

COL. JAMES PETTUS' MANUSCRIPT

By now it should be recognized by all of us, even those diehards with hope otherwise, that we will never see a history of the 43rd by Lawrence J. Hickey. So in order to give you a brief outline of one part of our history, I have taken the liberty and the time to write a capsule of the day-to-day operations of the Group starting from January 1, 1944 to the end of the war in August 1945. This is adapted from the manuscript prepared by the late Col. James Pettus, Commander of the 43rd Bomb Group in its B-24 era. Hopefully I will be able to send to our Editor, Andy Anderson, a few pages for each of the future newsletters until this task is done.

A few of the dates and targets are questionable. A check against my own diary and information that I received from many of you while I served as Editor of our newsletter show that a few dates in the Pettus manuscript and that in our records differ by one day. On some missions where the Group went to a secondary or tertiary target, only the primary target is listed in the Pettus manuscript. I think that is not really too relevant at this time in our lives. What I suspect has happened is that Jim used official records kept in the U.S.A. and they recorded events on the dates in this country while we were a day ahead in the SWP Theater.

Please bear in mind that some of Jim's entries were written in such a manner that they are almost in code to him and are not at all self explanatory. There are many references to other sources that are not included with his manuscript. In such cases it is virtually impossible to know what he is writing about a mission. Information is almost non existent on many days when the Group was in action. On other days the information is quite complete. I hope that this will be of some value to many of you.

Jim Cherkauer

- Jan 1, 1944. 21 B-24s hit Japanese supply dumps at Saidor with 500# GP bombs.
The 63rd conducted search missions over Bismarck Sea with 4-6 searches per night.
- Jan 2, 1944. 27 B-24s over Saidor to soften up enemy just prior to Army troops landing on the island.
The 63rd pounded Saidor and airstrip all night long with 500# GP bombs flying out of Dobodura.
403rd called to do Bismarck Sea recco attacked at low level a Sugar Charlie in the area of Cape Hoskins. Engine on 1 B-24 hit by 40 mm gun. Plane made an emergency landing at Finschhafen.
- Jan 3, 1944. Twenty-one B-24s dropped 500 lb. bombs in AA gun pits to destroy them at Alexishafen. Supply dumps also bombed.
63rd was expanding its night missions from the Bismarck Sea to New Ireland and as far away as Hollandia by the use of bomb bay tanks.
- Jan 4, 1944. B-24s went back to same target. 7 planes damaged by enemy fire. Three men were wounded, one seriously.
- Jan 5, 1944. A day of rest for the 43rd.

Jan 6, 1944. Back again to attack AA at Alexishafen. Each plane made an individual run in 5 second intervals from a slightly different heading and altitude to confuse the Jap gunners. Due to lack of practice with this type of bombing there were several near collisions. 43rd credited with destroying a number of gun emplacements.

Lt. Col. Jay Rousek, Deputy Group Commander, was rotated back to ZI for much needed rest. Major Jean Jack, 403rd, was moved to the Deputy slot from Group Operations, and Capt. Russell Bragg became Ops Officer. Major Art Curran, Group G-4, also went home and was replaced by Capt. Roger Kettleison.

Jan 7, 1944. The planned day of rest was interrupted with a call for ground support for marines near Borgen Bay. 18 B-24s dropped 216 500-pounders in the assigned area.

Jan 8, 1944. The 65th and 403rd were back pounding the AA at Alexishafen while the 64th was supposed to give ground support to in the Bergen Bay area, but the weather made it too dicey with U.S. Marines nearby.

Jan 9, 1944. The 43rd had the day off while the 90th Group took over the battering of Alexishafen.

Jan 10, 1944. Ken's Men sent 18 B-24s over Madang, only some 30 miles from Alexishafen. AA and supply dumps were the targets. The Group met little to no resistance, but a very large explosion was heard in the 403rd target area as reported by the 64th.

Jan 11, 1944. No entry in the manuscript.

Jan 12, 1944. It was back to Alexishafen or AA sites and supply areas. There was no resistance and bombing was excellent with several fires started, probably from stored fuel.

Jan 13, 1944. A lucky day for the 63rd as they tagged a Sugar Baker on the stern with a 1000 lb. Torpex bomb and another close by. The vessel was on fire but still afloat when the 63rd had to leave the area to continue the patrol. It was claimed sunk since it was never sighted later by other aircraft on the lookout for it.

Jan 14, 1944. Madang again with port and supply areas being plastered and one large fire started near the wharfs.

Jan 15, 1944. No entry in the manuscript.

Jan 16, 1944. The Group gave ground support to troops near Arawe on New Britain. A strong Japanese position was holding up the marines who would have suffered severe casualties to dig them out, so the 43rd blasted the Japs out using 1000 pounders with instantaneous fusing. The bombing was precise with initial reports indicating great satisfaction. The strafers followed immediately after the drop.

Jan 17, 1944. 18 B-24s dropped their bombs on the guns camp area at Hansa Bay.

- Jan 18, 1944. The heavies were to be bait to lure the Wewak fighters up for Gen. Whitehead's P-38s. Approaching at 20,000 feet and chattering on the radio near the juicy targets at Wewak was enough to get the Japanese airborne, and as the bombers sighted Wewak on the horizon, they turned back to bomb Hansa Bay. The P-47s and P-38s went to work with the 47s staffing and the 38s doing battle. There were 14 confirmed enemy fighters shot down and a number of others destroyed on the ground. One P-38 was shot up but made a crash landing at Gusap and was later salvaged. During the night of the 18th and 19th the 63rd scored hits on a 2000 ton Sugar Baker causing secondary explosions. Poor weather made it impossible to confirm a sinking, but the contact disappeared from the radar screen in 10 minutes. The crew was credited with a probable sinking.
- Jan 19, 1944. The 43rd went to Wewak to attack the fuel dumps and revetment areas. No enemy fighters appeared and the AA was moderate. Fires were started and were visible for 90 miles, but other groups were in action there so the 43rd did not claim all of the credit. On the night of the 19th/20th the 63rd attacked an unidentified "submarine" in the Bismarck Sea. Two 1000 lb. bombs were dropped after the 63rd plane received permission from the Fifth Air Task Force to do so. Neither bomb hit the submarine but it stopped dead in the water. Although the crew believed that it had sunk a submarine, some question arose as to whether or not it was a semi-submerged cargo container towed by a submarine that dropped the tow line when the B-24 approached. Another 63rd hunter claimed damage to a Sugar Charlie in the Bismarck Sea.
- Jan. 20, 1944. No entry given.
- Jan 21, 1944. The 63rd struck it rich hitting a Sugar Able (7000 ton tanker) and setting it ablaze. It was claimed sunk as on the return portion of the patrol it could not be sighted. A recco hit a Fox Tare with 500 pounders. The ship sank in 40 minutes.
- Jan 22, 1944. The daylight squadrons hit Wewak AA and supply areas. The Japanese put some 50 fighters into the air but lost a good part of these to our fighters and Liberator gunners. Bombing was good. The 43rd claimed 11 definite and probables. The 90th claimed 5 definites. This number of enemy aircraft was probably not destroyed due to gunners making conflicting claims. (There were days when claims of shooting down enemy fighters exceeded the number the Japanese had in the area, but the next day those clever Nipponese replaced many of them.) On the 22nd/23rd the Sea Hawks attacked unidentified motor vessels, but with uncertain results the vessels were listed as damaged.
- Jan 23, 1944. No entry shown.
- Jan. 24 - 25, 1944. The 43rd again attacked Wewak, but due to poor weather the results were not observed.
- Jan 26-27, 1944. Two groups including the 43rd headed to the Admiralty Islands. The targets were barge unloading points and supply dumps on Los Negros and Lorengau and the

adjacent air strips. Poor weather made for poor bombing. There was no opposition making it appear that the Japanese had not made much progress in building a major air base there.

Jan. 28 - 31, 1944. Poor weather prevented further daylight operations. There were some uneventful night reccos and attempted photo missions.

Feb. 1, 1944. Word was received that Maj. Jay Zeamer has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Jay is recovering from the serious wounds he received last June. Lt. Parks, 63rd, scored two direct hits on a Fox Able near Hollandia; explosions resulted and the ship sank within minutes.

Daylight squadrons were either inactive due to inclement weather or turned back from heavy fronts.

Feb 2, 1944. A 63rd plane made a recco run to Wewak and Hansa Bay. Either the same plane or another 63rd B-24 made a too close for comfort attack over a Jap destroyer.

Feb 3, 1944. Clear weather permitted a raid on Wewak to hit airstrips and revetment areas. Burning aircraft on the ground were sighted. P-38s kept the enemy fighter at bay. The 2000 pounders hitting the airstrips made the enemy fighters have to fly to Dagua to refuel. Our strafers destroyed some many on the ground there. In all 76 enemy planes were destroyed on the ground or in the air.

(In these early days of February, the Pettus manuscript is too cryptic for this writer to decipher all that is written, but the following is what was gleaned from his writings. He will not testify to the accuracy of what is reported in those early days of February.)

Feb. 4, 1944. A 63rd patrol encountered a Sugar Charlie; no report on what happened. The 403rd apparently bombed Wewak. A recco flown by Usset seems to have taken place.

Feb. 5, 1944. A daylight raid on Hoskins with 64th and 65th planes hit.

Feb 6, 1944. Apparently Wewak was the primary target that day but Bogajim seems to be the one actually bombed with a couple of 403rd planes hitting Madang.

Feb. 7, 1944. No entry shown.

Feb 8, 1944. The group was off to Wewak but only the 65th made it to hit AA positions in support of strafers. The other daylight squadrons went to Madang. Capt. Russell Bragg, Group Ops Office, and Capt. Bill Graham with a crew of B-17 vets from the 403rd flew a B-17, now an armed troop carrier, on a mercy mission to some stranded Yank and Aussie airmen in NE New Britain. After a search of two hours the airmen were found, and the B-17 crew dropped food, weapons and medical supplies to the stranded men.

Capt. Fisher, 63rd, attacked Rabaul and Sedlander, 403rd, bombed Momote strip.

Feb 9, 1944. Not enough information given to make sense to this writer.

- Feb 10, 1944. Mission to Wewak had limited success due to the weather. The 65th hit the target but the other squadrons went on to bomb heavily hit Madang. Sam Commons has more information about this mission.
- Feb 11, 1944. With better weather the group pounded Kavieng. The runways and dispersal areas were bombed with numerous fires being sighted. Enemy aircraft were spotted in the air, but no interceptions occurred. The 28 heavy AA were ineffective perhaps due to the dropping of a lot of chaff foil.
- Feb 12, 1944. A day off for the group.
- Feb 13, 1944. The target was Kavieng, but due to weather the bombs had to be dropped through the clouds by timing runs from the coast. Although the target area was two miles square, no estimate of damage could be made. Squadrons were weaving in and out looking for targets with many on the wrong headings. Planes became mixed up and there were many new flight leaders this day.
- Feb 13/14, 1944. The 63rd sank a Fox Tare Dog (1000 - 1500 tons) from a convoy. Later another Sea Hawk found more of the convoy and radioed its location and that of a destroyer before attacking a medium sized U/1 Freighter causing damage. It also got a hit on a destroyer. Still another Sea Hawk arrived on the scene and damaged a Sugar Charlie and a Fox Tare Dog. Results were one confirmed sunk and four damaged.
- Feb 14, 1944. Fierce bombing of the Admiralties. 63rd went back to Kavieng but the weather had not improved. Results uncertain.
- Feb 15, 1944. Went after a 19 ship convoy - good detail. Kavieng also hit.
- Feb 16, 1944. All B-24s sent to hit the light AA at Kavieng. Weather interfered to some degree with mission, but large fires were started. Two 64th planes went to look for stragglers from the convoy of the night before. Found some but their attacks were futile. That night the 63rd went in search for the convoy and found it. They damaged four vessels with at least two seriously crippled. Lt. McGehee straddled a U/1 MV and made one hit. He also laid bombs near an armed escort ship. Lt. Gregg attacked a Sugar Charlie and a Fox Tare Dog, claiming near misses and possible heavy damage.
- Feb 16/17, 1944. Fisher reported two runs made on two ships with unbelievable AA from them.
- Feb 17, 1944. Back to Kavieng to destroy light AA and automatic weapons that had caused a great deal of damage to B-25s on a previous day's mission. Due to bad weather the planes went to the secondary, Talasea, where they did little damage except to the runway. A 403rd plane dropped its bombs through the bomb bay doors. One flew back and damaged the tail causing the plane to spin from 12,000' to 2,500' before regaining control. A 65th plane searching for any remnants of the convoy attacked yesterday in the Bismarck Sea found several ships. It damaged a Sugar Baker of 1500 tons.

Feb 18, 1944. Entries too confusing to decipher.

Feb 19, 1944. Two squadrons on alert for a convoy known to be leaving Rabaul. A-20s and B-25s hit the convoy doing extensive damage. The squadrons used the day for much needed maintenance.

The Sea Hawks attacked a tanker that got away.

Feb 20, 1944. The daylight squadrons put 21 planes in the air to hit the AA at Hansa Bay. Bad weather spoiled the mission with bombs being dropped all over the area. The only recorded damage was to the secondary target, Alexishafen, where some explosions were seen.

At 2100 hour three 63rd planes took off. Two were unsuccessful, but Lt. McGehee attacked a large Fox Able freighter (5,000 tons) north of Wewak. Flares showed the ship capsizing with clouds of steam pouring from amidships.

Feb 21, 1944. Kavieng was socked in by weather and the group hit the secondary target, Iboki Plantation. With no visible results no damage assessment could be made.

The 63rd sent out 3 planes. One Sugar Charlie was hit and damaged by Lt. Quinette's plane. It probably sank.

Feb 22, 1944. A real SNAFU day. With two squadrons airborne and the third taking off the target was switched to Momote Airstrip. A severe front over the Bismarck Sea prevented the planes from getting there. Iboki Plantation was hit in turn with one string apparently hitting a fuel dump. The planes that were taking off when the target was switched attached themselves to the 90th Group heading to Kavieng. They too could not penetrate the front and hit Iboki also.

A 403rd and 64th search in the Eastern Bismarck Sea turned up a Fox Tare Charlie (2000 - 4000 tons) which they hit at least twice after the mediums had worked it over. With the ship sinking the crew took to life boats and headed towards shore. Strafing prevented them from getting to New Hanover where other ships from their convoy had headed.

Feb 23, 1944. This was labeled "Black Wednesday" and was probably the worst day in the history of the 43rd. The 3 daylight squadrons attacked AA at Wewak but encountered accurate AA, but no casualties occurred. Most bombs dropped in the water and not on target.

Feb 24, 1944. Bad weather again with the planes scattering and heading all over the area. The primary target was Mamote. One plane made it to the target and dropped all of its bombs in the ocean. Some planes went to Alexishafen and others made it to Karkar Island with no observed results.

Feb 25, 1944. Ken's Men plastered the guns at Wewak once again from 12,700 feet. All bombs hit the target area and were dropped by minimum interval. There were numerous secondary explosions of ammo with smoke rising to 5,000 feet.

Feb 26, 1944. Only the 64th and 65th got to the target, Mamore. The bombing results were not spectacular. The 403rd hit the secondary target. Jim could not read the name of this target from the form 34.

Feb 27, 1944. The supply dumps in Boram was once again the target. Large fires were started and seen for over 100 miles and as far as Hansa Bay. Crews bombing from 14,000 feet reported accurate heavy AA with several planes being hit but with no serious damage.

Feb 28, 1944. Off to Momote again with the 65th hitting supply and defense areas. The other squadrons were gearing for a special mission. Twelve aircraft were sent to Nadzab for a night mission under orders from ADCOM.

Feb. 28/29, 1944. Aircraft were reporting weather and were busy harassing Mamote with night strikes using frag and phosphorous bombs. One 64th crew carried out a predawn strafing run on barges and buildings. At 0740 on the 29th Ken's Men bombed the area where the 1st Cavalry was to come ashore. The troops landed and met little resistance. By 0940 bulldozers were at work enlarging the airstrip and making hardstands.

Feb 29, 1944. The 12 planes sent to Nadzab, including 6 from the 63rd, joined with planes from the 90th BG to hit Hollandia after midnight. Only the 63rd had been trained and had some experience for this kind of mission. So the 24 planes took off at staggered times and hit the target at staggered times also. The object was to keep the Japanese up all night and wonder what was next as the 1,000 pounders dropped. This turned out to be a bust due to weather. Planes were arriving far off their scheduled times and many never made it to Hollandia. Only a few planes dropped their bombs in the target area and did wake up the search light crews. The planes were land at Nadzab after dawn as the valley approaches were tricky at night. One plane made an emergency landing at Finschhafen as it was badly damaged but the crew was fine.

A 63rd crew piloted by Lt. Biddison sighted a four ship convoy near Hollandia and attacked. Two direct hits were made on a Fox Uncle causing several secondary explosions. Ship probably sunk.

In early February five crews from the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) were assigned to the 65th Squadron for B-24 training. All the pilots were experienced and had served in England, Singapore, Egypt and other places.

At the end of February Col. Harry Hawthorne returned from the U.S. and resumed command of the 43rd from Lt. Col. Ed Scott, a long time 43rd member and former CO of the 63rd, and temporary CO of the Group, was named Deputy Group Commander with special responsibility for the 63rd Squadron. Only 6 months earlier Col. Scott had returned to the 43rd with the planes and crews for Low Altitude Bombing equipped B-24s or LABs as they were designated. These new secret planes were painted black and flew only at night manned by 63rd crews trained at Langley Field. Within a few months Col. Scott became the commander of the 90th Bomb Group. "The 43rd felt that the 90th had at last come of age, getting the most distinguished member of the 43rd as their new commander."

- Mar 1, 1944. The daylight squadrons dodged weather and made it to Lorengau Township where the enemy had a staging point. An underground fuel storage was ruptured and oil spread over the bay.
1/Lt. McGehee, flying #041 of the 63rd on an East Bismarck Sea recco, radioed that he had lost an engine and was making an emergency landing at Cape Gloucester. In landing he overshot the runway and crashed into a gully killing himself, 1/Lt. Henry Krieder, copilot, T/Sgt. Howard Dust, engineer, and S/Sgt. Liggett Gillian, assistant engineer. The rest of the crew was badly shaken up by there were no other serious injuries.
- Mar 2, 1944. Due to inclement weather the daylight squadrons hit Alexishafen and Madang again with no visible results to report. A phantom B-24 was reported in the area but nothing ever came of it.
- Mar 3, 1944. Bad weather continues so strike was against Alexishafen with 320# white phosphorous bombs dropped in supply areas starting several fires. Assessment of damage limited due to white smoke. One enemy tan, twin engine flying boat reported in vicinity of Pommera Bay.
- Mar 4, 1944. Off to But airdrome and AA that had been so troublesome. Enemy fighters from an undetermined base eluded the P-40s in escort and damaged several planes. Two landed at Nadzab with engines out. Considerable barge activity reported Wewak area.
- Mar 5, 1944. With better weather 18 planes hit Mamote and Los Negros with 1000# instantaneous fused demos. All bombs on target with considerable damage to buildings and some vehicles. A 65th recco plane sighted 5 or 6 enemy ships headed in the direction of Hollandia. They could not be found the next day so it was surmised that they had turned west and gone to Biak.
One 63rd B-24 ran into a "hell of a storm" on its mission.
- Mar 6, 1944. Six reccos, day and night, but only the 63rd saw any enemy ships but did no damage to them due to the LAB radar still having bugs that need to be worked out to prevent the bombs from falling 300 feet from the target area.
- Mar 7, 1944. All daylight squadrons headed out over the Bismarck Sea to hit naval guns on the small islands of Mdrilo and Hauwei in the Admiralties. Atrocious weather led to bombs being dropped in the water, along the shore and on reefs with little damage. Pamphlets of Japanese fairy tales were dropped. One B-24 aborted on takeoff with 5 crewmen being injured and the plane a total loss.
- Mar 8, 1944. With clear weather the group was back at the small islands of Mdrilo, Hauwei and Pityilu in the Admiralties to prevent the enemy from building up any offensive capabilities to hinder U.S. operations from Los Negros. Each squadron hit whatever targets it found worth hitting after bombing the guns. With no action from the ground, the planes strafed the buildings.

- Mar 9, 1944. No activity except reccos; one 65th on E-W equator recco and two 63rd planes saw a Catalina blast a small lugger to the Promised Land.
- Mar 10, 1944. Only the 65th was out on strike to Bowat Mission and Ring Ring Plantation on Manus Island. One element took out Ring Ring with 22 bombs out of 24 carried. The two hung bombs were salvoed into the rain forest causing a tremendous explosion and white smoke, probably from an ammo dump. The second element, short one plane that had returned to base, put 16 x 1000 pounders in and around one building that caused a brilliant explosion. Probably ammo was stored there after being diverted while en route to Rabaul or the Solomons.
The 63rd had two reccos in the West Bismarck Sea and damaged a Sugar Charlie. They also reported weather in the area.
- Mar 11, 1944. It was the 403rd's turn to hit small rear area targets - this time Lugos mission west of Lorengau. Eight B-24s were loaded with white phosphorus and 500 pound demos. The idea of blowing down the coconut trees and setting a fire did not work out, so the planes strafed at 200' with one having an engine knocked out. The 63rd damaged a ship at night.
- Mar 12, 1944. Since the group had run out of targets with the exception of Wewak, orders to pack for a move had come in on the 10th. So today there was little activity in the air except for 63rd reccos. The group began its move from Dobodura to Nadzab on this day. The bombers were equipped with cargo racks and made the 1.5 hour flight to Nadzab, were emptied and sent back to Dobo for another loading. Some planes carried 30 passengers and parachutes became a problem. Several hundred C-47 flights were made each day for the next several days. The 63rd continued reccos from Dobo during the entire move.
- Mar 11-16, 1944. The 5th AAF made a final assault on the Wewak/Tadji area and the Dagua, But and Boram strips. In all some 68 Japanese fighters were shot down and over 100 destroyed on the ground. Runways were cratered and never repaired.
- Mar 14, 1944. The 43rd joined the parade and 17 planes bombed the runways at Tadji, a satellite field about 75 miles west of the main Wewak complex. There was no enemy interception and 4 probable Tonys were seen heading in the Hollandia direction. The runways were of no use for several days at least.
- Mar 15, 1944. Eleven 403rd and 65th planes hit the gun areas and dumps near the dromes at Wewak. At least 3 planes were damaged by AA fire, but all returned safely. A large explosion shook 64th planes. It seemed to be at about 3000' altitude while they were bombing at 12,000'. No explanation ever given of this explosion.
- Mar 16, 1944. The 65th and 403rd were on the mission together again to hit Wewak. The 65th dropped all of its bombs in the water while the 403rd put all of its bombs on target with large fires resulting.

