

## 877 BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, VERY HEAVY



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

877 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy constituted, 19 Nov 1943

Activated, 20 Nov 1943

Inactivated, 16 Feb 1946

### STATIONS

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 20 Nov 1943

Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 1 Dec 1943

Clovis AAFld, NM, 11 Feb 1944

Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 8 Apr-22 Jul 1944

Isley Field, Saipan, 22 Sep 1944-c. Nov 1945

March Field, CA, c. Nov 1945-16 Feb 1946

### ASSIGNMENTS

499 Bombardment Group, 20 Nov 1943-16 Feb 1946

### WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-17

B-29, 1944-1946

### COMMANDERS

### HONORS

Service Streamers

## **Campaign Streamers**

Air Offensive, Japan  
Western Pacific

## **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations  
Nagoya, Japan, 23 Jan 1945  
Japan, 22-28 Apr 1945

### **EMBLEM**

On a light turquoise blue disc, border triparted red, white, and black, a caricatured, brown and white condor with red head and yellow orange beak and feet, in flight toward dexter, hurling a yellow orange lightning flash with the feet, striking in dexter base at large, irregular, red-and-yellow orange, blazing target, edged black. (Approved, 16 May 1945)

### **MOTTO**

### **NICKNAME**

### **OPERATIONS**

Combat in Western Pacific, 24 Nov 1944-14 Aug 1945.

The first Squadron commander (temporary) was Capt. Thomas C. Wilkinson; appointed 22 February 1944. He was relieved by the permanent commander, Maj. Douglas C. Northrup by the time training began in Salina, Kansas in April 1944. Maj. (later Lt. Col.) Northrup remained commander until being lost when he had to bail out of his crippled aircraft during the 27 April 1945 mission. He was replaced by the Operations Officer, Maj. Colin E. Anderson, (later Lt. Col.), who held that position for the remainder of the war.

Squadron life, even with quonset huts and pre-fab buildings, was dull and most personnel busied themselves with beautifying the living area, digging deeper fox holes, planting flowers and vegetable gardens, pitching horseshoes, exploring for war artifacts or trophies, drinking alcohol when available and any other activity that helped make the time pass faster.

In those early days, many of the officers became involved in building a Sqdn. Officer's Club. When it was done, it was believed to be the only such exclusive squadron club on the island. The building was accomplished in the traditional Yankee fashion. All the officers contributed to a pool, one quart of whiskey from their ration. About 100 quarts were in the pot which was then traded for the necessary material and labor to build the club. It didn't take long to round up the material and an adequate work force to complete the domicile in record time. It was the pride of the island, as good, if not better, than the Group clubhouse.

Combat loss by the 877th Sqdn. in 1944 was only one crew-on 22 December, but the new year started with a jolt when they lost two of their more experienced crews on 9 January. Japanese home defenses were improving. The flak was more intense, more accurate and the fighters were getting very aggressive, pressing their attacks right through the formation at times. In some cases, ramming was resorted to.

One accident marred the training period. Capt. John B. Armstrong and the cockpit crew, plus the Squadron Intelligence Officer of the 877th Sqdn. perished when their B-17 exploded in mid-air on 16 June 1944 near Wichita, Kansas. The three crewmembers in the tail section parachuted to safety.

Nagoya was targeted for the 22 December raid but the weather was not good and the results were scattered and negligible. There was a strong defense and some 500 fighter passes were experienced by the Group. Another bomber was lost, the first for the 877th Sqdn. Capt. J. Darden in V7-4684, with Sq. Ops. Off., Maj. C. Dozier aboard, was hit but managed to limp back some 800 miles from the target before ditching. There were no survivors of the crash.

Tokyo was hit for the fifth time by the 499th on 9 January, but the city was again lucky. The jet-stream was extremely fast over the target, the bombing was poor and ineffective. Enemy fighters and flak was strong and although no bombers were lost over the target, two were so badly shot up that they had to ditch at sea. Aircraft V4-4665 of the 877th Sqdn., Capt. V. Fiala and crew ditched 300 miles south of Japan and V3-"Wugged Wascal"-4658, Capt. K. Murphy and crew, 877th Sqdn. went in 670 miles north of Saipan. The Squadron's Bombardier, Tom Shyrock, was also aboard. There were no survivors from either accident.

"Tokyo Twister", V5-4682, Lt. P. Burkett and crew of the 877th Sqdn., was damaged over Tokyo by both fighters and flak but managed to struggle back to Isely Field. The super-charger on No. 3 engine and the main hydraulic system had been knocked out resulting in a crash landing. The aircraft was damaged beyond repair and ended up on the scrap heap.

