hours, just before they hit the coast of Japan. They laughingly say he goes to sleep before he gets his wheels up.

The B-29 is a very stable plane and hardly anybody ever gets sick even in rough weather. The boys smoke in the plane, and the mess hall gives them a small lunch of sandwiches and oranges and cookies to eat on the way.

On mission days all flying crewmen, even those not going on the mission, get all the fried eggs they want for breakfast. That's the only day they have eggs.

The crewmen wear their regular clothes on missions, usually coveralls. They don't have to wear heavy fleece-lined clothes and all that bulky gear, because the cabin is heated. They do slip on their heavy steel "flak vests" as they approach the target.

They don't have to wear oxygen masks except when they're over the target, for the cabin is sealed and "pressurized"—simulating a constant altitude of 8,000 feet.

Once in a great while one of the plexiglass "blisters" where the gunners sit will blow out from the strong pressure inside, and then everybody better grab his oxygen mask in an awful hurry. The crew always wears the oxygen mask over the target, for a shell through the plane "depressurizes" the cabin instantly, and they'd pass out.

The boys speak frequently of the unbelievably high winds they hit at high altitudes over Japan. It's nothing unusual to have a 150-mile-an-hour wind, and my nephew, Jack Bales, said that one day his plane hit a wind of 250 miles an hour.

There are five officers and six enlisted men on the crew of a B-29. All the enlisted men of a crew stay in the same hut, because that's the way the boys want it. Thus there are usually three crews of six men each in a Quonset hut.

"My" crew is a grand bunch of boys, as I suppose most of them are. They have trouble sleeping the night before a mission, and they're tense before the takeoff. As one of them laughingly said at the plane just before takeoff one morning "How do you get rid of that empty feeling in your chest?"

But they relax and expand and practically float away with good feeling once they get back and have another one safely under their belts.

The six enlisted men of "my" crew are Sgts. Joe Corcoran of Woodhaven, L. I.; Faud Smith of Des Moines, N. M. (near Raton); Joe McQuade of Gallup, N. M.; John Devaney of Columbus, Ohio; Norbert Springman of Wilmont, Minn., and Eugene Florio of Chicago.

Springman and Florio are radio men, and all the others are gunners. Sergeant Corcoran is the oldest of the crew. The first time I walked into their hut he called from his cot, "Hi Ernie, the last time I saw you was in the Stork club."

"But I've never been in the Stork club in my life," I said. So we puzzled over that a while, and finally decided it must have been two other guys, or else I'm living a double life which I don't know about.

'Sarge' Continues To Ply Trade

Sergeant Corcoran was a chiropractor before the war, and still gives the boys amateur treatments. He practiced for three years at Jamaica, L. I., and had a fine business worked up. I asked him how a chiropractor ever wound up to be a side-gunner on a B-29, and he said damned if he knew.

It's unusual to find two men from thinly populated New Mexico on the same crew. Smith and McQuade never knew each other until they met on this crew, and then it turned out they had joined the army the very same day. Now they are great buddies.

McQuade was a fireman on the Santa Fe, and Smith owned a grocery store, but finally had to sell it. They'd just had letters saying it was below zero back home, and they were at least thankful to be away from that.

Both the boys have had experiences. McQuade made two trips to the Aleutians as a gunner on a ship. And Smith is serving his second tour of aerial combat overseas.

Smith was in the South Pacific in the early days, and flew 53 missions as gunner on B-17s. He has all his missions painted on the back of his leather flying-jacket—yellow bombs for the South Pacific, and red ones for Japan. He says he's only got room for 27 more missions on his jacket, and then he'll just have to quit.

I asked Sergeant Smith if he hated to come back overseas as badly as I did.

"Twice as bad," he said. "You couldn't." "Well, as bad then," he said. "But I haven't griped so much about it since we got here. It's not near as bad as I expected. In fact we're living as good here as we did in America."

Sergeant Smith's odd first name—Faud—is Syrian. He is growing a funny little rectangular goatee, black as coal. I asked him how long he was going to keep it. He said, "Probably only until the colonel happens to notice it."

Smith and Corcoran are the only two sergeants on the crew who are married. Both their wives are living temporarily in California.

Young Twins Serving on All Coast Guard Fronts



Twins seem to favor the U. S. coast guard. Upper left, James, left, and Robert Heater of Bronx, N. Y., being sworn into the coast guard. Lower left, Robert, left, and Orlean Marlatt, twins of Ringwood, Okla. Upper center, James, above, and Jack, who enlisted from Attica, Kan., and are now serving in mid-Pacific. Lower center, the identical Sullivan twins, Lamond, left, and LaVerne of Washington, D. C., who are on anti-submarine patrol duty. Upper right, Thomas J., left, and Edward F. Hurley of Northfield, Mass., shown with Jack Dempsey, a coast guard commander. Lower right, Mike, left, and John Collins, 17-year-old twins of Dorchester, Mass.

U. S. Navy and Coast Guards Deliver the Goods



Photo, just received, showing that out of the gaping mouths of coast-guard-manned and navy landing craft rose the great flow of invasion supplies to the blackened sands of Iwo Jima, a few hours after the marines had wrested their foothold on the vital island in the front yard of Tokyo.

Young Inventor Shows Officers



Hans Weinberger of Altoona, Pa., 16-year-old schoolboy, finalist in science scholarship contest, demonstrates his automatic inflator for life-saving vests, to army and navy officers.

Reports on Yalta



This sound photo shows President Roosevelt during his address to congress on the Yalta conference. The talk was broadcast to the nation from the house of representatives.

Build Gen. Patton New Bridge



Pvt. Roy M. Alaman of Battle Creek, Mich., tightens the noose on an effigy of Hitler made by the U. S. 3rd army engineers after they built this bridge. The bridge, named after the 3rd army commander, is at Bollendorf, Germany. This unit has advanced into Germany on their way to Berlin.

Salvaging Gas Cans



These two French children are on their way to an American salvage station with two gasoline cans. More than a million of these containers have been returned by French children.

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B-29 Takeoff an Exciting Spectacle

I've always felt the great 500-mile auto race at Indianapolis to be the most intriguing event—in terms of human suspense—that I've ever known. The start of a B-29 mission to Tokyo, from the spectator's standpoint, is almost a duplicate of the Indianapolis race.

On mission day people are out early to see the start. Soldiers in groups sit on favorite high spots

around the field—on tops of buildings, on tops of bulldozers along the runway, on mounds that give a better view—and even a few bold souls stand at the very end of the runway to snap amateur pictures.

As the planes taxi out, it's just like cars at Indianapolis leaving their pits to line up for the start. You wave farewell and then scamper to a good vantage point