The 63rd had 3 planes out in search of a convoy north of Hollandia. They located it and Lt. Thomas and Capt. Quinette set Fox Tares on fire.

Mar 17 - 18, 1944. Continuing to pound Wewak two 43rd squadrons hit AA and gun positions, especially on Boram Point.

The 63rd was out looking for the convoy found last night and had a banner night sinking a Fox Tare Charlie, hitting a two-stack Tare Baker and doing possible damage to an escort DD or DE.

Mar 19, 1944. An off day except for reccos. The 63rd finished its move to Nadzab and was no longer operating and living divided from the rest of the group.

Mar 20, 1944. This was a sad day for the 403rd as one of its planes crashed en route from Moresby to Nadzab killing 10 men: 1/Lt. Chester Lowe (probable pilot), HQ 43rd; Capt. Wm. H. Graham, Group S-2 HQ 43rd; Capt. Moore (name and org. unknown, may have been passenger); Civilian James Jollie, a tech rep HQ 43rd; M/Sgt. George Sotpic, HQ 43rd; T/Sgt. Wm. Allen, HQ 43rd; T/Sgt. Lyle Dorr, 65th Sq.; T/Sgt. Farrel McMahon, 403rd Sq.; S/Sgt. James Svojteck, 64th Sq.; and S/Sgt. Jon Davis, 403rd Sq. Only the 63rd was out this day with 3 reccos damaging a Fox Tare Baker and an escort gunboat.

Mar 21, 1944. After a day of rest it was off to Kairiru Mission where considerable fuel was stored and large fires resulted from bombing. A Sugar Charlie was destroyed at its jetty by a 65th plane. Considerable barge activity was spotted in and around Wewak Point. The 63rd had 2 armed reccos in the West Bismarck Sea. One sighted and attacked a DD with 6 bombs bringing it to a halt. The other plane was called in and scored 3 hits sinking the ship.

Mar 22, 1944. It was a hodgepodge of targets at Wewak with the squadrons split into elements and even individual planes. AA, revetment areas and some 16 enemy planes were sighted at Boram. It was a sad day for the 403rd losing a plane 10 minutes after takeoff with all ten men lost. Pilot Thomas in 42-72780 is the only crewman named.

Mar 23, 1944. The primary Boram was socked in so Hansa Bay, the secondary, was hit hard. It was difficult to determine damage although all bombs landed in target area. AA was heavy but inaccurate. 63rd Attacked 2 ships claiming to have sunk one that capsized.

Mar 24, 1944. The daylight squadrons were given a day of rest due to terrible weather at Wewak. Reccos did fly with the 63rd having 3 and the 64th one in a daylight search. Lt. Payne, 63rd, scored a direct hit on a gun boat or minesweeper which was claimed sunk. The 64th upon returning to home base strafed a tertiary target at Sek Island. The known results were some native building blown away. (These targets were never attacked without an OK from the Aussies.)

Mar 25, 1944. 64th and 65th pounded Wewak causing several explosions and a fuel fire. Photos showed 24 planes on Boram strip but their serviceability could not be determined. No aircraft took off.

Two 63rd planes sighted a Japanese hospital ship all lighted up with electric crosses. No run was made but flares were dropped and our men imagined the lower decks were filled with healthy troops.

Mar 26, 1944. No daylight strike action.

The 63rd picked up a different hospital ship. No crosses were on the sides but one was shown forward plus circles of green and white lights. The 63rd plane circled and then continued on its mission.

Mar 27, 1944. The 403rd and 64th bombed Wewak and Kairiru Island starting a large fire and destroying a jetty. Because of clouds one flight of 64th planes could not line up and bombed AA Hansa Bay. Lots of barges and luggers were sighted in the Wewak area. A 63rd anti-radar recco passed near a Nippon DD that opened fire from some 3 miles away. One B-24 with no bombs while at 8,000' made radar calibrations. Another 63rd adventurous sighted a gunboat in the West Bismarck Sea and strafed it after missing it with bombs. The craft replied with intense medium fire damaging the B-24.

Mar 28, 1944. This was a rest day. It was obvious that Hollandia was now to get serious attention and a maximum effort to do so was set for the 30th and again on the 31st. The mission on the 30th had been planned for a long time. Some B-24s did harass the enemy at Hollandia along with the 90th BG. They dropped flares and bombs with no specific targets. Only 4 of 10 planes made it through the bad weather to bomb but they could not find the airdromes. Flying to Hollandia at night was very tricky with high mountains only 15 miles inland and the bombers with no radar.

Mar 29, 1944. There were 3 night missions with the 64th dropping flares and frag bombs on Hollandia at night but with no real targets. This was harassment to keep the enemy up at night. The 63rd lurked off shore with 2 or 3 planes ready to intercept a possible convoy.

Mar 30, 1944. The Japanese were certain that there would be no daylight bombing of Hollandia with fighter escort out of the question. With improved weather 7 B-24s, 5 from the 43rd, hit dispersal areas with frags. Considerable damage was done to aircraft lined up on the ground wingtip to wingtip. Shortly afterwards 61 B-24s with 21 from the 43rd, escorted by 8 P-38s, dropped 14,000 23 # frag bombs on AA defenses and the aircraft parking ramps. Some 40 of the Emperor's wild eagles took to the air with 10 being shot down by fighters, 7 probables and the bombers claiming 2 more. Five minutes after leaving the target, smoke rose to 7,000' and could be seen as far away as Wewak.

Mar 31, 1944. A total of 68 B-24s including 23 from the 43rd hit Hollandia with frags and HE 1000 pounders to crater runways. Numerous fires were started and the 403rd destroyed 5 bombers and 2 fighters in a repair facility. AA was ineffective. The P-38s got 14 Zekes before the rest headed to safer airdromes on Biak or Wakde. Very little damage was done to American aircraft with the exception of one lost P-38 in two days.

- Apr 1, 1944. Maj. James Pettus was appointed Deputy Group Commander, Capt. Russell Bragg was appointed Group Operations Officer and Capt. John Petersen from the 63rd was made Group S-2. Bad weather kept the planes on the ground all day.
- Apr 2, 1944. Our primary target, Kairiru Island, was overcast so the B-24s headed to Hansa Bay to hit the AA again. The guns here were hard to take out and were very effective and unfortunately the bombs were 1000 pounders not designed for hitting AA emplacements that were generally only 12' in diameter. The guns were reported to have ceased fire, but only photos taken later could determine if the gun were hit. There is much confusion in the reports by the squadrons with no report from the 403rd available. The 64th may or may not have lost a plane on takeoff with all escaping the ensuing fire except the tail gunner.
The 63rd flew one armed recco, but sighted only lights at Wadke and lost its radar later in the mission.
- Apr 3, 1944. All 3 strike squadrons reached Hollandia where AA, both light and heavy, was the target. Most bombs fell in assigned area, but dust and smoke made it difficult to determine the damage done. Some shipping reported. P-38s turned on 6 Jap fighters. The 403rd lost a plane on takeoff losing 4 men: 1/Lt. Walter Cole, pilot; S/Sgt. Richard Fowlkes, gunner; S/Sgt. Wayne Laco, gunner and S/Sgt. Harry Rouse, Jr. The rest of the crew was listed as wounded in action.
- Apr 4, 1944. More bad weather caused the planes hitting the Wewak area to scatter their bombs far and wide. The flight down the Markham Valley was very difficult due to the extreme frontal conditions and with mountains on each side.
- Apr 5, 1944. Back to Hollandia for more AA guns. The 65th strung its bombs through the target and into a wooded area where they hit a fuel dump. Several fires and smoke to 12,000' were reported. The 64th hit nearby Homadi Island where they started fires as did the 403rd. The bomb load was 24 X 250# demos that gave good coverage and did a lot of damage. Good fighter coverage and no enemy planes attacked the bombers.
- Apr 6, 1944. No report for daylight squadrons.
The 63rd sent 6 aircraft off in intervals to strike Wadke Island to keep the enemy on its toes and in foxholes. The planes carried 40 X 120# frag bombs. The targets were planes dispersed at Wadke from Wewak and Hollandia. Fires and explosions were sighted and reported among the parked aircraft. The AA was light and inaccurate.
- Apr 7, 1944. Bad weather cancelled all daylight strikes. The 63^{rd sent} out 2 weather reccos and found conditions good up to Humboldt Bay, but by the morning of the 8th it had deteriorated.
- Apr 8, 1944. Back to Hollandia, but poor weather made bombing only fair although several good fires were started. The Japanese had dispersed their supplies so sometimes a bomb outside the assigned area brought good results. The 64th started a fine fire with smoke up

to 8000' though only 50% of their bombs were on target. The 403rd became separated from the rest of the group and bombed But near Wewak.

The 63rd had two planes on armed/weather recco. A radar indication was made not far from Wewak but disappeared. It is presumed this may have been a submarine. Bad weather over the entire route.

Apr 9, 1944. Bad weather in the northeast made bombing of But impossible, so it was back to Hansa Bay the secondary and that accurate AA. It was too accurate and the 65th lost its lead plane with a direct hit in the #4 engine. The plane, under partial control, headed out to sea but soon lost an outer wing panel. No chutes were sighted and B-24s circling the area sighted only a few floating oxygen bottles. The men in the plane are not identified. The 63rd had 2 planes on armed/weather recco. With no sightings one plane dropped its bombs on Wakde and started 3 intense fires north of the strip.

Apr 10, 1944. Back to Hansa Bay for revenge on the AA, but the weather protected the Emperor's gunners. Even the 63rd flew a daylight mission and a recco to see what the area looked like, rather than only on the scope. It had nil sightings.

Apr 11, 1944. Hansa Bay again but this time to bomb barges and jetties. Raids on Hansa Bay were kept up as a deception to the enemy. These were intended to make the enemy think that the next invasion would be there whereas this would be one more island skipped in the move to Tokyo.

Two 63rd planes took off for a night mission with nil results. One had to return due to radio trouble. These planes radioed weather conditions back to the base regularly during their missions.

Apr. 12, 1944. With better weather the 3 daylight squadrons made it to Hollandia with fair to good bombing results. Accurate but not intense AA. Enemy fighters in area and the 403rd claimed to have shot one down. A 90th B-24 was shot down and the crew was seen to bail out.

The 63rd encountered a rare episode of radar interference around Wewak and Hollandia.

Apr. 13, 1944. Dagua was hit today. AA guns were seen but were not in use. Bombing was excellent with several strings of 1,000 pounders through the target.

The Sea Hawks hit Wadke with numerous fires started. The AA was intense and accurate.

April 15, 1944. While the 64th had a day of rest the 65th and 403rd hit Tadj. They bombed the strip and staging areas with no opposition by AA or enemy aircraft. Bombing was excellent under these conditions. One 65th plane suddenly lost 3,000 feet when all 5 engines quit. It recovered and returned to base. Probably a fuel transfer problem. The 63rd had another night like the 14th with more radar interference. Looking for a technical solution to this potential problem.

April 16, 1944. At 2:00 am the Sea Hawks put 6 planes over Wadke. Each dropped 8 XC 1000 lb. demos that fell all over the tiny island keeping all enemy personnel up all night.

Heavy headwinds caused fuel problems and one plane landed at Saidor and another at Finschhafen.

The daylight squadrons dropped 1000 pounders set for 3000 feet intervals on the supply dumps in Hollandia. The weather was good except for heavy winds. There was some confusion over the target. The fighter coverage was excellent and the AA was silent. Some fires were seen, but the flight home became a nightmare due to weather. This day became known as Black Sunday for the 5th AAF. (See Michael John Claringbould's *BLACK SUNDAY*.) This was the worst day for the 5th AAF during the entire war yet not a single plane was lost due to enemy action. This story should be told in our newsletter, but not here. The 403rd lost one plane and no trace was found of it.

Apr 17, 1944. The weather was still bad but the 63rd got one B-24 recco off for a night flight but it was on instruments for most of the time. The other squadrons put one airplane each airborne on a search mission for planes lost on Black Sunday.

Apr 18, 1944. Weather prevented any daylight strikes. The time was used for maintenance and training.

The 63rd put two planes up that night but with nil results.

Apr 19, 1944. No daylight strikes due to bad weather.

The Sea Hawks damaged a Sugar Charlie and strafed a fishing boat in an unusual daylight mission that needed all of their radar for navigation.

Apr 20, 1944. Repeat of the 19th for the 3 daylight squadrons. The 63rd had two armed reccos in the vicinity of Wadke and they found 3 targets. A direct hit with a 1000 pounder resulted in a multicolored explosion and sinking of a Sugar Charlie.

Apr 21, 1944. All 3 strike squadrons hit But and Dagua Strips to make the unserviceable during the Hollandia landing set for the 22nd and the Tadjji invasion this very day. Bombing was not good although Dagua strip was knocked out for a few days.

Apr 22, 1944. With the Navy covering the Hollandia invasion, the 43rd bombed Hansa Bay to hit the very accurate AA guns there. Photos showed that the guns had been moved and the bombs were on targets that were no longer there.

The 63rd did some local calibration flying to sharpen their radar skills.

Apr 23, 1944. The 43rd went back to Hansa Bay with 12 X 500 lb. bombs in each plane with a better chance to get into the new gun emplacements. Bombing results were good and the AA was silent. Dust made it difficult to assess the damage.

Apr 24, 1944. Another day that the Group would like to forget. Of the 204 500 lb. bombs dropped on the large target, only 24 were on target. Although weather was a factor, it was no excuse for such poor bombing.

The 63rd were on unarmed reccos due to the fact that the U.S. craft were all over the area and this would prevent any accidental hits on our own forces.

Apr 25, 1944. The 65th went to Dagua with 2000 pounders to crate the runway and prevent any air evacuation of the strip. Bombing was good but there was always the problem of the 2000 lb. bombs having a slow release or hang up.
All other squadrons including the 63rd had the day off.

Apr 26, 1944. Weather called a halt to the mission, but the 403rd had 4 planes airborne before the strike was cancelled. They were told to drop their 2000 lb. bombs on the Hansa Bay supply areas. Most bombs were in the target area and there were no release problems.

Apr 27, 1944. This was a max effort day and 24 B-24s went on the biscuit bombing run to Hollandia. Some of our invasion troops had been cut off from the main supply route by a landslide and some roads to the airstrips had been cut off. Many men were low on food supplies, so food was being dropped by parachute from the B-24s to these men. Some C-47s managed to land at Sentani Airstrip. All drops were on target with the exception of one that landed in the water but was picked up by a PT boat. The 64th returned with a bullet hole in one prop. No one claimed responsibility but was the 64th firing at itself or even at the 403rd?

Apr 28, 1944. The strike squadrons were given a new target, Biak, some 800 miles from Nadzab and the longest strike penetration to date. Of the 21 aircraft scheduled for the mission, 20 got airborne and 15 reached the target. The bombs were frags with the hopes that they could repeat the success of Hollandia and destroy many enemy aircraft on the ground. There was no fighter coverage and the 43rd encountered no enemy aircraft although the 90th BG reported a number of attacks. There were virtually no enemy planes on the ground, but an enemy AA spotter flying well to one side of the group was relaying the course, altitude and air speed to the AA gunners. Despite this the enemy fire was inaccurate. Bombing was good with 6 enemy planes sited burning on the ground. It was long day with a 10.5 hour flight and some planes sweating out fuel on the return trip. This would not be the last bombing of Mokat Drome.

The Sea Hawks 12 planes were paired up with 8 from the 868th Sqd. from the 13 AAF to give a max effort against Wadke. Only 18 planes were airborne and 17 of them reached the target. They carried 160 lb. frags with extension fuses that were very effective against planes, men, vehicles and anything else on the ground. There were a few fires sited and the bombing continued into the 29th.

Apr 29, 1944. The Sea Hawks were back to Wadke with 6 planes carrying frags to hit the parking and bivouac areas. The bombing was poor due to radar failure on 2 planes, but a few fires were started.

No report is given on what the 64th, 65th and 403rd did this date.

Apr 30, 1944. This was a day of rest for all 4 squadrons. After a strenuous 2 weeks of missions both men and machines needed the rest.

A note by Jim Pettus indicates that on the last missions and especially the one to Biak, a bomb bay tank must have been used in each plane although he can find no record of the fuel loads used.

43rd BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION 2006 REUNION
BRANSON, MISSOURI
AUGUST 23 - 28, 2006

We are including this information in the newsletter to bring to your attention the Branson Reunion. The full details for the Reunion have been mailed by Branson Hospitality Inc. to all of our members this last week. This information in our News Letter serves as an added reminder and if you have not received the mailing from Branson directly for some reason then call Chuck Rauch at 941-639-6421 or write or call Branson direct. Give them the above information and Reunion date and they will send the complete information to you. Make your reservations early directly to Branson Hospitality for both the Hotel and Registration fee by June 24th or we will lose fifty percent of the rooms they are holding for us. We have included the Registration Form if you have not received one.

Branson Hospitality Inc.
P.O. Box 1167
Branson MO 65615

Phone: 1-800-877-8687 ext.0
Ask for Reunion Reservationist

SEE YOU IN BRANSON

(FROM THE PETTUS MANUSCRIPT)

- May 1, 1944. This was a maintenance and training day to get ready for the max effort strike to Sawar/Sarmi on the 2nd.
- May 2, 1944. Bad weather cancelled the strike and maintenance and training continued.
- May 3, 1944. Ditto the 1st and 2nd.
- May 4, 1944. The daylight squadrons hit Boram Strip AA positions again. There was no enemy AA or air opposition and the bombing was good. The 63rd kept them up all night at Sawar/Sarmi. The planes were followed by 2 unidentified aircraft that followed them for 40 minutes and did not answer IFF. This has happened before and it is presumed that they were enemy aircraft flying along at a distance.
- May 5 & 6, 1944. These were down days due to weather. On the 6th, the 63rd hit Mokmar on Biak with little success. They dropped frags but there did not appear to be many enemy planes on the ground.
- May 7, 1944. The only note is that the 64th hit Sawar/Sarmi.
- May 8, 1944. This was another down day for the strike squadrons due to bad weather, but the 63rd went back to Mokmar on an armed recco. Dropped on the dispersal areas were 500 pounders, but the areas seemed to be deserted. There was no AA or interception. The runways did not appear to have been repaired since the last raid. The strike squadrons did put armed recco search planes in the air looking for a missing 64th plane. (No mention of when this plane was lost.)
- May 9, 1944. The Sea Hawks staged 4 planes through Los Negros with the 13th AAF Snoopers to look for an enemy convoy supposedly heading for Manokwari. No convoy was found and the secondary was Mokmar on Biak. After dropping their bombs, they headed to Hollandia to refuel and debrief. Then they headed back to Nadzab to make it a long night.
- May 10, 1944. Two 63rd B-24s bashed Mokmar after an armed recco in the West Bismarck Sea. There were no sightings or reaction from the ground at Mokmar. The idea was to keep the enemy off balance while our forces would take control of Wadke in the near future. The strike squadrons had a day off.
- May 11, 1944. The strike squadrons attempted to get to Wadke despite the bad weather, but only the 64th got there. Bombing was fair with some bombs in the gun area but dust obscured making a damage assessment. The 65th and 403rd bombed the Boram/Brandi Plantation and were rewarded with fires, explosions and what appeared to be an ammo dump going up in a large cloud of whitish smoke.

- May 12, 1944. This was a quiet day. The 65th sent 2 planes to New Britain for supply drops to stranded airmen and the Australian patrols that were helping them. The drop was successful and "Thanks" were awaiting the crews when they returned to base. The 63rd had 2 armed reccos with no sightings and one cut short with engine problems.
- May 13, 1944. With the troop landings on Sawar/Sarmi imminent 3 heavy groups pounded the area with no spectacular results. The 64th delivered supplies to the New Britain stranded men, but several chutes broke away from the bundles.
- May 14, 1944. It was back to the Sawar area to attack Maffin Drome and hit the AA positions. Despite poor weather most of the bombs hit the target areas. An element of 3 planes became separated and hit the Boram/Brindi Road and saw a large fire start. The 63rd hit the enemy drome at Sorido on Biak dropping frags with hopes of hitting planes on the ground. No planes were identified and few fires were started.
- May 15, 1944. Maffin Bay landing was set for the 17th so a max effort was readied to hit Maffin Drome with 17 planes. The bombing results were partially obscured, but the run up was clear. The Sea Hawks had 4 planes over Sorido with very little action from the ground. Dropped bombs kept enemy awake most of the night.
- May 16, 1944. It was back to Maffin Bay with 1000 pounders blasting the shoreline for the upcoming landing. One B-24 lost the fabric of the elevators but made it back to Nadzab. The AA was intense hitting 3 planes. One had to make an emergency landing at Hollandia. Bombing results were good. The 63rd had 4 planes over Sorido. A large fire was sighted. They were also on an armed recco to report weather and were on to Biak to hit runways and prevent enemy aircraft interference with the Maffin Bay landing.
- May 17, 1944. D-Day for Maffin Bay landing and the Sea Hawks sent 6 planes on a dawn attack of the Sawar/Sarmi landing area. Two of these planes had been on weather reporting for several hours before joining the other 4 to bomb the beach and clear out of the area so as not to be mistaken by U.S. navy gunners as enemy aircraft. The daylight squadrons were off to bomb several good targets on Biak. The 65th modestly claimed the largest fire ever seen in the SWPA with smoke visible as far south at Hollandia. A good deal of shipping, barges and small craft were sighted. One 403rd had engine #3 hit by AA and #4 also damaged. The plane managed a landing at Hollandia where it blew a nose wheel tire causing damage to the nose gear.
- May 18, 1944. Due to inclement weather this day was an off day for most of the squadrons. The 65th had 3 planes airborne when the strike was called off so they hit the secondary, Boram. The 63rd had 2 planes hit Sorido with frags.
- May 19, 1944. It was a max effort by the 63rd with 9 planes attacking Kamari Drome on Noemfoor Island west of Biak. The goal was to hit enemy aircraft on the ground with

18

frags, but the results were not what had been hoped for. Despite very poor weather all planes made it safely home.