Luck persisted in keeping Tokyo intact when the two Wings struck on 19 February. The target was hidden under a dense layer of clouds as one hundred fifty B-29s roared overhead. Unable to be certain of the primary, the urban area was decided upon as the secondary target. Despite the cloud cover, the flak was accurate and effective. The enemy fighters arrived as usual and they too were effective. The bombers did well in fighting their way in and out of the target and accounted for many fighters. Six B-29s were lost in the encounter; two from the 313th Wing—crash landed due to battle damage, and four from the 73rd Wing, the 499th B. G. lost one of their aircraft over the target due to a Kamakazi ramming. This was V49-5220, Lt. L. Nickolson and crew of the 877th Sqdn. (The aircraft was from the 879th Sqdn. and on loan to the 877th for the strike.)

Only the 73rd Wing participated in the 1 April fire raid on Tokyo, but luck again held for the city and damage was only right. Bombing was poor. V2-4250, Lt. K. Dustin and crew of the 877th Sqdn. was the only loss the 499th suffered.

Target 2009, Tachikawa, the Hatachi aircraft engine plant was the 499th's target for 24 April. The bombing results were excellent, nearly 70% of the plant was destroyed. However, Lt R. Antonucci and crew in V11-3438, of the 877th Sqdn. had to ditch on returning from the target. There were no survivors.

Japanese warriors were as strong and determined as ever over the Okinawa area, with maneuvers that bordered on the fanatic. These aerial attacks were still originating at the Izumi airfield and the 499th B. G. was sent back on 26 and 27 April to try and put it out of commission for good. The raid on the 26th caused the loss of V8-4698, "Flying Fool" of the 877th Sqdn. Aboard were members of the Capt. J. Boozer crew and Squadron Commander Douglas Northrup. Their plane had an engine catch fire on the way to the target and the entire crew bailed out of the burning aircraft over Agrihan Island. All were rescued by the Navy/Army Air-Sea Rescue except Doug Northrup, who was never found.

The 499th B. G. changed airfield targets on 28 April when they struck the Miyazaki airfield, which was another nest for enemy aircraft plaguing the Okinawa campaign. V9 "Salvo Sally"-4699 was ditched just off the coast of Japan during this raid. Capt. W. Canada and crew, 877th Sqdn., along with Sqdn. Radar Officer Finklea, were aboard but two of the crew parachuted from the rear section just before ditching. When a rescue submarine reached the scene, only Sgt. Jack Cannon, a gunner was found and picked up alive. For this action and for the mission to the Izumi airfield back on the 22nd, the 499th received its second Unit Citation.

Daylight incendiary raids were carried out three days later over Yokohama but the strike force had a P-51 escort and there were no B-29 losses. Osaka was similarly hit on 1 June by a four Wing effort and some three square miles of the city were made ashes. The flak defenses were good enough to down one 499th bomber V8-(the 2nd)-0083, Capt. T. Wilkinson and crew of the 877th Sqdn. aboard. They took a direct hit over the target. All perished.

The 499th B. G. lost VII-9655 on the 26 June raid to Target 382, the Osaka Army Depot. Lt. J. Newell and his 877th Sqdn. crew were hit over the target. What was to have been a precision G.P. bombing, turned into a radar release because bad weather had set in. The results were undetermined and questionable.

Good military targets were getting hard to find so beginning 29 June, eight small cities were selected for incendiary blitzing. The areas of Sasebo, Kumamoto, Kochi, Akashi, Sakai, Tchinomiya, Oita and Hatachi were scheduled for the wrath of war. The 499th participated in all the missions and went untouched until the last raid-Hatachi on 19 July, B-29 VII-7652, with Lt. Ringham and crew were lost over the target. They were a newly arrived 877th Sqdn. replacement crew.

The mission to Target 357, the Nakajima aircraft plant, on 27 Jan. '45, was considered the toughest one of the war for the entire 73rd Wing. Flak Alley was thick enough to support a B-29 and almost 1000 fighter attacks were made by some very determined young Japanese pilots. Some were obviously conditioned Kamikazi pilots.

One of the planes on this mission was V5-4682 "Tokyo Twister." The crew of "Tokyo Twister" was P. Burkett-Aircraft Commander, R. E. Pace-Pilot, P. K. Hansen-Navigator, E. Kasun-Bombardier, R. Carter-Flight Engineer, R. Hamel-Radio, C. Bell-Radar, V. Schlect-CFC Gunner, C. Sylke-Side gunner, T. Ogonowski-Side gunner and V. Racki-Tail gunner.