May 20, 1944. Due to weather the daylight strike squadrons had the day off.
The 63rd had only one weather recco to Biak.

May 21, 1944. The Sea Hawks sent 10 planes off to Manokawari with two bomb bay tanks and 8 300 lb. demo bombs. This was the first full treatment of night bombing for Manokawari. The 8 planes that reached the target were rewarded with fires while the AA was inaccurate and the searchlights probing in every direction.

May 22, 1944. The daylight squadrons were airborne again and hit Sorido with 20 planes. The bombing was good and the AA inaccurate. Three chutes of unknown origin were sighted in the water 10 miles north of Cape Jeb.
This day started a series of armed weather reccos for the 63rd, all intended to annoy the enemy. The planes would carry frags or 500 lb. bombs and their targets were shipping, but if none was found they were to drop their bombs on land targets and head home. The target this night was Kamari.

May 23, 1944. The target for the 63rd was Sorido. No mention is made of the other squadrons.

May 24, 1944. Tonight's target for the Sea Hawks was Mokmer being hit with 300 lb. demos. Again no mention of what the other squadrons were doing.

May 25, 1944. The 63rd hit Ibdi and Mandon off Biak. A nice fire and explosion was seen at Ibdi. Where were the other 3 squadrons again?

May 26, 1944. The Sea Hawks were off to Biak again. The mission sighted a convoy of small vessels and 2 unidentified planes that shadowed one Sea Hawk for 10 minutes, but made no effort to attack. This plane was out of bombs, so it did not attack the convoy.

May 27, 1944. This was D-Day for landing on Biak so the 63rd flew to Los Negros to coordinate their efforts with the 13 AAF Snoopers for a dawn raid at Bosnek Village, the landing area for the invasion. Bombing was excellent but difficult to measure accurately as the destroyers began to shell the area at the same time.

The daylight squadrons arrived in full force as the landing took place. The planes stayed from the landing beach and hit the dromes and supply areas some 7 miles away. The landing troops met very little opposition but the Japanese troops massed between the beach and the dromes put up a fierce battle which held up our troops for 10 days. Major Pettus with one engine shot out and another leaking oil badly landed on Wadke. The crew spent a nerve wracking night with an enemy air raid killing 6 men, injuring 17 others and destroying 3 jeeps. They were flown back to Nadzab the next day in another B-24.

May 28, 1944. The 43rd was given new targets away from our troops on the ground and hit and hit Japen Island, Seroei strips and jetty. The 403rd and 64th went to Kamari on Noemfoor and started large fires while destroying at least 3 planes on the ground.

The Sea Hawks moved some of their operations to Wadke to be closer to the action and began the "Philippine Recco" that went west to Halmahara and north almost to Mindanao. Two planes on weather recco detected shipping in the Manokawari area.

May 29, 1944. The 63rd flew two weather reccos out of Wadke where the facilities were very limited and the Japanese air raids were numerous.

May 30, 1944. The daylight squadrons hit Cape Moem since weather prevented them from making it to hit guns at Mokmer on Biak.

The 63rd again flew 2 weather reccos out of Wadke.

May 31, 1944. This was a repeat of the previous day.

June 1944. June was a month of waiting and lots of frustration. Nadzab was not an ideal operational base for many reasons including weather, but in reality the war had moved past the unit's operational range. A move was a constant subject of speculation. For the Sea Hawks on the other hand flying from Nadzab was not a problem. Their targets were more to the northwest toward Biak, the Halmaheras and even as far as the Philippines. The 63rd planes generally carried more fuel and the return routes were not as hazardous as those flown by the daylight squadrons.

Hollandia had been bypassed leaving nearly 50,000 Japanese troops stranded there. Wadke was becoming operational and the landing on Biak was fully established. Biak strips would soon be available. About 12 miles offshore there was a small island named Owi that was uninhabited and flat. It was solid coral with a layer of top soil that once was the home of coconut plantation. This island was to figure large in the fortunes of the 43rd Bomb Group.

Weather had been a big problem in May and June promised to be no better.

June 1, 1944. The 64th and 403rd headed for Mokmer. The 403rd was to strike dual purpose guns not far from the strip, but unfortunately that target was selected while the crews were their aircraft being briefed. Target charts were not available and the result was poor bombing. The 64th laid its bombs on the strip, but there was no activity. The 65th spent the day on alert to look for a convoy that never was found.

June 2, 1944. Bad weather in the Ramu Valley forced the aircraft headed for Biak back from Annenberg. The 64th hit a secondary at Cape Moem. The 65th dumped on Wewak point while the 403rd had the day off.

The 63rd flew unarmed reccos to the Philippines on both the 1st and 2nd with nil sightings.

June 3, 1944. The weather improved and the 403rd and 65th hit Sawar/Sarmi with accuracy, but with no spectacular results.

The big event of the day actually took place in the early AM of the 4th when the 63rd discovered a big convoy leaving the Philippines and heading for the Halmaheras. This

convoy consisted of up to 40 vessels including possibly 2 battleships, five cruisers and ten destroyers plus many troop ships.

June 4, 1944. The 3 strike squadrons searched for the convoy in the area northwest of Manokwari. Failing to find it, the bombs were dropped on several secondary targets. Planes landed up and down the coast at Wadke, Finschhafen, Saidor and Hollandia. The 64th ran into interception plus Hamp or Tojos in the vicinity of Soepiori Island. Realizing these fighters might be cover for the convoy, they looked further with no results. The enemy fighters were not eager to engage in combat, but one was shot down. Lt. Petty, an experienced pilot from the 64th flying #991, crashed within sight of Wadke. The weather was bad; all planes were low on fuel but with no message from #991, it did not seem to be a forced landing due to low fuel. Some debris was found the next day. How unfortunate this was as the crew was a pickup crew with many of the men had finished 300 or more hours and were considered "old timers."

[There is a bit of controversy as to the dates of this next engagement, but here is the story as told by Jim Pettus.]

The night of June 4/5, the 63rd sent out 10 planes to hit this convoy. They sank 2 destroyers and damaged 3 cruisers or large destroyers. This was despite the fact that not all 10 planes found the convoy. The battleships, cruisers and damaged ships headed north while the balance of the convoy made for Sorong about 375 miles west of Biak. Later information indicated that the enemy transferred the troops to destroyers and headed at high speed to Biak. This was the same tactic the enemy used at Guadalcanal. Two of the Sea Hawks planes were damaged by AA, one seriously with the assistant engineer killed by a 40 mm hit in the bomb bay. One radar operator was injured slightly. All 10 planes made it back to base. It is moot whether or not this raid was staged through Wadke, but Jim Pettus thinks that it was as some of the men's diaries indicate that took place.

June 5, 1944. Ten B-25s attacked the convoy and sank at least 3 more vessels at the cost of 3 of their planes. USN destroyers engaged the remaining vessels and no Jap troops were landed.

The 64th and 65th scraped up 6 planes each and headed to the convoy, but on the way they were diverted to hit Boro Drome instead. Ten made it to the target and did some good bombing despite the weather.

June 5/6/7, 1944. These days also were spent collecting the planes back from the various fields where they had landed during the big search. Maintenance took place as well as removing the second bomb bay tank from the planes and waiting for better weather.

June 8, 1944. The squadrons went back to Biak to hit supply areas and gun positions around Sorido Drome. Bombing was not good with only about 50% of the bombs dropped in the target area.

June 9, 1944. Weather was the worst enemy when the 65th and 403rd hit a personnel area west of But. Results were like yesterday with only 50% of the bombs landing on target.

(Group records show a plane crash landing at Moresby, but I (Jim) can't find any squadron record of this or why a plane would be there unless it was not on a combat mission.)

On the night of 9/10 the 63rd sent 3 planes with frags to Peleliu Island in the Palau group. Two of the 3 reached the target and hit runways and dispersal areas with fires and several explosions resulting. The crews sighted a naval engagement on the horizon but gave that a wide berth as ordered.

June 10/11, 1944. These were maintenance days preparing for a mission to Palau via Mokerang in the Admiralties.

The 63rd went back to Palau, but despite hitting assigned areas, they produced no fires or spectacular results.

June 12, 1944. (?) Leaving Nadzab at 1100 local time, the 64th and 65th went to Mokerang to refuel and hit Palau through the night. This was a new kind of mission for the strike squadrons. The weather did not cooperate and of the 12 planes only 4 reached the target passing through 2 fronts. Three from the 64th hit the dispersal area with frags and started numerous fires and explosions. One 65th plane also claimed the big fire that could be seen 50 miles away. A "Pathfinder" plane with a homing device never made it to the target. Night fighters were over the area but did not attack.

June 13/14, 1944. The 64th furnished the "pathfinder" this night for a strike on Yap by way of Mokerang. The plane took off as scheduled but never reached the target. A 90th BG plane following the 64th plane reported seeing an explosion over the water and flying low to investigate, it found a burning wing on the ocean. No other 43rd plane was involved in this overnight mission.

June 14/15 1944. The struggle to hit Yap at night continued. Two 403rd planes turned back that night due to mechanical problems.

The Sea Hawks made it to Yap with little results.

June 16, 1944. Twelve planes each from the 403rd and 65th tried to fight the weather and other problems. All 403rd planes made it, and dropped their bombs with no observed results. Only one plane from the 65th (actually a 64th plane added on to make the total 12) made it to the target with similar results. This plane landed at Hollandia to refuel.

Bad weather and very long hauls were causing crews to be tired and planes to be left at other air fields resulting in parts being "borrowed" for maintaining other B-24s. It was decided to postpone all missions to Yap/Palau until the weather improved.

The 63rd, better weather birds, continued to hit this area.

June 21, 1944. [There are no entries for the 16th - 20th of June.] The 64th and 403rd bashed Noemfoor with 1000 pounders that hit the assigned area with no results observed other than bomb bursts.

The 63rd sent a 300 foot freighter to the bottom in a matter of seconds.

June 22/23/24, 1944. Time off to pack for a move but no destination known. Moving was a backbreaking task that everyone hated.

June 25, 1944. The 3 strike squadrons put 18 planes in the air to hit Kamari again. It was long trip up the valley and back for 10 hours. They dropped 250 GP pounders with only small fires being seen.

The 63rd sent one plane to Peleliu to drop frags and show that the island was not forgotten. A small fire resulted.

June 26, 1944. Poor weather over Noemfoor's Kamari Drome caused the strike force to go the secondary, an airstrip and staging area on the island at Nambar. 90% of the bombs fell on target with some planes going as low as 3000 feet to get under the weather. Some planes stopped along the way home for the night due to bad weather in the valley. Some 403rd planes hit Cape Moem, the tertiary target.

June 27/28, 1944. All daylight strikes were cancelled due to the weather.

The Sea Hawks flew several night missions but failed to make contact with a suspected quarry.

June 29/30, 1944. These were days of maintenance and training plus more packing for the move to a base in the Biak area. This would take the group out of Aussie territory and into Dutch New Guinea.

July 1944

Jul 1-2, 1944. The strike squadrons hit Kandari Drome on Noemfoer with 250 pounders on July 1st. This was an attempt to destroy fortifications the Japs were building. Excellent bombing resulted. On the 2nd they dropped 1000 pounders with great care as the allied forces had landed on the island 4 hours before the drop took place. Little to no enemy opposition took place. The Sea Hawks hit Pelalia Strip on Palau with frags and incendiaries with only small fires being started.

Jul 3, 1944. The 63rd was on reccos and carried frags. One plane bombed a reef believing it was a ship.

The strike squadrons were off for maintenance as they were through the 6th. They were also having the bombers equipped with cargo racks for the move to Owi.

Jul 4-6, 1944. The 63rd hit Peleliu on the 4th. On the 5th they bombed Klarrbeek Island. On the 6th a convoy was sighted and hits were scored on a medium freighter with a skip bombing attack due to faulty radar on the plane. The freighter was declared sunk.

Jul 7, 1944. Today began the big airlift of 43rd and other unit personnel and baggage to Owi. The strip was serviceable but fuel was very limited. So the bombers were fueled with only 500 gallons for the trip back to Nadzab. This move with the bombers took place until the 16th.

The 63rd had been staging out of Wadke Island for about a month now. The area was subject to nightly air raids by the Japs from Biak until it fell. Then the raids continued for some time from the Halmaheras until night fighters got the raiders under control.

Planes of all types landing on Wadke because of battle damage or mechanical problems were quickly stripped of parts to get other planes in the air.

The 63rd bombed Palau with frags and started a fire seen 30 miles away.

Jul 9, 1944. The squadron attacked a Sugar Able at Palau with no results. The 63rd continued its missions nightly with at least 2 planes each night on armed reccos looking for shipping. It flew at least 1 mission from Owi before moving there on the 14th and closing shop at Nadzab and Wadke.

Jul 10, 1944. Two Sea Hawks planes dropped 500 pounders on Ngesebus (Sp?) Drome after failing to find any shipping for targets.

Jul 11, 1944. The 63rd attacked Peleliu and caused fires and a large explosion.

Jul 15, 1944. With the 63rd moved to Owi 4 planes took to the air this night. Two went to Ngebeus and 2 hit Peleliu. The weather was so poor that no real results were seen.

Jul 16, 1944. The 3 Sea Hawks planes headed for some ships and 2 vessels were attacked. Although the Hawks claimed one was an aircraft carrier, this was very doubtful.

Jul 17, 1944. The 64th had the honor of being the first strike squadron to fly a combat mission from Owi. Nine planes headed to Manokwari to hit AA positions. With poor weather and despite some elements making 6 runs, the targets remained elusive in the rain and haze.

The 63rd kept the Japanese at Yap awake with a night bombing.

Jul 18, 1944. The strike forces had been busy with the move to Owi and no missions were undertaken from the 2nd through the 16th of July. Building a camp on Owi was heavy and difficult work. The island being so small soon became a nightly target of the Japanese planes that generally resulted in little damage. Many of the hundreds of frags that these planes dropped did not go off and soon became objects for souvenir hunters the next morning. Several men were injured gathering these and one unidentified 43rd man was killed. He was the only 43rd man killed on Owi by air raids of gathering of frag bombs for souvenirs.

The Sea Hawks sent out 3 planes but results were weather reports and a miss on a merchant ship.

Jul 19, 1944. Pettus' manuscript is ambiguous as to just which day the first strike of any of the day strike squadrons took place from Owi, but it seems to be the 64th might have flown as mission to Manokwari this day but with poor weather making the mission difficult.

The 63rd went back to Yap and Babelthuap to keep the Japanese off balance as to where the next shoe would drop.

Jul 20-21, 1944. The 65th and 403rd were still waiting for their sea lift to arrive at Owi so only the 64th was operational. It went to Manokwari again. With better weather and using a full load of 100 lb. demos, the AA batteries were definitely damaged.

Jul 22, 1944. The 64th pulled a double making 2 missions in one day. The first was to Biak to hit the "Indi" pocket a ridge where hundreds of Japanese were dug in and defying shelling, naval guns, snipers, etc. Eight 64th bombers took off at 0830 and flying in 3 elements dropped sixty-four 1000 pounders right on target. Our ground troops moved in immediately and the planes were back on the ground by 0925. They were then loaded for a mission to Manokwari.

That afternoon the same 8 planes went to Manokwari, only 200 miles from Owi, and covered the AA with 10 lb. demos.

Four Sea Hawks went out for the night and hit Yap, Babelthuap and Peleliu. Only a few small fires were sighted.

- Jul 23, 1944. The workhorse 64th sent 9 planes in 3 elements to 3 different enemy airstrips, Babo, Samate and Manokwari. The bombing at Babo was hampered by clouds, Samate was socked in and Manokwari, already much battered, got the worst of it with many more holes blown in the strip. The 63rd went back to Babelthruap and Ngosebus with frags and 100 pounders. A number of small explosions were reported.
- Jul 25, 1944. The 64th had a day of rest. The 65th and 403rd were getting their planes ready for their first daylight mission from Owi the next day. The 63rd sent out 2 armed reccos with not sightings reported and no secondary targets assigned.
- Jul 26, 1944. The 64th and 65th hit the airstrip on Samate while the 403rd hit the strip on nearby Ramsiki. That night the 63rd attacked and sank a 4500 ton Fox Tare Charlie south of the Halmaheras. Hit with a 1000 lb. bomb, the ship was set on fire and sank.
- Jul 27, 1944. The daylight squadrons headed for new targets on Halmahera Island. The target was the dispersal areas of Lolobata Drome. Although the area was covered with frags assessment of the damage was difficult due to smoke and dust. These made it hard to tell whose bombs dropped where. Two of 7 Nip fighters made an attack on the 403rd and 1 was shot down quickly. That night 2 Sea Hawk bombers had good luck with their radar in the same area and found targets but missed them. A great deal of soul searching took place as to why so many radar misses of late. Was it the training, calibration or mechanical problems with the new system that were under constant modification?
- Jul 28, 1944. The 3 daylight squadrons hit the oil fields on the island of Ceram, a new target. A lovely fire was started after the bombing by the 5 of 18 planes that made it to the target. Two 64th, one 65th and two 403rd planes managed to destroy a pumping station and start several fires with smoke to 4000 feet. The other planes hit secondary and tertiary targets. The planes staggered back to Owi throughout the day with one B-24 landing at Wadke. Takeoff had been delayed by the collapse of a nose wheel. The following planes had to reverse direction for takeoff. Bomb release problems were plentiful. This was probably due to electrical problems caused by the weeks of inaction and cargo hauling.
- I'll Be Around* a 63rd plane crashed with a C-47 on takeoff and then plowed through several parked planes: 2 C-47s; 2 P-39s; 1 P-38; 1 P-61 and 1 B-25. The bombardier was killed and the pilot, copilot, 2 gunners and the radar operator were injured.

Jul 29, 1944. The 64th and 65th managed to penetrate the weather and bomb Boela with good results. The targets were oil loading facilities, the water front with the airstrip being secondary. All were well hit with 1000 pounders, but the airstrip was soon back in service. The 403rd hit the secondary target, Otawari Airstrip.

Jul 30, 1944. It was back to Boela's airstrip with 1000 pounders. With better weather the planes hit the runway and adjacent parking area with a lot of smoke and fires reported.

The 63rd had 2 armed reccos out in the Halmahera Sea but found no targets.

Jul 31, 1944. The group hit Galela Strip on Halmahera some 600 miles away. The planes carried 250s and 500 pounders to drop on the dispersal areas. The bombing was excellent and at least 15 enemy planes were destroyed on the ground. Much to the surprise of the crews, Gen. Ennis "The Menace" Whitehead was on hand to meet them. This was a rarity as most enlisted men and junior officers seldom saw any of the generals much less to meet one.

The Sea Hawks' reccos had radar failure and did not complete their mission except 1 did drop frags on Agesebus Drome starting fires and explosions.

July was a hard month for the group. The scrub typhus epidemic broke up crews, but with hard work the men managed to weld crews together with the replacements as well as working with the ground crews. The mortality rate of the mite was less than 2%, but many victims were left with heart murmurs and symptoms similar rheumatic fever.

AUGUST 1944

Nobody was sorry to see July pass. New targets like Borneo to the west and the Philippines to the north were inviting. Allied troops had landed and taken Sansapor and New Guinea and new fighter strips had been constructed on a nearby offshore island of Middleburn.

The island of Ceram and Halmahera were the first targets to be neutralized. The weather on Owi was good but this was not true of the targets areas.

Aug 4, 1944. All 3 squadrons took off to hit aircraft on the ground at Haroekoe Airdrome on the island with the same name. They carried 20 lb. frags, but the target was covered and they hit the secondary, the oil fields of Boela. Since frags are not the proper bomb for oil targets, little damage was sited. One twin engine aircraft was destroyed on the ground. Enemy fighters gave minor interception with some phosphorus bombs dropped on the 64th. The presence of P-38s resulted in no serious passes made at the bombers.

The Sea Hawks were out almost every night of the month to date but with poor bombing results as the radar was not too effective when the targets were close to shore and among numerous islands.

Aug 5, 1944. With bad weather over Haroekoe the group went back to Boela, but the 64th lost a plane over the target. A/A was heavy and accurate but not so intense there multiple planes were hit. *Bombs Away* #006 with Lt. James R. Barber in command had an explosion in the bomb bay and immediately burst into flames. One chute was seen to open, but no landing was seen and it was not certain that anyone was in the chute. The plane may have had a bomb malfunction but more likely an A/A detonated some of the frags.

Aug 6, 1944. No report.

Aug 7, 1944. All 3 strike squadrons hit Lolobata Drome with 390 100 pounders. Numerous fires were started along with one large explosion. The 63rd had 3 planes out this night, 1 to Lolobata and 2 to Bassa Airfield on Mindanao.

Aug 8, 1944. Back to Lolobata, but weather forced the squadrons to hit the secondary target, Manokwari. It was big surprise to have 100 lb. bombs set off 2 explosions that rocked the B-24s at 10,000' after the target had been hit so many times. No doubt a well concealed ammo dump.

Aug 9, 1944. The daylight squadrons hit Liang Drome despite poor weather. Only the edges of the target were visible so no assessment of damage was attempted.

The 63rd got a real boost when Maj. Harry Staley, formerly of the 63rd and legendary skip bombing, rejoined the squadron. He was assigned as operations officer to learn the transition from B-17s to B-24s. Within a few weeks he was leading missions and was a big asset to Col. Hawthorne, the C.O.

Aug 10, 1944. The target was Galela Airdrome and photos showed at least 40 enemy planes on the ground. The 100 lb. demos were right on target dropping in the dispersal parking and revetment areas. V Bomber Command assessed that at least 10 planes were destroyed and as many were damaged. The 63rd worried these same airdromes with attacks on and off over several hours. A plane would hit an airdrome and then head off to look for shipping. Soon after another plane would attack the same airdrome at a different altitude and speed and in turn head out to look for shipping. These same planes reported weather every half hour to aid for the next day's strike.

Aug 11, 1944. Weather cancelled the daylight strike.

The 63rd went to Davao and back to the Lolobata area to a new strip named Hatetebako where they hit an ammo dump.

Aug 12, 1944. It was off to Davao to hit A/A and dispersal areas. Two twin-engine planes were claimed destroyed on the ground and another damaged. That night a 63rd plane hitting Lolobata dropped all of its bombs in the water, but another sighted and sank a Fox Tare Charlie in Davao Gulf. It also attacked another target but missed.

Aug 13, 1944. No entry.

Aug 14, 1944. The strike squadrons had a day of rest and getting tech supplies caught up.

The Sea Hawks hit the docks at Davao and missed a Fox Tare Baker by a narrow margin. Again the squadron was trying to figure out why so many recent attacks missed by a small margin - maybe 100'.

Aug 15, 1944. With a new supply of frags the daylight squadrons Lolobata under good weather conditions. Over 3000 twenty-pound frags fell in the dispersal area resulting in a number of large fires. A/A was heavy, and although 6 planes had minor damage only one man was wounded.

Aug 16, 1944. Planes on the ground at Miti Drome were the target as well as a strike to make the target unserviceable. The bombing was good starting numerous fires and destroying at least 2 planes on the ground and damaging others in the revetment area.

The 63rd could claim only a near miss in Kaoe Bay this night.

Aug 17, 1944. It was back to Lolobata to destroy any aircraft still on the ground.

Very few were seen. Radio chatter indicated that there were 14 enemy fighters airborne, but the only fighters actually sighted were P-38s in pursuit. Bombing was good but no fires were started in the area where the bombs fell amid parked aircraft. The only claim could be to damaging enemy aircraft. The 63rd were making life miserable in Kaoe Bay and Davao keeping the enemy up all night and dropping a bomb here and there. The only results were some small fires.

Aug 18, 1944. The strike squadrons were grounded due to weather. The 64th lost a plane when the gear folded up on landing after a practice bombing mission. No one was injured, but 5 jeeps were damaged when the plane slid into them.

Aug 19, 1944. With better weather the squadrons went on a multi-target mission in the Ceram area. They were to head to Manloa Airdrome and bomb if they found targets. If not, they were to bomb a town a few miles away. One squadron bombed the primary target causing little visible damage. The other 2 squadrons hit the town starting 4 nice fires.

The Sea Hawks found no shipping and dropped its 500 pounders on Kaoe (pronounced COW) Township.

Aug 20, 1944. The target was a staging area near Tabalo Village on northern Halmahera where numerous barges and small freighters had been seen. The 18 B-24s wiped out 75 buildings, a pier and caused severe damage. A few trucks and people were seen on the ground but the area looked pretty deserted.

The 63rd hit Kaoe Town that night and had another near miss on a freighter.

Aug 21, 1944. The supply area of Wasile Bay on Halmahera was to be hit today. Targets were jetties and dumps nearby. Bombing was excellent, but only 1 fair explosion was sighted.

The Sea Hawks went after Kaoe Town and Davao again with disappointing results.

Aug 22, 1944. Weather grounded the strike squadrons.

The 63rd was rewarded for its attack on Davao with a fire that was visible for 25 miles.

Aug 23, 1944. Galela an airfield on Halmahera was the target, but if not a sufficient number of planes were on the ground to justify using 1000 pounders, the squadrons were to go on to the supply/depot a few miles away. That is where they went and dropped 93 1000 pounders on a supply dump starting fires and destroying a number of buildings.

The 63rd went back to Kaoe Town to keep them up all night and to report weather.

Aug 24, 1944. Enemy aircraft on the ground on Halmahera were down to about 21 at 6 airfields, so the offense switched to supply and personnel targets. So on this date the B-24s was after troop concentrations south of Lolobata and laid waste to a bivouac area. The 403rd missed the intended target but started a very large fuel and ammo fire which kept growing by the hour as confirmed by strafers coming in later.

The Sea Hawks sent out 2 planes but with little success although they thought they had hit a ship but were not given credit for such.

Aug 25, 1944. The lead ship miscued the planes following it and 2 squadrons missed the target completely. The 403rd hit the Bull's Eye at Karokoe Drome amid light A/A, but with nothing to report for results.

Two 63rd bombers attacked a small island in Davao Gulf and did not sink it.

Aug 26-27, 1944. Bad weather so the squadrons used the time to catch up on maintenance.

Aug 28, 1944. The target was Ambon Town and in particular 2 buildings reported to be officers' quarters complete with geisha girls. Both buildings were claimed to be destroyed and 7 large fires were started in the area. A/A was heavy and accurate hitting several planes. This was nothing compared to the danger from the 22nd BG being off course and dropping their bombs through

the second element of the 65th Squadron's formation. The only damage was a 14" gash in one wing caused by an arming vane from one of the bombs. The Sea Hawks sent out 3 planes to Davao this night but bad weather made it difficult to pick out particular targets, but the squadron kept the enemy up all night. Another 63rd plane bombed "Cow" Town.

Aug 28, 1944. Bob Hope showed up at the revetment area, not the makeshift theater as planned, and christened a new B-24 *BOB'S HOPE* with the comment, "They named this ship after me because they couldn't keep its nose down."

Aug 29, 1944. The major supply point of Wasile Bay was the target today. Eighty-two 1000 pounders ere dropped in the staging area resulting in 2 large explosions. A/A was accurate but not intense. One aircraft hit. Targets like this one were being hit by not only the 43rd BG but the 22nd and 90th as well as by the B-25s that generally came in after the heavies had bombed. Their hopes were that the deadly light A/A would have been taken out by the B-24s.

The 63rd went back to Davao hitting a barracks area south of town. They dropped 260 lb. frags with extension fuses. These are very nasty against vehicles, barracks, etc.

Aug 30, 1944. Terrible weather cancelled all strikes.

The Sea Hawks sent 3 planes to Davao to hit Matina Drome. Some fires were started and one very large explosion was seen near the base of a jetty a mile from the base.

Aug 31, 1944. There was no group strike.

The 63rd went back to Davao with frags and HEs. Numerous small fires were started as well as 2 large conflagrations. It could not be determined what was hit and burning due to the heavy black smoke coupled with rain and clouds, but obviously something was set afire as frags do not burn.

August started out slowly, but by the end of the month KEN'S MEN were on a roll. In all 329 sorties were flown, and the group was capable of putting up 3 strike squadrons each day plus the 63rd's nightly flights. The bad news was that 250 men had to be evacuated due to scrub typhus. That was about 10% of the unit's strength.

[Note. S/Sgt. Robert W. White's diary indicates that the pilot in the 65th B-24 shot down over Hansa Bay on April 9, 1944, was Lt. J.W. Taylor. Insert this information in that date in this edition of Jim Pettus' manuscript. Jim Cherkauer]

SEPTEMBER 1944

Sep 1, 1944. The month started with a bang. KEN'S MEN, the 90th and 22nd Bomb Groups bombed the Philippines for the first time hitting Licanan Drome near Davao with 20 lb. frags. The targets were enemy aircraft on the ground, but not too many were sighted. About 10 Hamps and Zekes intercepted the 43rd and some were very aggressive. 2/Lt. Norris F. Weaver, 403rd pilot, was killed, and S/Sgt. Robert E. Brailer, nose gunner, was severely injured and died 2 days later. Two other gunners were injured by fighter fire, and ten 43rd planes were hit by AA. Due to weather the P-38 fighter cover arrived too late to help. KEN'S MEN destroyed about 10 planes on the ground. Group Commander, Col. Harry Hawthorne led the 65th and Lt. Col. Harry Staley, Group Operations Officer, led the 43rd. Several crews that had completed their tours and were scheduled to go home had asked to come along on this historically important mission. The 5th AF claimed 38 Jap planes destroyed on the ground, but that figure does not jibe with the number of enemy aircraft in the 43rd's target.

Other groups suffered more AA fire and lost 2 planes over the target.

[A previous edition of our Newsletter indicated that S/Sgt. Samuel Commons, 65th Flight Engineer, was credited with shooting down a Jap fighter. It was some 50+ years later when Sam was awarded a DFC for that accomplishment. Both Gen. MacArthur and Gen. Kenny had reported to Washington that there was no enemy fighter interception. That is another story.]

That night the Sea Hawks hit another drome, Sassa, in the Davao area. Two large fires were started.

Sep 2, 1944. Those crews that did not make the first raid on the Philippines had their chance to go there today. The target was a town named Bunawan in the Davao area and near a big supply yard and a boat building facility. They dropped 500 pounders with good results. Of the 17 planes that got off the ground, 2 had mechanical problems. Many planes from yesterday's mission were being patched or serviced. The fighter cover arrived on time and although enemy fighters were sighted, there was no interception. AA was accurate. The weather was broken and several planes bombed the secondary target. The 63rd found no shipping and hit Matina Drome.

Sep 3, 1944. It was back to Celebes for the strike squadrons with a shipyard supply area and a fish cannery on the Lambeth Straits being the targets. The target areas were heavily damaged or wiped out. There was no AA but about 8 enemy fighters tried to break up the show dropping aerial burst bombs with ineffective results. No 43rd planes were damaged, but the 403rd claimed a "probable" enemy plane shot down. The 63rd was back at Sassa that night with 260 pound frags, but there was no apparent damage.

Sep 4, 1944. Bad weather grounded the strike squadrons.

That night Lt. Roland Fisher of the 63rd had his encounter with a night fighter over Davao. In brief, a Jap night fighter either deliberately rammed his aircraft into the belly of the B-24 or was blinded by the searchlights as was Fisher's crew. A 20mm shell passed through the waist of the B-24 and 2 crewmen were slightly injured. Fisher managed to bring a badly damaged B-24 back to home base. [This story was featured in detail in a previous edition of the Newsletter.]

Sep 5, 1944. Fourteen 43rd B-24s hit Langoan Drome on Celebes with mixed results. Clouds obscured the target although enemy aircraft were known to be on the ground. Four Jap fighters did attempt to intercept but were sent running for their lives as the P-38s moved in to pursue them. A good part of the 250 pound bombs hit the target although the crews were not too satisfied with the results. The Sea Hawks also hit this area that night as well as Licana where they found no shipping.

Sep 6, 1944. Back to the Philippines and the seaport area of Davao called Santa Ana. Fair to good bombing destroying several buildings and warehouses but some hit the ocean too. Fires were seen with smoke to 7000 feet. AA was heavy but inaccurate. There was no fighter interception. The 63rd bombed Manado Town on Celebes with frags and hit the main jetty.

Sep 7, 1944. Seventeen B-24s hit a factory on the outskirts of Manado although no one seemed to know what was made there. The factory burned and exploded spreading fire to nearby buildings. AA was slight. One enemy fighter appeared only to have 3 P-38s take after him. The Sea Hawks plastered Manado with frags that night.

Sep 8, 1944. The 43rd went after the center of enemy headquarters in Langoan Township in northern Celebes. About 70 large buildings were in the target area and the bombing with 1000 pounders was right on the mark. AA was meager. A lone interceptor was last seen with 3 P-38s in its tail. A photo taken 4 days later showed headquarters obliterated with extensive fire/blast damage throughout the area. The Sea Hawks hit Kendari in southern Celebes. This was a 14 hour haul. Three planes hit the revetment area with 120 lb. frags, but little damage was sighted, but this would keep the enemy on its toes.

Sep 9, 1944. It was back to Mapanget Drome and adjacent personnel area on Celebes Island. Buildings and barracks were destroyed and a good sized fire was started. AA was meager, but one plane was hit. The 63rd returned to Manado this night with incendiary bombs but found little to burn.

Sep 10, 1944. Only 13 B-24s managed to get into the air to bomb Mapanget concrete runway with 2000 pounders. The bombing was not good with only 10 bombs hitting the runway, but the stress on the shackles by these heavy bombs caused many hang-ups or split second delays in their release.

- Sep 11, 1944. This was a day off to put the planes back in good condition.
The Sea Hawks hit a new target, San Roque Drome, near Zamboanga in the extreme south of the Philippines. It was well hit but the results were unobserved.
- Sep 12, 1944. It was back to bombing strips again but with the planes making individual runs.
The results were much better with 22 out of 40 bombs hitting the runway with 2000 and 1000 pounders with 1/10 second delays.
The Sea Hawks tried out new bombs, 500 pound incendiaries, on Langoan Drome. A huge fire was started in Manado Township on Celebes, Indonesia, that soon spread. Later photos showed the town was almost burned out.
- Sep 13, 1944. Owi was having fuel problems and the planes had to be fueled from emergency 55 gallon drums. This took a long time for the fuel to be pumped and filtered into the wing tanks of B-24s holding 2700 gallons. Only 3 of 5 planes took off to hit the strip at Kaoe Drome. The bombs were 1000 and 2000 pounders and 5 of 18 hit the narrow runway. Bombing was individual with no AA or interception.
The 63rd bombed what was left of Manado and started fire visible for 60 miles.
- Sep 14, 1944. With an improved fuel system the daylight squadrons were back pounding the strip at Mapanget. The allied forces were scheduled to land at Morotai, Halmahera, tomorrow and the intent was to put out of service all airstrips that might be used to defend Morotai. Thirteen planes dropped 23 bombs on the narrow concrete runway putting it out of service for a few days.
Three Sea Hawks hit the town of Amoerang that night with their new incendiaries and started huge fires. It seems that these new bombs make a conflagration so intense that they set areas on fire that lighter bombs fail to ignite. Jungles and incombustible materials are set afire. A lone B-24 dropped this same kind of bomb on the Tondano River Bridge, burning buildings and causing explosions early the morning of the 15th.
- Sep 15, 1944. More runway bombing of Kaoe strip by 43rd planes with 14 taking part was the mission of the day. Twenty-eight bombs made the strip unserviceable.
The 33rd Division landed almost unopposed on Morotai and within hours the engineers were busy building airstrips.
- Sep 16, 1944. The day squadrons hit Kendari Drome, 960 miles away and over 14 hours in the air. Each plane carried 1 bomb bay tank with a bomb load of 500 pound incendiaries and 500 pound demos. Several planes turned back with mechanical problems. Eventually 11 planes including 3 from the 403rd made it to the target. The target was a cluster of workshops and supply points that were to be scattered and set afire. The bombing was good with all but a few bombs right on target. The 64th made a second run due to clouds and was intercepted by 2 Oscars. Both were claimed as damaged by our gunners. Five other Jap planes were in the area doing aerobatics and feigning coming in on the bombers, but they broke off before they were within range. The AA was light. One 64th plane lost an engine and landed at Middleburg.
The 63rd gave Ambon Town the 500 pound fire bomb treatment. Results were unknown due to clouds.

Sep 17, 1944. The daylight squadrons had a day of rest to get the planes back in shape. The Sea Hawks fire bombed Kendari and Tembaga village. No confirmed damage reported.

Sep 18, 1944. Of 17 bombers headed to Davao, 16 made it. The damage from 260 lb. frags to the buildings was significant. En route a 65th B-24 had a runaway prop, lost an engine and had a fuel leak on the flight deck. The pilot headed to Morotai where some of the crew bailed out over an airstrip under construction. Pilot, 1/Lt. Harris Routy put the plane down on a reef near the runway. One man's chute did not open during the 1,500' foot fall, but he landed in a large coconut tree. Its strong and compact fronds combined with his unopened chute enabled him to slip to the ground with a thumping bang, but with not a single broken bone. A doctor who witnessed the fall, rushed to the scene expecting the worst. He found the jumper very much alive and fully conscious. A field hospital report stated that [Cpl. Joe] Aeillo probably had internal injuries and a broken spine as no one could survive such unscathed. [Jim Cherkauer has a "Believe It Or Not!" clipping by Ripley that states Joe was from the Bronx and dropped 3,000'. Jim's scrap book indicates that Joe was a tail gunner on Capt. Petty's crew. Does anyone recall this event? On whose crew Joe was?]

On this date, Colonel Harry Hawthorne, who joined the Group as a Captain in 1942 and worked his way up to CO and colonel, moved to Fifth Bomber Command. The new Commanding Officer for Ken's Men was a relative newcomer, Lt. Col. James T. Pettus, who had flown some 40 missions and had been deputy Group Commander for 4 months. Pettus previously had served in the Royal Canadian Air Force and subsequently in the USAAF as an instructor in B-17s and B-24s.

Sep 19, 1944. Amoerang [Amurang] Town on northern Celebes was the receiver of the next demo fire bomb raid. Seventeen B-24s dropped 148 bombs of both categories on the town with fires putting up smoke to 2500'. With no AA and no fighter interception, some planes made as many as 5 runs to get a clear view through clouds and smoke. The Sea Hawks put 2 planes over Sidate on Celebes. Both carried frags hoping to catch planes on the ground, but none were visible.

Sep 20, 1944. The daylight squadrons staged a mini-strike with 10 planes to Sidate to hit the narrow strip and make sure no interference came from there to Morotai. The bombing was fair with twenty-five 500 pounders hitting the coral, concrete and earthen strip using 1/10 sec. delays to make sure the bombs were well into the ground before going off. This type of strip is easy to repair but the heavy rainfall in the area made compaction difficult as the holes would have to be filled first with stone or other solid materials. The Japs had ample labor for the task but were short trucks and fuel so they could not do the job quickly. When the runways were back in shape, the B-24s would return with more 500 pounders.

Sep 21, 1944. There was no group strike this day. The 63rd hit Sidate with 260 pound frags. Explosions were seen and fires were started in the stores and dispersal area.

Sep 22, 1944. This was another day off for maintenance and much needed rest after 17 missions in the first 20 days of the month.

One 63rd plane hit Sidate but with poor weather all bombs dropped into the water. Three other Sea Hawks arrived later that night and managed to start a few fires with frags.

Sep 23, 1944. Photos showed that the Sidate strip was about ready for use, so 15 B-24s dropped one hundred twenty-five 500 pounders on the strip. Nip fighter planes jumped the 403rd after its bomb run with no damage done to either side.

Sep 24, 1944. Weather kept the daylight strike squadrons on the ground.

The 63rd sent a lone plane to Kendari and trailed a string of 260 lb. frags through buildings and stores south of the strip. This started a huge oil fire that could be seen for 30 miles and made the 15 hour flight well worth it. The Sea Hawks also went to Amoerang with their fire bombs and started large fires. Two radar ferrets were also sent out, one to Balikpapan and one to the Philippines.

Sep 25, 1944. The 5th AAF had concluded that Jap fighters were coming from Manlea Drome on Boeroe Island after 2,000' of runway had been put back into use. The 3 squadrons put one hundred thirty-eight 500 pounders on the strip and dispersal area by making individual runs. The strip was put out of action again and 7 SSF on a dispersal pad were destroyed or damaged. The AA was heavy but inaccurate.

The 63rd had 2 planes loaded with frags over Kendari this night, but only ground strikes were seen.

Sep 26, 1944. The strike squadrons headed to Kendari on Celebes, Indonesia, but encountered a terrific front west of New Guinea and were ordered to return. Four planes did not receive the message and pressed on; 2 made it to the rendezvous point to find it deserted so they headed for Ambon Island, Indonesia, the secondary target. The other two gave up and headed to Owi. The weather at Ambon was also bad so they dropped their bombs by ETA on a known visual point. The Jap AA had a ball shooting the hydraulic system out of 1 plane and rocking the other. Upon its return to Owi, the damaged plane had no brakes and dragged its tail skid until it came to rest but not before putting a fair sized hole in the plane where the skid had been. The damage was repaired in about 3 days.

Sep 27, 1944. The primary target, Langoan on northern Celebes, was socked in solid with weather so the group headed to Manado Town where the weather was not quite so bad. Bombing was fair, but the 43rd managed to find a hole in the clouds and put their load in the personnel area.

The 63rd sent an anti-radar ferret out to the Philippines on a long, boring 14 hours mission. These ferret planes looked pretty much like any other 63rd plane, but they carried no bombs. The bomb bay was jammed with receiver equipment to detect enemy radar and electronic defenses. They did carry the normal complement of guns but no radar to detect enemy aircraft. At times one of these ferret planes would accompany the daytime strikes.

Sep 28, 1944. Weather kept the strike squadrons down again.

The 63rd sent out two ferret planes, but both had troubles. Two other planes made life miserable for the enemy at Ambon with 260 lb. frags.

Sep 29, 1944. The strike squadrons were after 2 different targets with the 64th and 65th after planes on the ground at Kendari. This 14 hours mission stretched fuel to the limit. At total of one hundred eighty 260 lb. frags was dropped destroying or damaging at least 8 planes on the ground. AA was light and no planes were damaged, but two 64th planes had bomb rack problems and missed by 2 miles. Several planes had to land at Middleburg for fuel.