Narrative of the mission from the crew of "Tokyo Twister:" "Twelve aircraft were assigned to the first wave of our group. We took off from Saipan before daylight and stayed at low altitude until about an hour from the coast of Japan, at which time we started our climb to our assigned bombing altitude. Our diamond formation stayed together until the climb started, but by the time we had reached the 27,500 feet bombing level, three aircraft had aborted. This put our aircraft in the unsavory "coffin corner" position-the inside right hand slot in the formation that will make right hand turns-a most vulnerable position since the plane has to be slowed considerably in right turns.

"Things went well until we turned on our run over the IP (Initial Point), Mt. Fujiyama. From then on things started moving fast. Japanese fighters were out in swarms. It seemed that at least one of our turrets was firing for the entire run. As we neared the target, the fighters broke off and the flak started. It was intense and it appeared they had our range.

"As the bomb bay doors closed after the bomb run, we suddenly felt the aircraft lurch. Immediately, the right gunner called on the interphone to report a flak hit on the right wing in the vicinity behind No. 3 engine. A large piece of metal had been blown loose from the wing. It was finally determined that the whole nacelle behind No. 3 engine was gone but no grave damage had been done to the basic structure. At about the same time, one of the gunners reported that one of our planes in the wave behind us and in the same position we had just been in, was hit and going down; chutes were reported leaving the aircraft. Information received later was that the aircraft was V27-4769-E. G. Smith crew-878th Sqdn. Some of this crew survived and were repatriated after the war.

"After the bomb run, the flak let up quite a bit and we got to the turning point (Chosi Point) on the coast of northern Japan in fairly good shape, but the gunners reported that they were either very low on ammunition, or completely out. As we turned to the right off the coast for our heading back to Saipan, an enemy fighter was reported off our right wing. By the time we had completed the turn, the fighter was reported at 2 o'clock and a little high. When he was reported at 1 o'clock, he started his run. All guns that could be brought to bear on him attempted to fire, but only one of the upper turrets' four guns was firing, being controlled by the bombardier, Ed Kasun. As the fighter passed, a deep decompression explosion was felt and the smell of cordite permeated the aircraft. At the same time, I felt a sharp pain in my neck, near the shoulder, and a burning sensation on the rear section where I sit. At the same time, I saw the pilot, Rid Pace, slump forward on the control column. I immediately called on the interphone to report the situation. Ed Kasun looked back and stood up to push him off the controls. Then the engineer, Bob Carter reported that No. 3 engine was out. I asked if he was sure. There was no manifold pressure and I told him to feather it. Bob tried but it would not feather. We began losing power and had to leave the formation as we were depressurizing. We thought we were on three engines with one windmilling. I tried to contact the other ships in the formation by radio to ask for escort back home but could not make contact. We

had to proceed alone. As we descended, the engineer reported that the manifold pressure was coming up on the windmilling engine and by the time we reached 10,000 feet, we were on four engines again. Only the supercharger had been knocked out.

"At this time we were resting fairly easy; all engines were operating and the co-pilot had been laid out on the nosewheel door where he had received a shot of morphine for the pain. He had lost quite a bit of blood from multiple fragment penetrations of his right arm and shoulder and upper chest. He was obviously suffering from shock. Administration of plasma was definitely indicated, so Charlie Bell, the radar operator as well as the first aid man, was called to give the plasma injection. He came through the tunnel with his first aid kit, and as he came out of the tunnel he was very pale, almost white in color and we knew he could not do it. He was sent back to the rear. All the officers discussed the problem and no one thought he could press the sternum needle into the soft bone above the solar plexus, as the plasma was given in those days. The idea was finally abandoned. We covered the wounds as best we could and the morphine seemed to control his pain. "About 300 miles off the coast of Japan, No. 1 engine quit and it was quickly feathered. We still had about 1300 miles to go, on three engines, and it was getting near sunset. Since we were on reduced power we were using more gasoline than on four engines due to the higher power settings we had to use just to maintain flying speed. The engineer didn't believe we could make it back due to the fuel situation. This put us in a pretty poor position if we had to ditch with a wounded crewman. We started trying to contact someone from the formation again. This time we finally got Jim Teetor's crew of the 878th Sqdn. who was in the wave behind us. After some time, Jim thought that they were coming up on us and asked us to turn on the landing lights. They saw the lights and we were able to join behind them and be escorted back to the island. It was a great feeling to be with buddies again. If we had to ditch, they could give us assistance and possibly vector the rescue Dumbo to us.

"We thought we really had it made now and arrived over the island with no more incidents, except the navigator, Paul Hansen, complaining that Teetor's aircraft was off-course 2 degrees a couple of times. We set up for the landing and the bombardier sat in the co-pilot's seat to help as much as possible. The engineer reported the regular hydraulic system was inoperative, but that the emergency system was pressurized. Then, as the wheels came down, the right gunner reported that the outboard tire on his side was flat but the other appeared good.