The 403rd went to Haroekoe Drome to hit the revetment area, and each plane made 2 runs with aircraft in trail. They dropped seven hundred sixty-two 20 lb. frags in all with most hitting the small target. Although there appeared to be some planes in the revetments, no flames were seen. It is possible that these were wrecks or dummies.

The Sea Hawks sent an anti-radar ferret to Zamboanga, Negros, Panay and Leyte. Four planes did weather harassing at Haroekoe dropping a few 260 lb. frags to make life miserable for the Emperor's bypassed heroes.

September was a good month for KEN'S MEN despite a slow start and poor weather for part of the month. In all there were 329 sorties flown and 841 tons of bombs delivered to the targets with reasonable accuracy. A big problem was the lack of practice missions to improve the bombing. The 10' high moving platform for the Nordon sight was in service by the end of the month. It needed a smooth surface on which to operate and cement was a scarce item, but a suitable court had been laid out and was being used by the 22nd BG.

October 1944

Oct 1, 1944 The 3 strike squadrons hit several runways on northeastern Celebes to insure their being unserviceable.

Oct 2, 1944. A bit more exciting was the pounding of Haroke [Haroekoe?] Drome with 46 tons of high explosives, but the planes sighted on the ground were thought to be dummies or unserviceable.

The Sea Hawks had several planes out the first two nights of Oct. Some made reccos to the Philippines and bombed Haroke. An anti-radar ferret went to northern Mindanao. Three planes gave Ambesia Drome a treatment of bombs and frags on the runway and taxi ways in hopes of finding some night traffic to this dome as there were radar indications of Jap planes sneaking in after dark. No shipping was sighted on these 3 reccos and damage was confined to harassment and bomb craters.

Oct 3-4, 1944. Poor weather and lack of targets kept the strike squadrons on the ground for these two days.

Manado Town on Celebes got a going over by 4 Sea Hawks that made direct hits on the jetty and warehouses starting large fires and several explosions. Two of the 63rd planes were armed reccos, but finding no targets they came back to hit Manado too.

- Oct 5, 1944. Two squadrons went to Whitcola on Celebes and hit aircraft in revetments. There were no fires though the Jap planes appeared to be serviceable. The Sea Hawks attacked Ambon Town with frags and 500 lb. incendiaries dropped through the personnel areas and town. The coal wharf was burned, but exact damage was hard to assess with clouds below the planes. An anti-radar ferret plane hit 100 mph winds when returning to Owi.
- Oct 6, 1944. The high winds kept the strike squadrons on the ground. The 63rd gave Manado another pounding, but with no spectacular results.
- Oct 7, 1944. The strike squadrons sent 18 B-24s to Zamboanga, Mindanao, Philippines, but due to weather only 13 reached the target. Many planes flew for hours over overcast that rose from sea level to 20,000' with lots of rain and very little turbulence. The 13 planes that made the frontal penetration formed up about 80 miles from the target. There was no fighter cover, but also there was no enemy interception. Bombing was good with warehouses exploding and sending debris and flames high into the air. AA was intense with several planes being hit but there were no WIAs. [What are WIAs?] That night 3 planes from 63rd hit Manado Town again with unobserved results. Manado was getting a lot of attention to keep the Japs from interfering with the Morotai Airdrome building program.
- Oct 8, 1944. The strike squadrons were on the ground getting ready for the upcoming Balikpapan strike set for the 10th. The Sea Hawks sent 10 planes in the air to do recco in and around Balikpapan. They hit the airdrome dispersal areas with frags and kept the AA crews and defenses up all night. Fifty-six 260 lb. frags were dropped, but no fires were seen to the disappointment of the crews. The three 5th AF group leaders went to Noemfoor [Numfoor] Island, headquarters of the 13th AF for a planning session for the Balikpapan raid. In two previous raids of the refineries in Balikpapan, the 13th AF had lost 11 planes and was mauled badly without inflicting any damage to the refineries. The 90th Bomb Group was along on the first of these missions, but cloud coverage obscured any sighting of damage it might have caused. The 13th opted to go in at 20,000' on the 10th, but the 5th AF leaders opted to go in at 10,000' to save fuel, keep better formations and to make sure they hit the target. At lower altitudes the gunners were free of cumbersome clothing and oxygen equipment so they were better prepared to fight their way in and out than they would have been at a higher altitude.
- Oct 9, 1944. The strike squadrons were still preparing for the 10th. The 63rd sent 5 planes out; 4 went to the Borneo area. One ferret went to the Philippines. The 13th AF Snoopers were in the Balikpapan area also.
- Oct 10, 1944. With Balikpapan some 1260 nautical miles from Owi and with two bomb bay fuel tanks, the strike squadrons were scheduled for an overweight, late night takeoff on the 9th proceeding individually to the rendezvous point over the Halmaheras, assembling into squadrons and groups, an then proceeding to the target to arrive at the same time as the

fighter cover and 5 minutes before the 13th AF's two groups. Each plane carried 3500 gallons of fuel, extra ammunition and five 500 lb. bombs.

The plan called for the 13th AF to be first over the target at 1050 hours, one group of escorts to be there at 1040 and the P-38s to escort the 13th AF. The three 5th AF groups would then come in at 10,000', through the smoke and confusion to plaster the targets. We were to have bombs on the target at 1055 to 1100. It was timed so that all the bombers would be over the target in no less than 10 minutes as the fighters could not stay in the area but a very short time.

As the 43rd was only a 3 squadron group, it took the inside low turn at 9500', the 22nd would be at 10,000' and the 90th at 10,500'. Although the low group would be exposed to AA longer, their turn was tighter and the lead group always drew more attention. As each squadron of the 3 groups, 11 in all, had targets that were slightly removed from each other, squadrons had to spread out a bit, but were all to be over the target in the space of 5 minutes.

Fifth AF fighters, P-38s and P-47s, had been fitted with ferry tanks of 310 gallons, as well as their usual 165 gallon drop tanks. The P-47s could only fight about 15 minutes while the P-38s could stay a bit longer.

The 5th AF rendezvous went well, with group leaders firing different colored Very lights to attract their flock; all squadrons and groups left the area on time. The 13th AF climbing to 20,000' was not to be seen, nor did we see any of the escorts, but as the 13th was ahead of us, we assumed the fighters were with them and were approaching the target on schedule.

The 43rd had 20 aircraft at the rendezvous out of the 21 that took off. The one missing plane had fuel problems and headed to the secondary target. Due to the importance of the mission, each squadron was flying 7 planes.

It was an impressive sight with 11 squadrons all pulling into good formation with perfect weather and Borneo on the horizon. However, it became apparent that the 5thAF was all alone when the Japanese AA spotters picked us up some thirty minutes out.

Lt. Col. Pettus turned to the navigator standing behind him and asked if he saw any fighters. "Plenty, but none of them are ours" was the reply. Japanese fighter attacks began about 30 minutes from the target area, first with phosphorous bombs and sometimes pressing to 100 yards with cannon and MG fire. Fifteen minutes out from the IP it was obvious that the 13th was late and the fighters had stayed with them.

Final course changes were made to line up on each target, drop those fire bombs we had brought so far, hit the bull's eye and fight our way out. Everybody was busy and scared. Pilots were too occupied with flying and keeping formation to see all that was going on, but the intercom was blue with vivid descriptions of attacks, the chatter and vibration of the 50 calibers and the jolting crump of the AA. Bombardiers had their eyes glued to their sights with lead planes tracking the target.

It seemed forever to the crews before the "bombs away" light blinked, and they could look up and see what was happening. The formation was still good and it went into a gentle turn for home. Once we were over the water, the AA let up. Our fighters showed up and the best of all was that all 19 [Where did one go?] of our aircraft were still with us. It was an euphoric moment for the 43rd.

During and immediately after the attack 4 B-24s were seen to go down; one from the 90th BG and 3 from the 22nd. The 43rd lost no planes but did have 2 men killed and 11

wounded out of the 19 crews over the target. Fortunately except for the KIA, wounds were not serious.

Estimates of the number of Jap fighter interceptors ranged from 50 to 57. These planes repeatedly attacked the 5th AF Bombers first with dropping phosphorous bombs and then making passes at one squadron only to move on to another. The 120mm naval guns firing at long range proved to be ineffective, but the 75mm AA, assisted by a two-seater spotter plane flying out of range of the bombers, proved to be very effective. It turned out that the P-47s had already left the area due to fuel limitations and the P-38s were with the 13 AF.

The bombing was excellent with over 85% of our 95 bombs were in the small target areas. When the 13th AF arrived 15 minutes later, the smoke was up to 19,000'.

Almost every aircraft was damaged to some degree and at least 3 were in serious trouble with battle damage. There were engines shot out, controls damaged and hydraulic problems.

All 43rd aircraft that were able to make the flight were to proceed to Sansapore, New Guinea to RON. Those planes with badly wounded aboard, or so damaged as to have difficulty making Sansapore, were to head for Morotai where there were good medical facilities and repair crews.

It was a long trip to Sansapore, even longer for those with wounded and serious damage, but every plane made it safely there or to Morotai.

In the 403rd plane #978 piloted by Lt. Howard R. Catlin, Sgt. William Isley, the tail turret gunner, was hit in the neck and died en rout to Morotai, despite the efforts of his mates to keep him alive. He was buried there the next day. Sgt. George Stahl wrote this tribute to his plane mate:

THE EYES OF DEATH

In the bloody skies of New Guinea
I heard a bother cry.
In the battered guts of a Liberator
I helped a war child die.
The eyes of death are imploring
They pierce
They linger
They accept no lies.

The 65th lost a navigator. [Lt. Donald W. Hunt, Navigator, on Capt. Thomas J. Scannell's crew.]

Arrival at Sansapore was a great relief as all planes were accounted for. Pettus and crew in the lead plane were met by the local commander. Their plane had a slightly wounded tail gunner aboard so they landed with their red light on so as to be met by the medics. The local bomb group brought a trailer of iced beer for the crew, but no one had a bottle opener. So it fell to his [Pettus or the local commander is not made clear] lot to bite the tops off some 30 beer bottles so the crew would not lose a swallow.

The 43rd was credited with 13 Japanese fighter shot down and a number of probables. The Group hit its target as well.

Upon arriving back at Owi Pettus had a message from General MacArthur "to: Commanding General Fifth Air Force. Balikpapan strike was magnificent [please] convey my sincerest congratulations to all concerned." To this Generals Kenny and

Whitehead added their heartiest congratulations. KEN'S MEN had good reason to feel elated and proud. They had proved their B-24s' group to be second to no one. As the words on the 43rd emblem said, they were " WILLING, ABLE AND READY."

Oct 10-11, 1944.

The Sea Hawks had 5 planes in the Philippines area. Two hit Davao and Buayan with frags but the results were only small explosions. Other planes hit Maina Drome and barracks near Davao. One ferret made a long mission along Mindanao and to the Sulu Sea.

Oct 11-12, 1944. The 63rd sent 4 planes to Pagamican in the Philippines doing a recco search but returning to hit a warehouse and staging area with frags; no spectacular results.

Oct 12-13, 1944. A 63rd recco and ferret headed to the Leyte Gulf to search for any Japanese naval forces in the area where an American force was to make a landing in a week. Two Sea Hawks went to Matina, stringing frags through the dispersal area. Two more of their planes went on a Borneo recco and dropped bombs on Mangaar Drome at Balikpapan starting several fires and large explosions.

Oct 11-13, 1944. The strike squadrons were busy with maintenance and training getting ready to hit Balikpapan again on the 14th.

On the night of the 13/14 the Sea Hawks sent 7 planes out; 5 to Mangaar Drome to keep the enemy up all night and to string bombs through the dispersal area starting several fires. They also sent constant weather reports for the daylight strike that was already in the air.

Another 63rd recco plane went to the Leyte area but not too close; it then dropped on Zamboanga, San Rogue Drome en route home. Still another went to Davao to hit Matina.

Oct 14, 1944. The 43rd went back again, but a lot of the starch had gone out of the defenders. The fighters and bombers took a heavy toll of the Japanese. It was 6 months before the refineries were back into production but that was too late with the relentless Allied march to the north.

In all 101 B-24s went over Balikpapan including 18 from the 43rd led by Deputy Group Commander, Major Harry Staley. The Edalanu refinery, the heart of the complex, was put out of commission for months and the Pandasari plant was further damaged badly. The defenders put up only about 50 fighters with some 40 being claimed as shot down by the U.S. fighters and bombers. American losses were 2 B-24s and 5 fighters of which 4 of the pilots were rescued. KEN'S MEN did not lose a plane, but 4 men were wounded and 2 planes were diverted to Morotai because of battle damage. The 43rd did not attack Balikpapan again.

The Sea Hawks sent out only 1 plane this night flying the Philippine circuit to get a look at Leyte. On the flight back it dropped bombs on Matina and was rewarded with a series of at least 4 large fires and explosions.

Oct 15, 1944. The strike planes drifted in from Sansapore and Morotai and the crews went to work preparing for the next strike - probably the Philippines.

The Sea Hawks sent out planes this night to Sassa and Matina in the Davao area.

Oct 16, 1944. This was a day for the strike squadrons.

The 63rd sent out 2 unarmed reccos to the Mindanao Sea and the Sibuyan Sea as well as 1 anti-radar run to the Philippines. Although these planes carried no bombs they were on the alert for Jap night fighters and kept all guns manned.

Oct 17, 1944. This day was a disappointment to the strike squadrons. The target was Ilang in southern Mindanao, but due to fuel transfer problems and weather only 12 made it to the target. The planes were to drop on the lead plane, but it was off target. Fortunately a few bombardiers dropped on their own and did some damage to a large barracks complex. The bomb bay tanks and fuel transfer was still a problem. This was especially true with the B-24 D models with so many different transfer systems. Several planes landed at Morotai as a safety margin before returning to Owi.

The 63rd had a dull night with 2 unarmed reccos to the Mindanao Sea.

Oct 18, 1944. Eleven planes made it to Menado on northern Celebes. They started 10 fires in all. Gas leaks were again a problem and the 65th had 2 planes turn back for this reason. The Sea Hawks were busy with armed reccos looking for a Japanese fleet that might interfere with the Leyte invasion on the 20th. No sightings were made.

Oct 19, 1944. A day off for the strike squadrons.

The 63rd had a repeat of the night of the 18th.

Oct 20, 1944. MacArthur waded ashore on Leyte and declared "I have returned."

The Sea Hawks had 6 armed reccos out again this night.

Oct 21, 1944. Another day off.

Oct 22, 1944. Due to mechanical problems only 12 of 18 planes reached Cagayan Township.

The bombing was good and 7 buildings were destroyed with 2 blowing up like ammo dumps. There was no fighter interception and the AA was very meager.

The 63rd was again on armed recco to search for ships that might interfere with the Leyte operations. Finding none in the Sulu Sea, they dropped twelve 500 lb. bombs on Malibuti Town with unobserved results.

Oct 23, 1944. Due to the mechanical problems of yesterday, this was a day off for the strike squadrons.

Oct 24, 1944. Eighteen planes hit Buayan on southern Mindanao with many buildings destroyed with collateral damage to roads and bridges.

This night the Sea Hawks sent 4 unarmed planes to the areas of Visayan, Sulu, Mindanao and the Sibuyan Sea on a search for a Japanese naval force known to be at sea and possibly headed for Leyte.

Oct 25, 1944. This was a maximum effort day to attack the sighted naval force. Twenty-three planes reached the area. They searched by squadrons as the danger of interception was low. Numerous bombs were dropped with only one being a near miss of the cruiser that was subsequently beached. The Group had not practiced the technique of having one squadron force the ships to take evasive action that took them to where another squadron would be in position to bomb while the ships were in a turn. Total results came to the one near miss.

This night the 63rd sent 7 B-24s armed with 500 and 1000 pounders back to the area to search for the Japanese ships. Finding none they deposited the bombs on Sandakan Harbor and Drome and on the naval base at Tawi Tawi. The search was restricted to the western Sulu Sea due to the Japanese ships being east of the U.S. Navy bomb line. Another 5 Sea Hawks searched the Sulu Sea area and around Palawan Island. Four planes drew blanks and bombed Wahig Drome on Palawan while a 5th found a light cruiser or heavy DD and scored 2 near misses causing it to slow down to 5 knots with smoke pouring from the bow.

Oct 26 1944. The search continued with individual squadrons combing the area all day. The 403rd spotted a DD but it evaded all the dropped bombs. The Japanese were now in retreat and scattered.

The Sea Hawks had 5 planes out this night and they found 2 ships, a destroyer and a light cruiser, not far apart in the Sulu Sea. A direct hit was made on the bow of the DD and a near miss made the cruiser come to a stop. With dawn approaching and fuel running low, the planes had to leave the area.

Oct 27, 1944. The strike forces headed to Morotai where they landed and were ready for a possible strike on Puerta Princesa in the event that the enemy fleet might have headed for Palawan for anchorage. Reccos showed no ships in that area, so the strike forces had to down load as no planes were permitted to remain loaded overnight. Loading the bombs again the next morning was particularly hard on these RON missions as there was a shortage of armorers and dollies.

The 63rd was back to the Sulu Sea again this night and found a DD and a light cruiser. The DD using evasive action avoided any direct hits but did take some near misses. Two direct hits were made on the cruiser as well as 2 near misses. The ship slowed and was pouring out black smoke. The B-24s claimed it was seriously damaged.

Oct 28, 1944. The 19 planes from the strike squadrons fully loaded in the morning took off to bomb the airfields at Puerta Princesa. This was a long mission of 800 miles. No ships were sighted and apparently the enemy had not expected any U.S. planes to come that far so there was neither AA nor fighter interception. After bombing the drome, one exuberant 65th crew sent down on deck and staffed 7 float planes tied to buoys near the shore with at least 4 being heavily damaged or destroyed. Another 7 planes were destroyed on the drome. Most planes refueled at Sansapore while en route to Owi on the return flight. The strike forces had no more missions for the rest of the month.

Oct 29, 1944. The 63rd bombed a Hoshu class aircraft carrier with unobserved results. Since no enemy carriers were reported with this fleet, it is possible that it was a different type ship.

Another Sea Hawk plane found a heavy cruiser getting under way in Coron Bay. Two direct hits were claimed. The ship was certainly heavily damaged with fires noted on its decks.

Oct 30, 1944. Three reccos and 1 ferret plane were out from the 63rd this night. With not shipping sighted bombs were dropped on Zamboanga Drome with unobserved results.

Oct 31, 1944. The Sea Haws sent one armed recco to the Sulu Sea and another to Palawan. The first plane was unproductive, but at Bacuit Bay on the northeast coast of Palawan, the Sea Hawk sighted remnants of the Japanese fleet so many had been hunting. There were at least 10 warships of which 5 were cruisers in the fleet. The plane sent a message about this target the B-24 either was preparing for a quick run on the outer side of the target or it strayed to close to the now moving ships. They opened fire on him and in short order the #2 engine was knocked out, #3 was damaged and one man was wounded. The plane dumped its bombs and headed to Tacloban, Leyte Island, as the nearest strip. The crew dumped all the guns, ammo, loose equipment and the radar to keep it from possible recovery by the enemy in the event of a crash landing. They could not take direct flight to Tacloban as it would have taken them over Cebu. With #3 now gone, the plane reached Leyte on 2 engines only to find an air raid taking place at the strip. The tower refused to give them permission to land with a straight in approach. On their second circuit 2 Jap Zekes dropped phosphorous bombs on the B-24. The 63rd pilot made a steep short approach and landed, slamming on the brakes. [Pettus has the crew firing at the Jap planes, but that seems incorrect if they jettisoned their guns and ammo as stated above.] The nose wheel tire blew on the steel matting. Before the plane came to a halt some of the crew were headed for cover at full speed. The pilot shut down the two remaining engines and then the flight deck crew sought cover.

1944 NOVEMBER

With the battle for control of Leyte about over after severe losses to the Japanese navy, air force and army, it was obvious that targets for the B-24s were moving north and that a move from Owi was imminent for the 43rd BG.

MacArthur's engineers were adamant that they could build two airstrips about 20 miles inland despite the fact that the Filipino natives told them that the land was unsuitable for airdrome construction. The engineers went ahead to construct the strip San Pablo #1 and Buri #2. When the rainy season arrived the runways, steel mats and all, gradually sank out of sight. Only 1 B-24 ever used either of those strips. A 43rd bomber landed there by mistake when coming from Owi. Stripped of all weight and with only 75 gallons of fuel for each engine, Lt. Col. Pettus managed to get the aircraft, with 2 crews, airborne using 2800 feet of soft runway. In the dry season the strips were used by C-47s, P-40s and L-5s mostly to drop supplies to the infantry fighting in the hills.

Headquarters of the 5th AF, V Bomber Command and the 5th Fighter Command were all in the Tacloban area with heavy bomb groups and fighter groups to move in soon. The Sea Hawks were to operate out of Morotai and Tacloban and move to Mindoro on December 15th. With dry weather expected soon, conditions were good for airdrome construction on Mindoro.

Tacloban quickly emerged as the major air facility on Leyte. Dozens of wrecked navy planes from the Battle of Leyte Gulf were bulldozed aside or into the ocean. The strip was lengthened and covered with steel matting. Coral was not to be found and hard fill had to be trucked in for several miles.

Traffic was a nightmare. Wounded had to be moved from the island using this one strip. There were P-38s, P-40s, C-47s, C-46s, C-54s, B-24s (both army and navy), Navy P-3s, L-5s, Marine Corsairs, and later B-25s, P-47s, P-61s and Marine F-8 night fighters. In mid-November it was the world's busiest airstrip with a landing and takeoff every 40 seconds. If a plane broke down or delayed traffic for a few minutes, it was moved aside quickly with every effort made not to damage the plane.

About Nov 10th it was decided to bring the 43rd to Tacloban as soon as the hardstands were finished. The 63rd was to come in first with the other squadrons to come as they could be accommodated. The camp area was constructed by those who came to Leyte via LSTs or were flown there. It was about 2.5 miles from the strip in a muddy but flat area that abutted the main road to the strip. Although the strike squadrons remained on Owi for the time being, they staged missions through Tacloban as did the 22nd and the 90th Groups.

Lt. Col. Pettus was put in charge of the entire strip. Planes were parked every 10 feet. There was only 1 main taxiway with limited ramp space. Pettus had to rule that aircraft on the ground had priority over those in the air. This was exactly the opposite of what would have been the case under normal circumstances. In all this was an inviting target that the Japanese visited often.

The 43rd provided help with servicing transient aircraft and with the navy's BP4Ys. At times this one squadron would have 30 such aircraft there making it a wild and dangerous place.

A second operational strip was located at Dulag about 12 miles south of Tacloban. P-40s and P-38s were stationed there. The strip was only 3600' long and the terrain made it difficult to lengthen it.

On November 9th five LSTs left Owi with the 43rd personnel and that of a service squadron attached to the 43rd. The ocean voyage lasted 6 days amid calm seas. Although the 43rd was scheduled to go to San Pablo strip near Tacloban, the navy dumped all on a beach about 20 miles south of Tacloban. The navy refused to go to Tacloban where the unloading facilities were overloaded and air raids took place day and night. With only one north/south road from the town area south to Dulag, it was sheer hell with rain most of the time. It was under these conditions that KEN'S MEN came to the Philippines.

At 0930 Nov 15th the unloading began and lasted for 8 hours. Anything not unloaded at that time would stay on the LSTs as the navy was not staying after 1730 hours when the night air raids would begin. Fortunately everything was unloaded using lots of local labor paid with meals only. Some 7 pounds of food per day for 2200 men was consumed. In 12 days everything was moved to a new camp site that was almost as muddy as the unloading site.

Army regulations prohibited a unit from drawing fresh food from the myriads of vessels in the harbor until it had used up the compulsory rations brought in. What was not used of the 7 pounds per man per day was passed out to the Filipinos who had been on short rations for years.

While all of this was going on the strike squadrons were to carry out such operations as they could.

Nov 2-3, 1944. The 63rd spent the nights looking for shipping and a reported Japanese task force. No sightings were made but 1 plane was trailed by 3 bogeys that did not attack. The bomber lost them after entering a friendly cloud. A ferret did sight a large cargo ship at San Pedro, but not being armed it could not attack.

The night of Nov 3-4 the 63rd sent out 5 planes to 5 different airdromes in the Philippines. Each was armed with deadly 260 lb. frags with extension fuses. The fields at Lahug, Cebu City, on the island of Cebu, Opon, Bacalod and Alicante on Negros were all given a going over. One silver plane was seen burning at Bacalod. Over Alicante a Japanese Lilly was seen with lights on and several night fighters closed with the B-24; shots were exchanged with minor damage to engine #3.

Nov 4, 1944. The strike forces went to Lahug Drome, but only 13 of the 19 planes that took off made it to the target. The 65th had a bad day. The lead element strayed, missed the rendezvous and returned to Owi after dropping its bombs in the ocean. Three of their planes made it to the target. Two tagged onto the 64th while the third joined the 90th BG for protection. Although the runway was hit numerous times, the bombing was only fair. The 403rd did the best job causing a large explosion only to have 10 Jap fighters appear. The 65th had 2 planes damaged and 1 waist gunner slightly wounded. The AA was erratic and only 1 plane was damaged. The 43rd crews claimed several interceptors damaged with 1 gunner swore that he exploded a Tojo, but no one else saw this.

This night the Se Hawks sent long range ferrets to the Dutch East Indies and to the northern Philippines. These 15 hours missions were carried out successfully.

Nov 5, 1944. The strike squadrons had the day off preparing for Nov 6th.

The 63rd sent 3 planes with frags to Alicante and Fabrica. A Betty bomber was claimed destroyed as well as a large building being set on fire. Night fighters were seen but did not fire on the B-24s that held their fire so as not to be easier to locate. At Fabrica there appeared to be 4-engine planes on the ground, but no confirmed damage resulted from the bombings. Five fires and several explosions were reported by the 2 attackers and the planes spent a couple of hours in the area harassing the enemy.

Nov 6, 1944. The strike forces set out for Fabrica with Del Monte as the secondary target. Using 5 X 1000 lb. bombs, the strips and facilities were damaged along with 15 of the 30 planes sighted on the ground. Numerous fires and explosions were sighted. About 6 Japanese Oscars intercepted the B-24s but were not too eager to attack. They made passes but were driven off by concentrated fire from the bombers. One 403rd plane did not make the rendezvous and went to Del Monte making a direct hit on one large building resulting in a large explosion. Even with one bomb bay tank, all planes landed at either Morotai or Sansapore to refuel for the long trip back to Owi. The flight from Owi to the Cebu/Negros area was about 1200 miles and required a night takeoff with a rendezvous in the southern Philippines.

The Sea Hawks were back to Fabrica and Alicante with frags that started fires and explosions in the revetment area of Alicante. These strips were the takeoff points for attacks on Tacloban and covering Jap reinforcements coming to Leyte in the Ormoc area.

After the LSTs had left Owi for Leyte, there was a shortage of ground crews to service the planes for missions. Although the flight crews pitched in to load bombs, their strike capabilities were severely reduced. Numerous supply and courier flights took place between Owi and Tacloban with lots of excitement at times because of air raids and alerts.

Nov 9/10, 1944. An unarmed Sea Hawk spotted a 10 ship convoy in the Sulu Sea. Clouds made confirmation difficult, but radar blips indicated the ships may 4 DDs, a possible cruiser and some smaller vessels. The next day the navy could not find it. For the next few nights the 63rd sent out ferrets and unarmed reccos but they never found the convoy. Preparations were being made for the move of the 63rd to Tacloban.

Nov 14, 1944. The strike forces sent 116 planes to Matina Drome near Davao to destroy runways and airplanes on the ground. Bombing was good with direct hits on the strip. The 64th claimed damage to 3 twin-engine planes on the ground with their 1000 pounders.

Nov 15/16, 1944. The Sea Hawks went after airdromes at Matina, Licanan and Tarakan on Borneo with 1000 lb. demos. Bad weather forced all bombing to be by radar that had improved over the months. Facilities at Matina, Licanan and Tarakan were hit.

Nov 16, 1944. The strike forces had a dull day hitting Licanan. Although the bombing was good, the 403rd's bombs did not explode upon hitting the target. There was very little AA and no interception but plenty of harsh words for the armorers. KEN'S MEN had never had a whole squadron's bombs go bad on the same mission.

The 63rd bombers were out looking for naval ships with little luck lately, but this night they came across 1 heavy cruiser, 1 light cruiser, and 2 DDs plus several smaller craft at Brunei. Despite attacks on the naval force, only near misses could be claimed.

Meanwhile the Japanese had been stepping up their bombings of Tacloban and the area around it. The area was filled with personnel and equipment in an area about 6 miles by 1 mile. The day attacks were at specific targets, but the night attacks were made on lighted areas. Personnel on the ground became careless with a feeling that these bombers were not after them in particular. As a result the casualties were rather high with several men killed in a motor pool, individual men killed here and there with many fires started and even the control tower hit on one occasion.

During a red alert the control tower operator was to leave his post, but planes were constantly coming in for a landing. This created significant problems since radio communication was halted. Using an Aldus lamp and putting sand bags around the platform of the control tower, one pilot and a radio technician manned the tower. The pilot was deemed to be in the best position to know when to let a plane land or takeoff.

Nov 17/18, 1944. The 63rd went back to Brunei to attack vessels they hoped were still there after being attacked the night before. They found a light cruiser of the Yubari class and scored 3 direct hits and 1 near miss setting the ship's superstructure on fire. The bombers were advised to leave the area quickly as they had no radar that could detect night fighters that may be in the area.

Nov 18, 1944. A 64th strike force was to take off before dawn and ferry passengers from the 43rd Bomber Command to Leyte. There the planes were to refuel, take on bombs and take off again to hit a target on the other side of Leyte and proceed back to Owi. As the 64th approached Tacloban there was a red alert, but they were given the go ahead to land. On the final approach an Oscar made a pass at one bomber only to be shot down by a P-38. After their landing the control tower was set ablaze by another Japanese aviator. Several men were wounded but no

planes on the ground were damaged. By 1230 the 64th planes had loaded on 5 X 1000 lb. demos, refueled and were ready to takeoff for Palompon on the west side of Leyte. They took off in a hurry and bombed the target area starting fires in warehouses, a jetty and personnel areas. No AA was seen and the planes soon departed for Owi.

The Sea Hawks hit Brunei, did reccos and dropped bombs on a dock at Luban near Zamboanga, but there was nothing of interest found.

Nov 19, 1944. It was the 403rd's turn to repeat what the 64th had done yesterday. They also got the red alert treatment. Proceeding as the 64th had, they soon had the planes fueled and loaded with bombs and were off to Palompon. After good bombing and no AA, the planes went down and strafed the area but encountered only some machinegun fire. This was not a recommended procedure, but the CO as back in Tacloban. One plane had a camera from the 6th Combat Camera unit aboard and too time good footage.

The 63rd found at least 2 ships in Brunei Bay and a Fox Baker was hit with two 1000 lb. demos after which a large explosion resulted and the ship sank. Three near misses on a two stack Tare Able left the ship listing, but this may actually have been due to sharp maneuvering.

Nov 20/21, 1944. This night the docks of Luban were hit by the 63rd and a large explosion resulted. No vessels were found. The Japanese seemed to be building up for a landing on the west side of Leyte so this area was under constant watch by American planes.

Nov 22, 1944. This was a "rest" day for the 63rd, but by evening they were back at Brunei where they scored 2 direct hits on a Fox Tare Uncle but no fire followed. The ship was claimed to be damaged.

Nov 23, 1944. The 403rd again carried 65 passengers to Tacloban. They started out with 7 planes, but 1 had to stop at Morotai. Upon landing at Tacloban there was no Red Alert only rain. After refueling and loading on bombs they were off to Ormoc on the west coast of Leyte where the enemy had been landing troops at night. There was little AA with the poor weather. Some bombs landed in the bay, but 2 large explosions were seen in the center of the target area. This night the Sea Hawks went to Lauan where 2 planes were sighted on the ground and to Tarakan Drome with 1 plane sighted. The crew made a radar run on the shoreline and strip, dropping through the overcast. It was rewarded with a reflection of a very large explosion taking place on the ground.

Nov ?, 1944. The 65th was off to Tacloban and then on to Ormoc, but they had no passengers aboard. The target was 6 heavy dual AA that could be used on ground forces as well as against aircraft in the air. Bombing was poor although 1 gun was probably destroyed. Some bombs landed in the bay, others not sighted due to weather, but 1 bombardier was right on target and the gun stopped firing after the bombs hit. There was no interception with only one plane slightly damaged by AA. This would be the last operational mission of the month for the strike forces of the 43rd. Propaganda leaflets were dropped and numerous photos were taken, at the 6th's Army request, of the valley near Limon.

Nov 25 - 30, 1944. The Sea Hawks kept up armed reccos, ferrets and attacks on Brunei for the balance of the month. Generally 2 planes were out each night. On the 26th a Fox Tare Uncle, fleeing Brunei, was attacked. The enemy had learned to duck behind one of the many small islands in Brunei Bay. This confused our radar and many a rock pile was lined up on before positive identification was made. The Uncle got away.

On the 28th Brunei caught it again when 2 small Sugar Charles were destroyed, 1 disintegrated with a direct hit from a 1000 pounder. The other was capsized by 2 near misses and rolled over and sank. Another unidentified vessel was sighted and attacked, but the bombs missed by 400'. The last mission of the month was made by a 63rd ferret to SE Luzon, but due to radar failure it only partially completed its mission.

The move from Owi to Tacloban along with the resulting split operations as well as the operation of Tacloban Strip was a heavy burden on the Group. This was not an outstanding month as far as the combat record goes.

DECEMBER 1944

This month marked a low point in KEN'S MEN's operations since combat operations began. There was only 1 group strike from Owi, but the Sea Hawks carried on nearly every night with reccos and bombing as far north as northern Luzon and reccos nearly to Hainan Island in the China Sea. A steady stream of daily courier flights to Tacloban to bring more 43rd and V Bomber Command people to the "front." But no action is worse for a combat coupled with miserable conditions. The outfit languished in the mud and rain and morale was low until the 43rd was given the responsibility for Tacloban strip.

Dec 1, 1944. Three 63rd planes went out. One flew the unarmed recco circuit looking for enemy naval activity, covering Mindanao, Leyte Gulf, Samar and southern Luzon. The other 2 went to Miri in north Borneo not far from Brunei. Making separate attacks in the harbor a fire was started. In nearby Kudat Bay a Fox Tare Able was attacked with a direct hit and 2 near misses. After 40 minutes the ship was listing severely, but the plane could tarry no longer as the recco part of the mission was still to come. At Morundu Bay several Sugar Charlies were observed and strafed with no visible results.

Dec 2, 1944. The 403rd flew a weather recco and supply flight to Tacloban and brought 4 men, 1 dog and 7000 pounds of construction equipment to the muddy camp. Not many dogs were left in the Philippines due to short rations over the years so this one would be close to camp. This night 2 planes went out to hammer those Sugar Charlies but got only near misses. A third bomber flew an unarmed recco circuit around the islands.

Dec 3/4, 1944. One harassing mission went to Manila to harass and dropped the first Army Air Force bombs on Luzon since its evacuation (the U.S. Navy had been there). Flying from one area to the other, the 63rd caused a 7 hour alert at Clark Field even though they were not that long in the area. After dropping 100 pound demos on Fort Stotsenburg and Clark Field and damaging a large building, the planes went to Nichols Field and left a few reminders of their visit. Next it was off to Nielson Field to pay their respects. Due to the fact that night fighters were detected in the area, the planes constantly changed altitude and kept on a weaving course. The searchlights in the area did not seem to be radar controlled. Another Sea Hawk went to Negros and Cebu dropping 100 pounders on Bacolod, Dumagette, Binaloagan and Alicante. No night fighters were sighted and AA was not a problem. "Keep the enemy awake, dodge the searchlights ..." was the order of the night.

Dec 4/5, 1944. The night was pretty much the same as last night with up to 5 hours of bombing with Cavite and Sangley Point added to the tour. The Japanese helped by turning on searchlights with 10 counted at Nichols Field and another 10 at Nielson Field. Medium AA was

encountered but upon seeing this, the planes broke off and returned later from a different direction.

Dec 5/6, 1944. New targets included Binalbagan, Opon and La Carolota with 2 to 10 bombs dropped on each. Fabrica was hit again and a string of bombs was placed through the barracks area of Stotsenburg. Many false runs were made to keep the enemy alert, but one 63rd plane was caught in the searchlights at Nichols Field despite evasive tactics. It received a hole in the port wing. It lacked equipment to detect radar control of searchlights or guns.

Dec 6/7, 1944. In the late afternoon of the 6th, Lt. Col. Pettus as C.O. of the strip received a call from Gen. Hutchinson of FEAF that Japanese paratroopers had landed at Buri and San Pablo and were attempting to capture the V Bomber Command and 5th Air Force Headquarters where generals Whitehead and Crabb were in residence. He stated that a parachute attack on Tacloban and Dulag was expected that night. Tacloban had no organized ground defense or infantry for airdrome protection. Quickly every Army, Navy and Marine unit that had weapons was organized. MPs brought to the field every plane that had an operational power turret. These were fully loaded and manned with auxiliary power at the ready. All AA and searchlights were alerted and manned; the Navy manned all their power turrets and the Marines of Fleet Air Wing 1 gathered such arms as they had, but mechanics and pilots were not trained for this situation. All that could now be done was to wait in the dark. Some Marine F-8 night fighters were airborne equipped with short range radar that was used in conjunction with the vector radar. The P-61s at the strip were not operational. It was dark night with no moon, but with 20,000 plus men in camp and a Philippine city nearby there was some light. Around 8:00 PM, as the first F-8s were coming in to land, a Japanese TOPSY transport with its navigational light on got into the pattern. It caused no anxiety, but as the first F-8 rolled down the steel matting the TOPSY turned off the base leg to line up and follow the F-8 in with lights still on. An alert anti-aircraft gunner at the south end of the strip saw the exhaust flames from the top of the TOPSY's nacelles (U.S. planes exhausts were from the bottom of the engine nacelles) and began to fire his 40mm gun. The transport took numerous hits in seconds and was on fire as it passed over the gun battery at the end of the strip. It veered off line, and the pilot who had intended to land wheels up on the steel matting to make the runway unserviceable for as long as possible, crashed in a massive fireball. It hit the ground amid 12 Marine Corsairs, bounced and crashed into more planes, a grader, and a cletrac that was towing a 63rd B-24. The resulting fire was tremendous, and demolition charges aboard the transport, along with 50 cal. Ammo going off, made it a scene of fiery carnage. It did not appear that any Japanese aboard the transport survived, but no knew for certain. Amid the smoke and flames everywhere men staggered out and bodies were seen. Rescue crews and MPs soon determined that no Japanese were alive from the crashed transport. The 6th Army and FEAF were notified and the intelligence people were on their way while the MPs kept order and the souvenir hunters away. Fire fighting equipment was very limited, so planes not on fire were pulled out of the way while bulldozers pushed the smoking wreckage into the bay. The gunners kept watching the sky, but unknown to those on the strip, the attack was over. Lt. Col. Pettus was notified that troops from the 1st Calvary were in truck en route and would arrive by noon tomorrow.

The red alert was ended about 2300 hours when it was felt that there was little danger or further attacks. Two F-8 night fighters landed too close together and ran into each other. That was the excitement for the moment. A man in navy fatigues walked into operations and gave Col. Pettus an unidentified object that he said he did not know what it was. Pettus knew that it was some sort of bomb and with no demolition people around, he put it in the safe where it stayed for a day or so until it was remembered. At about the same time that the TOPSY hit the strip

another Japanese transport crashed in San Pedro Bay, not far from Tacloban Drome where it was headed. The Navy was on the scene quickly and fished a live Japanese 1st Lieutenant alive from the water. He gave them many details of the mission, but of course, this was unknown until the crisis had passed.

On this same night two 63rd planes flew a harassing circuit while 1 went northwest on a shipping search. The harassing planes were off before the red alert, but the armed recco was held on the ground by the red alert, the fire and the confusion although Col. Pettus wanted the plane full of bombs off his airdrome. After two bomb runs over Clark Field engine problems cut short the mission of one of the harassing planes. The pilot jettisoned the rest of his load, some 22 X 100 pounders and was rewarded with 3 very large explosions. He then headed home. The second raider went towards Cebu, dodging large thunderheads, and on a 3-hour circuit dropped bombs on 8 different dromes. The plane held up by the red alert finally got off and headed toward Masbate where he found a 13 ship convoy. After determining that this was the main body of ships, the plane attacked the nearest, a 3000 ton Fox Tare Charlie causing some damage. Then a DD on the edge of the convoy was hit on the bow with a 500 pounder and a huge explosion followed. Early dawn showed no sign of the destroyer, but while the Fox Charlie was seriously damaged, it was still afloat. All 3 planes returned at first light and landed between squadrons of fighters taking off.

Dec 7, 1944. Dawn on this day that will live in infamy came with relief to those who had awaited an attack, but the crews that had manned the turrets remained by their planes in case of another enemy plane arriving with unwanted guests. The fires were out and work of the day commenced. U.S. troops were scheduled to land at Ormoc Bay on the west side of Leyte. The Navy had scheduled the Marines to fly close cover for the landing with P-38s providing protection overhead. The Corsairs were to take off 30 minutes before light, but the pilots had never flown at night under blackout conditions. Two of the first four Corsairs to take off crashed; one hit an ambulance killing the driver and the pilot. Fortunately, the wreckage ended in the only open space for 100 yards. The rest of the pilots waited for light before taking off. The Marines had been hit hard during the night losing about 15 planes from the crash of the TOPSY, but only a few men had been injured. From daylight on it was sheer bedlam on the runway with fighters taking off, others sneaking in, transports wanting to land and wounded to be evacuated.

Unknown to everyone was the fact that at Ormoc the Japanese were making a landing at the same place and time as the U.S. troops. No intercepts or aerial surveillance had detected the incoming ships. The 63rd had not been given a search mission in the area as American ships were headed there and they wanted no mistakes in identity. U.S. Navy patrols had been there the preceding day but the Japanese had not entered their sectors until dark. It was a major surprise for all. The Japanese being out numbered turned and headed north to San Isidro to try to land their troops and vitally needed equipment. In both places a wild offensive and defensive air battle raged all day. In the end the Japanese lost 4 destroyers, 4 merchant vessels between 3000 and 7000 tons, 3 DD escorts and 2 small freighters. American losses were 2 destroyers by kamikaze attacks, 2 Marine corsairs and 1 P-38, but all pilots were saved, 2 by Filipino guerillas. Japanese air losses were 56 for the day. Only small arms fire hit any of the amphibious U.S. ships, but 2 landing craft were sunk.

About 8:00 A.M. Gen. Blamey, Commander of the Australian Forces, arrived from MacArthur's headquarters in Tacloban Town, but his special C-54 was kept circling for 3 hours until there was a slot and ramp space. The general was very understanding. When his plane did land, it was refueled immediately as there were no close alternatives with the nearest being Morotai about 650 miles away.

Parking space was so short that when the ramp at one end was filled with aircraft refueling or rearming, planes had to land in the other direction. Transports evacuating wounded from the evacuation hospital unit by the strip were given preference and a quick takeoff slot so that the wounded would not have to endure the hot airplane waiting to take off.

If a plane had an emergency that might obstruct the runway, the pilot was told to go over the bay and bailout, and Air/Sea rescue was notified. One P-40 landed against a red flare and rolled towards operations with everyone waving it to get away and go to the end of the runway, but as he rolled in the prop stopped. It was seen that he was badly wounded but fortunately was stopped about 100' from an ambulance. He survived.