"We declared an emergency and the runway should have been cleared for us when we landed, but after touchdown, about the time the nosewheel was on the ground, I saw an aircraft taxiing across the runway in front of us. I hit the emergency lever and slowed enough to let them pass. It was then that I found, much to my amazement, that the emergency had one, and only one shot in it, and then it was gone. We had no brakes and were still moving 70 to 80 miles per hour. I had thoughts of going over the cliff at the end of the runway and into the sea. By kicking left rudder as hard as possible and putting No. 4 throttle on a little, we finally got off the runway and into the rough. When we started hitting the boulders, the nosewheel collapsed. I can still see Rid Pace being knocked to the overhead when the nosewheel snapped and pitched up into wheel door where he was lying.

"Mercifully we finally came to a stop. I remember seeing what appeared as smoke in the cockpit and thought we may have an electrical fire but it was only some flare ammunition that had broken open and the dust-like particles were floating in the air. The fire and rescue squads were right there to take Rid out over the wing through the engineer's door. The nose being on the ground, I just stepped out through the pilot's window. The people in the rear were having it a little bit tougher as the tail was pretty high in the air, but they were assisted by the fire truck personnel.

"We were taken to de-briefing after flying 18 hours and 45 minutes, and no food in over 12 hours. At de-briefing someone (a friend no doubt) poured about 6 ounces of medicinal whiskey into my canteen cup, which I drank before leaving. I was in no shape to eat the steaks they had cooked for us and barely found my quonset that night.

"Rid Pace received intensive care at the field emergency hospital that night and surgery the following morning. After two weeks recuperation, he was flown to Hawaii for months hospitalization and further surgery, then to the U.S. where he was stationed at Hoff General Hospital, Santa Barbara, CA. His recovery and rehabilitation were completed in Nov. 1945; at which time he was retired medically as a 1st Lt. He never returned to duty.

"We were both awarded the Purple Heart; his well deserved but I consider mine, the "Million dollar wound". I never had any hospital treatment but the flight surgeon did remove a small bullet fragment from the base of my neck. It goes without saying, the crew was well trained and every man did an exemplary job in assisting to get the wounded crewman and a combat damaged aircraft the long distance from Japan to Saipan. I might add that V5, the "Tokyo Twister" did a faithful job too, but she was damaged so bad that she was surveyed and ended up in the scrap yard ingloriously, next to a Japanese Betty."

The next jolt came to the Squadron on 27 April when Commander, Lt. Col. Douglas Northrup, was lost on bailout of V8-4698 "Flying Fool", with the Jack Boozer crew over Agrihan Island. They were on the way to the Izumi Airfield target. The bailout was necessary due to an engine fire. All occupants left the aircraft successfully during the darkness, the night of the 27th or the early morning hours of the 28th. The aircraft commander plus four other members of the crew were picked up after daylight by the U.S.S. Cook. The remain-ing six crewmen were picked up by the Army Air Sea Rescue Unit in an OA-10 Flying Boat.

The CFC gunner, Joe Ogilvie remembers the following regarding the bailout and recovery. "We were on our way to the target when an engine caught fire. We salvoed our bombs and were going to ditch close to the island, but the fire got so bad that we did not have time. When I jumped, my chute had no more than opened when the aircraft exploded in a big ball of fire; then absolute quiet and pitch black. I had no idea how high we were when I jumped, and not wanting to get tangled in the chute lines, dropped out of my chute harness too soon. When I hit the water I don't know how far under I went but was sure that the surface was never going to be there.

"But surface I finally did and then I opened my one-man life raft and just sat there until daylight. Then I started looking for any others of the crew. Most of them had gone down to the water in

their chutes and some had become tangled in the shrouds. Joe Koscumb, the bombardier had lost his raft. Four of us were together before the PBY came looking for us, and was that ever a welcome sight. We used our signal mirror to help the rescue crew see us. They signaled back when they had us located, then circled for some time before deciding to land in the open sea. We were within sight of the island (Agrihan) but not sure if we should try for it during the daylight. We didn't know if there were Jap soldiers on the island or not. The PBY was damaged in landing, but we managed, after salving some gasoline, to reach Saipan without further problems." After the rescue of the five members by the U.S.S. Cook, she steamed along the coast of the island looking for Lt. Col. Northrup and landed a search party in the area where the other crewmembers were picked up. No further contacts were made by the ship, so they headed back to Saipan with the survivors. A Navy PBY Flying Boat was sent out to continue the search in the late afternoon of the 28th; two Squadron members, Maj. Ballard: Executive Officer and Lt. Burkett: Aircraft Commander, were on the flight to offer possible assistance if required. The aircraft reached the island during darkness and it was thought that light signals were seen at the highest point on the island, however, this later proved to be the smoldering remains of the B-29.