Tacloban bore the brunt of the air support for this major battle. There were 895 landings and takeoffs that day averaging 1 every 45 seconds. Two fighters were allowed on the strip at one time on takeoffs, but care had to be taken to avoid turbulence from the plane ahead. On landing a plane was not brought over the end of the runway until the plane ahead had almost cleared the strip. Any plane coming in had to have room to go around in case of an accident, a blown tire or gear collapse. A plane that became disabled on the runway was moved out of the way by the gentlest of means. THE STRIP HAD TO BE KEPT OPEN. Engineers with steel matting, sledge hammers, welders and coral fill were at the strip at all times, day or night, to patch holes of soft spots that occurred frequently due to the rain which fell sometime every day. These strong men would dart out on the runway between planes with buckets of coral and sledge hammers to bash down sharp edges that could cut a tire. KEEP THAT RUNWAY OPEN. KEN'S MEN saw to it that all these chores were attended to.

The 43rd had a real share in the day's victory with the operation of the strip. A good portion of the transient aircraft servicing was done by them. Over 20 officers and men ran the operations, and over 100 men worked on the strip day and night. Since the 43rd had no planes and their C.O. was the strip commander, Lt. Col. Pettus was able to put his men in action when the airdrome service squadrons did not arrive. There were many unsung heroes those days. Lt. William Jones fired so many Very shells from the tower that he should have had a Purple Heart for his aching arm and finger. Every non-resident plane was met with the word that it would be refueled immediately and it would have to leave the soonest. No excuses; engineering officers were there to check problems and bring help. NO SIGHTSEERES ALLOWED. If a transport landed, it was given a load of sick or wounded. If they brought in VIPs, they were left. If crews needed to eat, they were given C rations and could not leave their planes. A fast Japanese air raid was a great incentive to get planes back in the air. Intelligence officers met planes to see if they had anything to report. No one stayed overnight except for an engine change. Planes had to be protected with the very lives of the maintenance crews or someone with a similar plane would make the plane a "hanger queen" so they could get their plane out of Tacloban. If extensive repairs were needed, the plane was cannibalized and many skeletons joined the wrecked planes lining the shore.

The Japanese had picked December 7th to inflict a major defeat on the Americans just as they had done 3 years before. They tried to shut down the strips with suicide attacks, capture, or disruption of the command structure. They failed in every aspect, but they had added a new weapon - the Kamikaze.

Dec 7/8, 1944. This night was fairly calm with only a few red alerts. The 63rd sent out 4 planes. Near Cavite one attacked a light cruiser of the Kuma Natori class. After several near misses, 1 bomb scored a direct hit just forward of the tower. The ship remained motionless in the water for the next hour that the B-24 could remain in the area.

The plane of #049 piloted by 2/Lt. Thomas D. Savage disappeared while headed for a harassing mission over Clark Field. The Cebu and Negros harasser dropped 30 bombs on 6 dromes and

saw a large building blow up on Opon. An unarmed ferret made a long sweep around southern Luzon despite miserable weather.

Dec 8/9, 1944. With the battle of Ormoc Bay over, Tacloban Strip began to return to normal with only 600 landings and takeoffs a day. The 63rd was gradually moving all of its operations to Tacloban and stepping up the pressure on the enemy both on land and sea.

Two planes were out this night with one harassing the enemy around Negros using radar to make runs on airdromes despite the foul weather. Over Negros an enemy night fighter was observed but it made no attack. A Fox Tare Uncle was attacked near Corregidor but was missed.

Dec 9/10, 1944. Two 63rd planes were out again looking for a reported convoy reported in Lingayen Gulf, but only 1 large vessel was sighted and bombed although the plane had a low altitude bombing problem. Another smaller ship in Manila Bay was bombed using radar due to overcast; results were not seen.

Dec 10/11, 1944. Two planes went out. It was thought that the convoy not sighted last night was headed for Manila, but only 1 ship was attacked with a series of near misses. This plane went on to Olongapo and then returned to Clark Field to cause an alert. The other plane did the rounds at Negros and dropped demos and leaflets.

Dec 11/12, 1944. The routine of the previous night was pretty much repeated. One plane missed a first ship it sighted and then dropped a string of 500 pounders alongside a ship in Manila Bay. The ship disappeared from the radar screen after 2 hours. The second plane dropped bombs on a ship near Cavite, but there was no observed damage.

A serious accident killed three 63rd men while working in a 63rd plane parked on the ocean side of Tacloban Strip. A P-38 swerved off the steel matting runway after losing a right engine blowing a right tire. It hit the B-24. Killed instantly were M/Sgt. Ralph Colman, Line Chief, and Cpl. Jaul R. Gilner, airplane mechanic. 1/Lt. Hugh J. Noonan, Engineering Officer, died of his injuries several hours later, and the P-38 pilot died from burns that same day. Lt. Col Pettus was standing by the control tower when this accident occurred. Someone came to him and reported that the plane was loaded with bombs. That was a direct violation of all orders. So Pettus took his jeep and rushed to the site of the accident and ducked into the bomb bay but there were no bombs. In the B-24 were the many large low pressure oxygen bottles probably mistaken for bombs. The pilot of the P-38 staggered around the nose of the bomber with flight suit smoldering. With the help of another G.I. Pettus got the pilot into his jeep with the other man walking alongside holding the pilot erect. They crossed the runway and were met by an ambulance.

Dec 12/13 & 13-14, 1944. Bad luck and radar trouble dogged the Sea Hawks again. There were low altitude bombing trouble and desperate efforts were being made to find the problem. With the make shift conditions at Tacloban, it was difficult to get precise calibrations, but the near misses were getting the crews down. Risking one's neck for near misses did nothing for morale. On the second night more of the same; a near miss on a Sugar Baker in Manila Bay and then on to dodge searchlights over Clark Field. Armed reccos around Cebu, Negros and other islands were carried out as the American landing on Mindoro was due in a few days.

Dec 14, 1944. This was the only day the strike squadrons had a mission this entire month. In all 18 planes from all 3 squadrons were called into action against Padua Drome where numerous enemy planes had been sighted. Despite grim weather along the route and scattered arrivals,

the bombing was good and a number of enemy planes were destroyed on the ground with very large fires started in the dump areas. With very little AA luck was with the 43rd. Many planes made individual runs and in some cases several per plane. The enemy fighters sighted in the area made only half-hearted. The first plane to arrive at the target had missed the rendezvous. Thinking he was late, he headed for the target alone. He arrived after the scheduled "bombs away" time and made 2 runs while getting a half-hearted pass from an Oscar. In minutes other planes arrived including some from the 90th Bomb Group that was not better organized than the 43rd. They bombed in groups of 3 and 4 planes. At this time 5 Tojos joined the party, but did not press attacks closer than a half mile. No aerial bombs were dropped. Fuel became a significant element and all bombers headed to Morotai or Owi. The 43rd crews found this mission a welcome relief from the boredom of sitting around Owi, doing courier flights to Tacloban or practice bombing.

Dec 14/15, 1944. Five Sea Hawks went out this night. Two were on armed recco looking for any interference with the scheduled landing on Mindoro. The other 3 went to search for shipping around Manila Bay and to harass the Cebu circuit. One ship was attacked but not hit, and an explosion was sighted while bombing Negros. Another plane bombed a reef at Pampanga Bay off the north end of Manila Bay.

The landing on Mindoro took place with little Japanese opposition. Before the day was over American airdrome construction was underway.

Dec 15/16, 1944. The 63rd had 5 planes out his night. Two armed reccos went to Luzon and on to the west of Mindoro. One ferret flew to northern Luzon and 2 flew harassing missions to Negros, Cebu and Mindanao. These planes would fly over the dromes dropping 1 or 2 bombs at a time only to return later to drop a couple more and keep the enemy up all night.

Dec 16, 1944. The strike squadrons flew several courier missions from Owi to Tacloban. The Sea Hawks were given the day and night off.

Dec 17/18, 1944. The 63rd sent 3 planes off. Two went on a harassing routine at Bacalod, Alicante and Carolina on Negros. On the last run over Alicante the crew was rewarded with a huge explosion and a long lasting explosion. These raids lasted about 6 hours so the takeoffs of these planes were gauged accordingly. The third plane was on an armed recco over the China Sea looking for possible fleet movement to counter the Mindoro landing. Weather over Negros was bad but that over Mindoro was good.

Dec 18/19, 1944. Three planes were sent out. Two were to seek the enemy fleet now known to be at sea. They spotted 8 blimps on radar and bombed only to find they hit reefs not BBs. The third plane dropped a flare to send back a report on the fleet before attacking so avoided the same mistake. The pilot then searched elsewhere and ran into bad weather moving in from the China Sea. It was actually a typhoon that blew the plane 100 miles off course, but after bucking the storm for 6 hours, it arrived home safely after 22 hours in the air.

Dec 19/20, 1944. The Sea Hawks headed to Laoag on the northern tip of Luzon. The target was a village near the drome that was used as a landing and transient site for traffic from Formosa. 18 X 500 pounders were dropped, with 10 hitting the village. With good visibility 1 plane made several passes "strafing" at 600'. The planes then headed for home searching for shipping en route. They discovered a large naval task force about 40 miles northeast of Corregidor. Another smaller group of ships was sighted closer to Corregidor. The B-24s

shadowed the convoy for several hours until almost the first light when interception would be certain. Their one regret was having no bombs after dropping all on northern Luzon.

- Dec 20/21, 1944. With the Navy watching the sea lanes by day, on this night the 63rd was sent to hit the dromes in the central Philippines with 500 pounders; to do damage, not just harass. The targets were Carolina, Alicante and Bacalod with hits scored on all 3 but with no major fires resulting. One plane detoured via Paracel Island to do a sea search and recco, but finding nothing, it went on to bomb Carolina Drome.
- Dec 21/22, 1944. The target switched to the Clark Field/Manila area with 3 Sea Hawks in action. Real damage was done at Clark with 9 bombs on target and a huge fire that was still burning 2 hours later. Bombs also hit Nichols where the searchlights were many and accurate, but friendly clouds were around to dodge into. Mabalacat and Las Pinas (?) were hit. The runway at Clark was hit and put out of action for at least 2 days.
- Dec 22/23, 1944. An armed recco looked for shipping this night around the Paracel Islands, 200 miles off the Indo-China coast. No shipping was found but dropped flares revealed many shoals surrounding the islands. The aircraft went to Negros to hit the Carolina Drome again. The runway and dispersal areas were hit with no spectacular results.
- Dec 23, 1944. The 65th suffered the loss of a courier plane from Tacloban to Owi. It simply disappeared in good weather and without sending any radio message that the plane was in any trouble. Four 65th planes went out in search for the missing one, but found nothing. One plane foolishly flew low over Babelthaup Island in the Palaus and received several light AA holes for its effort.
- Dec 23/24. No shipping was sighted so the 63rd hit the Carolina Drome again with a string of bombs going through the dispersal area and 6 parked planes. Two good fires were started and a twin engine plane was destroyed with a direct hit. More than 20 wrecked planes were seen on the pock marked drome. The last plane to leave the drome was met by 5 interceptors that made long range passes at 300 or more yards. The B-24 suffered no damage but did damage an Oscar with its return fire.
- Dec 24, 1944. A 65th navigator hitched a ride to Tacloban from Biak, but the plane was never heard from again and there are no records of its disappearance except for a brief mention in 65th chron.
- Dec 24/25, 1944. The Sea Hawks went back to the Clark - Nielson circuit. They dropped Christmas cards before the heavy bombs. The heaviest AA and searchlight activity of recent weeks showed that Clark defenses had been beefed up, but 63rd planes were damaged. Manila was blacked out entirely and the bombing was hindered by a rack malfunction. Back in Tacloban, in the swamp, an effort was made to celebrate with a beer ration and a few bottles of hoarded Aussie booze, while the nightly interruption by Japanese raiders took place. These attacks did little damage, there were more men hurt falling into fox holes and by vehicles running off the road than by the few bombs dropped.
- Dec 25/26, 1944. The Sea Hawks again visited the Clark/Manila area to hit the strips and dispersal areas. One plane had to return early, but the others left greetings on the runways and started fires at Clark. Nichols yielded a dandy explosion that must have been an ammo dump.

Dec 26/27, 1944. Target tonight was the Laoag Drome and staging area. One persistent fire was started, the runway damaged and tent area strafed. A Betty on the ramp was the object of many tracers, but no fire resulted. One Sea Hawk flew over Vigan Harbor on the way south and was holed in the wing and a booster pump was hit. This could have been serious as it was on the underside of the main fuel tank. Four Japanese vessels in the harbor let him know that he was not welcome.

Dec 27/28, 1944. Two Sea Hawks were sent out to check on long expected Japanese naval activity near Mindoro. They found 7 ships west of the island. On the first attack a light cruiser was hit on the stern by one bomb. Intense AA fire seriously damaged that B-24 that had to jettison the rest of its bombs and head back to Leyte with 2 wounded men aboard. Despite damage to the rudder controls, the plane made it back to Tacloban where it had to circle for 5 hours due to a red alert and work to repair rudder cables. The second plane attacked another light cruiser or large DD and scored 2 direct hits and a near miss. A large explosion was followed by a fire that burned from stem to stern. The plane remained in the area reporting movements and later attacked a DD, but missed. The Japanese task force began shelling the San Jose area and land forces returned fire. The task force shelling that began at 11:00 P.M., hit fuel dumps, runways and parked planes. Mindoro planes were unable to get bombs due to a fire around the bomb dump, but B-25s, P-47s, P-40s and P-38s strafed and damaged the attackers. About midnight they headed back north. A destroyer had been sunk, a cruiser and 2 destroyers heavily damaged. It was a costly night as American losses were 2 B-25s and 25 fighters were missing. The fighters were sent to Tacloban due to damage to the runway at San Jose. Many ran out of fuel and the weather around Tacloban was terrible. Some fighters were lost trying to find Tacloban in the dark and rain. The next day 16 fighter pilots were picked up after bailing out or ditching. Although a number of planes had been destroyed at San Jose, the multitude of American ships in the area was saved.

Dec 28/29, 1944. Only two 63rd planes were available to go after the Japanese task force now headed into the China Sea. A destroyer taking violent evasive action was missed and a bomb malfunction caused the attack on another ship to fail. AA from the vessels was intense but inaccurate and seemed to have no central fire control. The task force had been joined by other ships that might have been troop transports that laid back waiting for the warships to clear the way for them to land at San Jose, but the reception was too hot and forced them to retreat.

Dec 29, 1944. With the enemy convoy out of range, the 63rd had a much deserved day of rest.

Dec 30/31, 1944. The month ended with a bang for the Sea Hawks as 2 planes hit shipping in Lingayen Gulf near the mouth of the San Fernando river. A 7000 ton Fox Tare Able took 2 hits from 3 bombs. It exploded, burned and sank in a few minutes. A cruiser was missed while taking evasive action and several other nearby ships were lucky in that they only suffered near misses. One plane was holed in the stabilizer by 50 cal. from ships in the harbor. Thus ended 1944.

KEN'S MEN were in a muddy camp not far from the Tacloban Strip, but most of its planes were in Owi. The 63rd was operating as best it could from Morotai and Leyte. The Sea Hawks compiled a remarkable record for December. They flew planes on 21 night nights of the month with 31 separate assigned missions entailing 72 sorties. Only 1 sortie was not completed but a few were cut short due to weather or enemy action. Work on Tacloban was going on at a record pace but to relieve the pressure, Mindoro would have to take more of the operating load before the 43rd's B-24s could come up from Owi.

JANUARY 1945

- Jan 1, 1945. Although takeoff was on Dec. 31, 1944, the action by the Sea Hawks took place in the new year. 1/Lt. Earl Butts in #397 was assigned a shipping search along the west coast of Luzon north of Lingayen. He sighted 2 picket boats, but the bombs fell astern and the boats headed to shore. LAB radar not being very accurate near shore, he headed northward toward the Abra River. Anchored near the mouth of the river was a Fox Tare Baker of about 4000 tons with about 15 barges going back and forth to shore. Upon deciding to skip bomb this target the fuses on the bombs were changed quickly. Butts made a low level approach from land to sea, where the silhouette of the ship showed along the horizon. Fifty feet off the water, full power on, within 100 yards he released 1 bomb on each of 3 runs; the second scored a direct hit. The third bomb exploded on the far side of the ship. The plane made 2 more passes on the sinking ship to let the gunners have a chance to sharpen their skills. Well satisfied they headed back to Tacloban.
- Jan 1/2, 1945. Flying the same route again this night, Capt. Howard C. Rogers in #898 found the ship sunk by Butts with the stern completely submerged. A quarter of a mile away tied up at a dock was a Fox Baker two stacker of about 4000 tons. On two runs the bomb racks malfunctioned and despite diligent efforts the problem could not be solved. It was decided to make a 45° angle run over the ship and jettison the 6 X 500 pounders on the ship and dock. Due to smoke, wreckage and confusion of the very large explosion, direct hits could not be confirmed so the ship was claimed as damaged.
- Jan 2/3, 1945. With such good hunting on the Abra River, the 63rd returned and found the Fox Baker still at the dock with indications that it had sustained some damage the previous night. Plane #394 had released 3 bombs while attacking 3 destroyers that sailed close to shore where the LAB was of not much use to the B-24. The destroyers were firing at #394 that released a flare. Another attempt to sink the ship failed when the closest bomb dropped 50 feet astern. Some damage may have occurred to the rudder.
- Jan 3/4, 1945. Two 63rd planes, #397 and #398, headed to Laoag on northern Luzon where activity had been picking up. Each was over the target about 4 hours. They dumped their mixed load of demos and incendiaries on the parking ramps, runways, campsites and storage areas. At least 1 plane was destroyed on the ground and large fires were seen burning for hours. One was a brush fire that swept into a personnel camp. The planes made strafing runs on the target as well.
- Jan 4/5, 1945. Two Sea Hawk planes spent a part of this night harassing with demos the installations at the Clark Field complex since the landing at Lingayen was scheduled for Jan 9th. They were rewarded with an orange fire that lasted several hours. Searchlights and AA were at a minimum.
- Jan 5/6, 1945. It was back to Clark Field again for the 63rd but with frags and incendiaries that caused explosions and fires. There was 1 burst of medium but inaccurate flak. The bombers used weaving approaches and bombed at random. There was a great deal of

activity on the ground. Road traffic was visible and the surrounding towns were not blacked out. The planes spent more than 4 hours over the target.

Ten planes and crews from the 90th B.G., the 43rd's arch rivals, joined the 63rd for the rest of the month to learn tricks of night attacks. These planes were equipped with H2X radar for blind bombing. This radar could pick up prominent landmarks and was best used for runs from sea to land. They did not have the LAB radar of the 63rd. Briefings were joint and an instructor pilot or navigator from the 63rd went along with each 90th plane on its initial sortie. The 2 groups did excellent work in this time, but regrettably the 90th lost 2 planes during this period.

The 5th AAF had long wanted a night interdiction aircraft. The newly arrived P-61s could do the needed job but they were tied down with night fighter work to defeat Japanese night raids.

From time to time the day strike squadrons were called on to do night raids, but they never had very great success. The crews were not trained for this sort of bombing as were the 63rd crews. An attempt to use them for a night attack on Hollandia prior to the big day time attack resulted in a dismal failure. Bombing at night required special training and lots of practice as things look different at night even when the crew is sure of that it is seeing and were it is.

Jan 6/7, 1945. The 63rd sent 2 planes to Clark Field loaded with frags. These were well distributed over the area but mostly in targeted zones. Small fires and 1 spectacular explosion were reported on this clear night. No enemy night fighters were sighted, but the B-24s located and reported 10 ships in Pampanga Bay.

Jan 7/8, 1945. This was the first night of the joint 43rd/90th operations. Four planes took off but one 90th plane returned due to radar problems. The target was the Manila Bay area but there was a ground haze, so visual identification was not certain and orders were to drop no bombs on friendly areas. The planes went to Clark Field shadowed by 6 Nip night fighters that made no firing passes although they came within 250' of the bombers. The 63rd carried frags and the 90th carried 100 lb. demos. Bombs went through a Stotsenburg warehouse but no fires were started.

A 63rd ferret plane picked up 7 ships on radar in the Lingayen Gulf. These ships were engaged in a naval battle. The plane stayed well away.

Jan 8, 1945. This was a red letter day for the 63rd as they were once again all together. The last of their planes flew in from Angaur in the Palaus from where they had staged many missions. A few of their personnel were still on Owi.

Jan 9, 1945. It was a sad day for the Sea Hawks as they lost Major Merrill F. Sargent, their C.O., in a crash on Owi. The plane with 16 aboard faltered on takeoff and crashed. There were no survivors. Except for a few men in the hospital, these were the last of the 63rd men on Owi.

Jan 9/10, 1945. Four American divisions had landed at Lingayen Gulf early on the 9th. Two 63rd planes took off to do ground interdiction north of Clark Field. Planes #394 and #901 flew in at 1000 to 1500 feet and disrupted road traffic and stalled convoys by dropping

wicked frag bombs. They were in general making life miserable for the Japanese who were heading north from Manila. A few fires were started and over 3600 rounds of 50 cal. expended. There is no record that the 90th was on this mission.

Jan 10/11, 1945. Four planes, 2 from the 63rd and 2 from the 90th, went after the traffic north of Manila. One 90th had a rack malfunction and turned back, but the other had a ball snarling traffic and strafing trucks setting them on fire. In all, they blasted a dozen or more convoys. Small arms fire was encountered but it was ineffectual. One 63rd plane got an intense dose of small arms fire as it crossed Clark Field at 1000'. Although this was a foolish thing to do, the pilot said that he was so intent on hitting the traffic, he was over Clark before he knew it.