Due to these negative results, a Navy Task Unit was formed with a Destroyer Escort (U.S.S. Currier) and L.C.I. (#371) which left Saipan on 30 April. Aboard the L.C.I, was a fully equipped platoon of soldiers from the 24th Infantry Division, a Navy Interpreter, an Army Medical Officer, and three officers from the Squadron (Ballard, Burkett, and Griffin: Sqdn. Flight Surgeon). The Task Unit arrived at the island 1 May. They proceeded to beach the L.C.I, and unload the landing party. The natives were friendly and assisted in all ways. A thorough search was made with negative results. The rescue efforts were concluded on 6 May. In the process four Japanese and 40 natives were herded onto the L.C.I, and returned to Saipan for internment. The party arrived back at home base on the 7th of May.

The 877th had only one known survivor of a bailout or ditching in enemy homeland territory. This occurred on the mission of 28 April '45 to the airfield at Miyazaki and Capt. Canada's aircraft was disabled over the target. An attempt was made to ditch just off the coast. The aircraft was V9-4699 "Salvo Sally". When they received a direct flak hit in the aft fuselage, severing some control cables and then another hit in the crew compartment, making a huge hole, it was presumed that most of the men forward, with the exception of the A/C "Wild Bill" Canada, had been killed. Still another flak burst hit between No. 3 and 4 engines, causing No. 3 to catch fire and start windmilling. When No. 4 was feathered, indicating that the Flight Engineer was still alive at this point, there was hope of survival. With two engines out, the aircraft fell out of formation and started descending fast, but the pilot regained control and headed for the coast line in an attempt to ditch. Crewmembers in the rear called on the interphone to ask the A/C if they should bail out. "Hell no, everything's all right, ride her down and prepare to ditch", came the answer. V9 was still heading for the coast but the fires were getting too hot. Flames swept back near the right blister and it started to melt. Whether the order was given by the A/C or not, two men bailed out, possibly more, but other aircraft reported that only two chutes opened just past the coast. With barely enough altitude for safety, the chutes opened just before hitting the water. The aircraft continued on in an apparent attempt at ditching but it hit too hard on impact. No survivors were seen in the wreckage.



T/Sgt. Jack B. Cannon was the last to jump and estimated his altitude at about 500 feet. His chute broke open just before striking the water. At the shock of hitting the water, he lost his gun, signal mirror, canteen of water, and rations. All he had was his Mae West and the one-man raft. He looked around to see if he could see any of his buddies, but sighted none. The bail-out came in the mid-morning, and he spent the afternoon trying to dry out. He slept in dozes throughout the night and at dawn could see the mountains of Japan. He had apparently landed in the main Japanese current that sweeps north up the coast. If he had landed on the opposite side of the current he would have drifted onto the beach. As it was, he was too close to the shore for comfort.

About mid-morning, he saw a B-29 circling nearby. They saw the survivor and came down low to drop some rations, marker dye and mirrors. Then they turned and hurriedly left the area. Shortly Sgt. Cannon saw the reason an enemy fighter, fairly high, surveying the situation. Jack got down low in his raft and played dead.

Actually, the Super Dumbo had left the area to attack some Japanese sailing vessels who were headed for the scene. The Dumbo went in low against the vessels, strafing until four of the boats were sunk and the other four left for land. Another Dumbo was in the area also, circling a Navy Submarine, directing a rescue path. Enemy fighters joined in, trying to attack the sub with bombs, but Dumbo kept chasing them off and the sub kept heading for Cannon's raft. One of the Dumbos, before leaving the scene due to low gasoline, dropped a larger life raft, which Cannon changed into. He then hoisted the sail in an attempt to move away from the shoreline.

Some smoke on the horizon caught his eye and thinking it was an enemy patrol boat, he put the blue cover over the raft in an attempt to conceal himself. He almost succeeded. The sub coming up could not find him at first but after a few wrong turns and hard looking, the Navy found him and took him aboard. The sub headed back into the area after dark to check for other survivors from "Salvo Sally", as well as another aircraft from another Group that had ditched on this mission. They picked up four other men from the other aircraft before finally departing. After a few days at sea, Sgt. Cannon and the other B-29 crewmembers were returned to their units.

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Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

*499 Bombardment Group, Very Heavy*. Historical Aviation Album. Temple City, AZ. 1981.