Jan 11/12, 1945. It was a dark and hazy night with only 1 plane from the 63rd and 1 from the 90th taking off. Convoys were bombed with no damage claimed. The 90th plane, #480, carried a 63rd instructor pilot, 2/Lt. George W. Brautigan. During the flight the plane disappeared. No message was heard and no wreckage was found. All were listed as MIA. The 63rd plane, #398, reported enemy night fighters were aloft, but they were not aggressive.

Jan 12/13, 1945. This night the Sea Hawks accomplished another first by dropping the first USAAF bombs on Formosa. Three planes, #394 and #396 of the 63rd and #487 from the JOLLY ROGERS, were up. No. 394 had to turn back with a bad engine, but the 63rd planes pressed on to Heito Drome on Formosa where the weather was clear. Each plane carried 3 X 1000 demos plus clusters of incendiaries. There were numerous searchlights but a low lying overcast kept them wandering. AA was inaccurate and all bombs were on target. Two very large fires and several smaller ones were burning in the revetment and fuel storage areas.

Jan 13/14, 1945. One plane from each group went again to Heito with each carrying 6 X 500 lb. demos and frag clusters. At least 3 large fuel fires were started. AA was moderate and inaccurate but up to 25 searchlights at Takao/Okayama were active. One plane passed over Itbayat Island in the Philippines on the return flight and was fired upon. Note was taken to avoid this spot for future routes to Formosa.

Jan 14/15, 1945. Planes, numbers 394, 471 and 901, were off to Heito. Despite an undercast outlines could be picked up and results were good. A large fire with numerous pyrotechnics identified it as an ammo fire, visible for 25 miles through the undercast.

Jan 15, 1945. Capt. Albert Brownfield took command of the 63rd after the death of Maj. Merrill Sargent. Brownfield was 27 years old and received his military training in the infantry. For the 43rders he was an old man in experience and age.

Jan 15/16, 1945. The night planes headed to Okayama with a secondary of Aparri on Luzon. The weather was poor with a solid undercast to 6000' with rain and turbulence. Three planes, #s 448 of the 90th, 398 and 396 of the 63rd, made runs with radar. The crews felt that their bombs were on target. The enemy made no reaction until the bombs fell. The

searchlights came on but could not penetrate the overcast and some AA was fired. The 2 planes that followed had the same experience. On the way home one plane, whose frags had failed to drop over Okayama due to an electrical problem, detoured to Aparri Drome and dropped its frags after righting the electrical problem.

Jan 16/17, 1945. It was back to Okayama again with only 2 planes. Again there was a solid undercast, but the target was better outlined to meet H2X capabilities. With no visual confirmation of results, these had to wait the photo interpretation they hoped to have by the next week.

The Sea Hawks flew an anti-radar ferret over Formosa that brought back a wealth of data.

(An entirely different report for these dates is also reported in drafts that Col. Pettus was working with. It is shown below.)

With clear weather #471 and #394 went to Okayama and saw the ground for the first time. Lots of lights went off and on at various times with a flashing red beacon on the coast that remained on as long as the planes were in the area. A large unexplained fire was seen to the north. The planes dropped a total of 48 frag clusters and 4 incendiary clusters on the revetments and storage areas. There were heavy explosions and a huge detonation that caused a bright yellow blaze plus numerous small fires. No night fighters were seen.

Jan 17, 1945. The 2 daylight strike squadrons still on Owi were back in limited action. The 65th and 403rd went to a target near Davao and destroyed a warehouse and other buildings using 250 lb. demos. There was AA but no planes were damaged. The bombing was good. The 64th, operating from Tacloban, went to Cebu, Negros, where 3 planes hit a different drome with 8 X 1000 demos. The 64th felt very superior while operating from the "Front" while their comrades were still back in the rear areas.

Jan 17/18, 1945. A major effort on Heito and Okayama was to take place. The 63rd sent 3 planes out and the 90th sent 2. #398 of the 63rd had mechanical problems, salvoed its bombs and returned. Plane #472 of the 90th failed to reach the target and was not heard from again. It was listed as MIA. #448 of the 90th bombed Heito using H2X and reported good results. While passing 60 miles from Nichols Field heading to the target, the planes sighted a large fire, and it was burning more intensely 3 hours later when the planes returned. #901 and #396 of the 63rd hit their targets with 500 lb. demos, but the results were obscured by ground fog. Searchlights were operating, but no night fighters were seen. Takao city was blacked out as #901 passed over.

The 63rd had a ferret out that ranged from Formosa to Mindoro. It reported signals from Bataan and Koto-sho Islands. It landed at Mindoro due to an engine problem.

Jan 18, 1945. The 64th was out to destroy a bridge south of Bagio. They missed it, but their 2000 lb. demos caused a landslide that closed the road for a time.

Jan 19, 1945. Three 64th planes plastered the drome at Lahug with 2000 lb. demos. They had been headed for Fabrica, but weather interfered. Eight planes from the 65th and 403rd hit Deliao, destroying buildings and a saw mill as well as facilities around Padada.

Jan 19/20, 1945. Six planes headed to Okayama and Heito, but only 4 reached the targets as one from each group turned back. The 63rd hit the secondary at Aparri with no results. Other Sea Hawks pounded Heito with excellent results. One fire was sighted 30 miles away by the 90th. The going over Okayama was rougher for the 90th with 1 plane being holed and numerous searchlights in use. Although night fighters were seen and made passes, they did not open fire.

Jan 20/21, 1945. Three planes each from the 63rd and 90th headed to the city of Takao and its dock areas that served as a major jumping off place for the re-supply of Luzon. The weather was poor and plane #471 of the 90th returned due to radar trouble. The 63rd's #034 ran into a thunderhead and was tossed so violently that equipment tore loose and a 1000 lb. bomb was wrenched from its shackles and became wedged between the outer skin and the bomb rails. It took hours to pry it loose and lower it to where it could be jettisoned. One gunner was cut on the forehead and another almost went out the camera hatch but was pulled back to safety. Shortly after midnight the remaining planes hit the Takao area with 1000 lb. demos and started huge fires and explosions in the warehouse and dock areas. The bombing took place over a period of 2 hours. AA was weak and confused and many searchlights were in use. A few night fighters were seen with 1 coming within 200 yards but did not fire. Several convoys of ships were sighted and reported. Near Cantanduanes Island red flares burst at 10,000', presumably an air raid alert.

Jan 21, 1945. The 64th headed to Balete Pass east of Lingayen with 15 X 2000 lb. demos in an attempt to block the road in the pass for a few days to prevent the Japanese from bringing supplies to re-enforce its defenses that were holding the hilly area to the north. The mission had bomb sight and rack problems. The 2000 pounders often did not release properly and sometimes a large screw driver was inserted into the shackle and when the electrical solenoid clicked, a strong hand on the screwdriver sent the bomb on its way.

That night and into the 22nd, 5 planes went to Heito; #397 and #398 of the Sea Hawks and #431, #487 and #424 of the JOLLY ROGERS. The planes were over the target for about 2 hours and started numerous fires. The main target was the fuel storage and building area. AA seemed accurate with #431 being holed twice. One night fighter moved in close but did not fire. A huge fire was sighted burning north-northeast of Heito and large fires were seen near Viagan.

Jan 22, 1945. The 64th and 65th were sent to hit the Balete Pass area again and provide ground support to the infantry. [No mention has been made of the 65th arriving at Tacloban from Owi, but they apparently arrived.] Several hits were made on the road and landslides were triggered by the 2000 pounders. Keeping the road closed prevented the enemy from sending troops northward while they were being chewed up in the south.

Jan 23, 1945. Three 64th and one 65th plane headed to the Bario/Calot road with 2000 lb. demos. Landslides and direct hits on the road made it difficult for traffic to move for a day or two.

That night the 63rd and 90th headed back to Takao where a previous raid had been so successful and a decision had been made to hit this target over the next week or so. The target was a lucrative one, the Nippon Aluminum Co. Three planes from the 90th and 1 from the 63rd had their go at the plant with 500 lb. incendiaries. The planes were to string out the raid and keep the targets in a state of alert over a long period of time. Just before midnight #041 made a run on the factory and started 2 huge fires. Just after midnight, the 24th, #471 started more big fires. Later #467 passed over the factory and dropped 6 more incendiaries through the building causing a big explosion. AA was not accurate but the searchlights were. One night fighter was seen but it did not fire. These were the only planes over the target as the 90th plane had radar trouble.

Jan 24, 1945. The Sixth Army wanted 2 bridges taken out on the all weather Bagio/San Rosario road. Three 64th planes and one 65th plane were able to drop a forty foot span of the South Bridge. Photos showed the bridge down.

Jan 24/25, 1945. Pleased with the results of the previous raid on Takao, 6 planes, 3 from each group, took to the air this night with oil tank farms, Nippon Aluminum and the adjacent chemical works the targets. Planes #s 424, 487, 448, 898, 394 and 901 dropped 500 lb. demos and small incendiaries scoring numerous hits. The searchlights were right on target and hard to shake. The Japanese AA was more accurate with more guns seemingly brought in to defend the area, but only one plane was holed. Two enemy planes were sighted but they did not fire on the B-24s.

Jan 25, 1945. The 64th tried its bridge success once again but due to turbulence and a malfunctioning bomb rack the bombs missed and surprisingly some turned out to be duds. Ten planes from the strike squadrons (3 from the 64th, 4 from the 65th and 3 from the 403rd) went to the Matina area. Bad weather and a poor target resulted in the crews getting mostly formation flying practice. A few buildings were hit and 1 good fire was started.

Jan 25/26, 1945. Three planes from each of the 63rd and 90th BG were back to Takao's warehouses with good results. Large fires and explosions were reported along with stiffer AA opposition from more guns than in past raids. Anti-radar devices were used and seemed to cause the lights to waver and the AA to fire a bit late. The raid lasted almost 4 hours with 500 lb. demos being dropped. Several enemy planes were seen. Some even had their lights on.

Jan 25/26, 1945. Four planes were back to Takao to hit the chemical plant. They found fires from the previous night still aglow. More fires were started and merged into 1 large conflagration as each plane went over the target at 45 minute intervals. The anti-radar devices seemed to be ineffective this night. Seven planes had taken off but #424 bombed Aparri after its radar failed, and #898 and #034 jettisoned their bombs due to radar and radio problems.

Jan 26/27, 1945. The Sea Hawks and the 90th headed to Chomosui Drome in the Pescadores Islands. This was a new target. Only a recco plane had been here before. Two 63rd planes and one 90th took off but #041 turned back with a gas leak. The other two reached the target but the weather was so bad they dropped to 1000' attempting to find the target by radar. Even at this altitude they could not make out the drome but dropped frags by radar. Indications were that the bombs were on target. #394 stayed around the area so long it had to refuel at Mindoro on its return flight.

Sometime during this week the strike squadrons were sent to bomb Fort Drum in Manila Bay. This was a concrete battleship built on a small island named El Fraile that guarded the entrance to the bay and Corregidor. It had no AA defenses, but it had 2 turrets on the deck. Whether or not they were operational at the time was not known, but after repeated bombings they were obliterated. The bombs used could not penetrate the concrete but did knock off pieces when they hit. The bombing of this fortress continued well into March before a Navy ship using a heavy bamboo shield on one side moved up to the concrete ship and eliminated all occupants with flame throwers.

Jan 27-28, 1945. Three planes each from the 63rd and 90th headed to Kagi Drome north of Takao on Formosa. Due to bad weather all the planes but #432 went to Takao. #432 hit Kagi Drome with unobserved results. #487 returned early due to radio problems. The others hit Takao setting large fires which covered whole blocks and were seen 50 miles away. The planes dropped aluminum strips called "rope" in an attempt to divert the searchlights.

Jan 28, 1945. Three 64th and three 65th planes hit the former U.S. Naval Base at Olongapo on the coast west of Manila. 2000 and 1000 lb. demos were strung through the warehouses and housing areas causing one small fire. There did not seem to be much activity at that old base.

Jan 28/29, 1945. The 90th hit Kagi and the 63rd hit Takao City. The Jolly Rogers felt their bombs were on target. Although ground fog prevented an accurate evaluation, a glow from a fire was seen through the overcast. The Sea Hawks had a bright moon and #394, first over the target, started a fine fire visible for 20 miles. Next #037 piloted by 1/Lt. Albert Goosens was picked up by the lights and AA holed the plane a dozen times even though they dropped "rope." Bombs were dropped on the tank farm and enormous fires resulted. Between 5 and 7 night fighters attacked with a desperate fight ensuing. Tail gunner, S/Sgt. Charles Trusty, was wounded but shot down 1 fighter. S/Sgt. Willingham got Trusty out of the turret and took over the tail gun. He shot down a second attacker. Meanwhile S/Sgt. Willard Ogle who was manning a waist gun and trying to tend to wounded Trusty was hit in the right forearm. Willingham returned to aid both wounded men when Lt. Robert Gordon, bombardier, came to help. Willingham returned to the tail turret and may have damaged another night fighter. While this was going on Goosens was seeking safety in clouds and was taking evasive action and losing altitude. Although the fight lasted about 15 minutes, it seemed like an hour to the crew. The B-24 took a good many hits with #4 engine losing oil rapidly. It could not be feathered due to the loss of the hydraulics so it wind milled. The auto pilot was gone, the starboard gas tank was

hit and the wind whistled through the many holes in the fuselage. The windmilling prop was creating a big drag so that the other engines had to pull almost full power to hold the altitude. Sparks, flames and hot chunks of metal were being thrown off endangering the craft with fire from the leaking tank. All guns and the remaining ammunition were thrown overboard to lighten the plane. It was estimated that 1700 rounds of ammo had been expended in the fight. It was 550 miles to Lingayen Gulf where there was a strip big enough for the plane to land. #4 engine was vibrating so badly that preparations were made to bail out if the plane started to breakup. Relief came when the prop and white hot gear box spun off the glowing engine, but left a fire that burned for 20 minutes before going out. Approaching Lingayen their troubles were not over as the drome was in the midst of an air raid. The plane was held up for 30 minutes after which the crew had to lower the flaps and gear without hydraulic pressure as well as to land at night with only marker lights along the strip. Not until touchdown did the crew realize that the left wheel and tire were damaged. They could apply the brakes only once using emergency hydraulics. The plane swerved off to the left and clipped the tails off two B-25s, but the pilots brought the plane back on the steel matted runway and to a halt. Medics met the plane, complemented the crew on the first aid they rendered to the wounded, and took the latter to the hospital. Lt. Goosens was recommended for the Silver Star and other crew members for suitable awards.

#398 was the last plane over the target and encountered no problems but started only one small fire.

Jan 29/30, 1945. It was back to Takao and Kagi, but the weather was not clear. Although bombs were dropped in the general area, there was little in the way of fires at Kagi.

Jan 30, 1945. A U.S. Navy plane was missing and a plane from each of the 64th and 65th squadrons were sent to search the Luzon, Samar, Leyte triangle but made no sightings.

Jan 30/31, 1945. It was back to Takao with the 90th joining the 63rd. A large fire was started near the docks at 2307 and was still burning at 0305 when the last plane departed. Plane #471 was attacked by a night fighter and there was an exchange of gunfire with no apparent damage.

Jan 31, 1945. The strike squadrons hit the Cavite and Sangley Point AA and coastal guns. Bombing results were mixed. The 65th hit radio towers and a fuel dump. The 403rd claimed bombs in a coastal gun emplacement, but had no pictures to verify that. The 64th started a fire but missed the guns in their target area. There was a great deal of AA from Manila City, Nichols, Cavite and Corregidor. All were firing with little chance of hitting the planes. No damage took place.

January ended with the Sea Hawks having flown missions on 30 of the 31 days with a total of 72 sorties on 35 assigned missions. Seven missions were incomplete due to mechanical failure - mostly radar. One ship was credited as sunk and 1 as damaged, but most of the missions were against land targets. Two enemy aircraft were destroyed in the air. The strike squadrons had operations very fragmented while performing from several different dromes. Their totals were short of their capabilities and often not up to standard due to operation difficulties.

FEBRUARY 1945

- Feb 1, 1945. Midnight found 3 Sea Hawks dropping frags on Okayama Drome. Two, #041 and #396, had excellent results stating large fires in the barrack's area. #398 had to dump its load due to radar failure. The 90th BG joined them and dropped frags and demos. Two 90th planes guided by the fires had good results while the third experiencing radar problems went on to bomb Takao visually. Night fighters were spotted with no exchange of fire. The searchlights were erratic when the planes dropped "rope."
The strike squadrons sent 2 planes to hit the guns at Corregidor. Heavily entrenched AA made the target a difficult one, but bombs dropped all around one emplacement led to a claim that it was destroyed. Some buildings were destroyed. These AA frequently hit planes flying into Manila or Cavite.
- Feb 2, 1945. This was the last night that the 63rd and the 90th engaged in cooperative strikes. Okayama Drome was the target again with 3 planes from the 63rd and 2 from the 90th taking off. Several large fires were started and were seen through the undercast. Plane #467 of the 90th developed a gas leak and bombed Aparri. Later #487 caused 2 large explosions. Searchlights were ineffective and night fighters were airborne but made no attacks.
Seven planes from the strike squadrons returned to Corregidor to hit the guns and try to seal the enemy in the caves. Results seemed to be good and there was less AA than in the previous raid. Two planes from the 64th and 65th went to Cebu to hit a supply target. The 65th did well but not so for the 64th.
- Feb 3, 1945. No target is identified, but the 403rd hit some suspected Japanese dumps and storage buildings with some 8 of 25 damaged.
- Feb 3/4, 1945. Three Sea Hawks were over Takao for more than 3 hours, there was no sign of any opposition. The undercast was slight but there were no searchlights, AA or night fighters. Results were good with explosions and one fire visible from 30 miles away.
- Feb 4, 1945. A 65th B-24 piloted by Major Arthur Mulligan flew the President of the Philippines, Sergio Osmena, back to his country after he visited the ZI to confer with President Roosevelt. They landed at Tacloban.
The Group sent 7 planes to hit Corregidor again with the coastal batteries as the main targets. Other heavy groups were also hitting the target and near misses and hits were hard to identify due to the dust and smoke. AA was slight and over 400 photos were taken of the defenses and gun pits.
- Feb 4/5, 1945. The 63rd sent 3 planes to Tainan Drome just north of Takao City. #398 was over the target at 2305 hours and its bombs were dead on, hitting hangers and repair areas. Very large fires erupted. About midnight #396 hit the hangers and barracks, but ground fog building up made it hard to judge the results.
- Feb 5, 1945. Seven planes were off to Corregidor from the strike squadrons. Gun pits were the target again. The 65th claimed that half of its bombs failed to explode on contact. The

65th also sent 2 planes to Licanan where Japanese troops had been reported concentrating. The bombs were frags but the bombing was not good due to rack failures. They did not see any heavy enemy activity.

This night and into the 6th, the 63rd went back to Tainan, but encountered bad weather en route to the target with broken clouds over the drome. Planes numbered 901, 396 and 041 started numerous fires including one large fire with red billowing flames that suggested a gasoline fire.

Feb 6, 1945. American troops entered Manila this day. Corregidor was again the target. The bombs were 1000 lb. demos and 1 hit directly in a 12' x 12' pit. These bombs made the rocky area below look like a moonscape. There was no AA. The 64th sent a couple of planes to the Padua area to hit some warehouses and were rewarded with large fires. The 65th and 403rd also hit Cebu City with frags.

The 63rd had the day/night off but had been informed that they would be sending a detachment to Mindoro to assist in the staging through there. It was thought that the Japanese had some planes there that would not attack a large number of B-24s but might attack small numbers of planes. None were sighted.

Feb 7, 1945. Six planes from the 64th and 65th went to Licanan with 100 lb. demos. The bombing was good with 228 of 240 bombs falling on target resulting in the destruction of several buildings. Fires were started and the smoke reached 3000'. Three possibly serviceable twin-engine planes were seen on the ground at Sassa Strip.

The Sea Hawks gave Takao Town a going over despite the usual undercast. Bombing was done by radar. #034 could not find an opening in the undercast at 1000' and rose to 5500' and made a run on the oil storage and carbolic acid plant. Three large fires were started. At 0130 #397 made a radar run on the business district to the tank farm. There was no AA or searchlights. Small glows were seen in the mist when suddenly the night was ripped by a brilliant explosion, then another and a third and fourth when the plane was 20 miles away. #901 was airborne when a piece of Plexiglas in the nose turret was blown out. The plane returned with a full load; the crew took the standby and made it over the target by 0300. The weather had improved and they sighted the fires from earlier bombing as well as starting some more. There was no opposition.

Another 63rd plane made a ferret flight around northern Borneo and back up the China Sea. It made no sightings and picked up no new radar indications.

Feb 8, 1945. The Group sent 7 planes to Mariveles Town on the Bataan Peninsula with 1000 lb. demos. About 85% fell on the target. Several buildings were destroyed, and a jetty was hit sending lots of grey and black smoke upwards.

That night the Sea Hawks sent 3 planes to Tainan Drome, but only 1 made it due to mechanical troubles. Plane #398, while in the vicinity of Takao, was sent a message to attack a ship in the harbor, but finding none it continued to the target where its bombs hit hangers, the repair area and barracks. No damage was seen along with no activity at the drome - no guns and no lights.

Feb 9, 1945. The strike forces had the day off for maintenance.

The 63rd headed to Raigaryo Drome, not far from Takao. Three planes made it to the target with #031 hit the target first about midnight. Frags and incendiaries were dropped through a supply area setting off numerous fires and about 100 explosions. A few minutes later #901 hit the dispersal ramp setting 3 twin-engine planes on fire. #397 came in next, but due to calibration problems it did no damage. The crew enjoyed the show their comrades had put on. There was no AA or lights. The night fighters sited made no attempt to attack.

The 63rd sent planes to Heito Drome 10 minutes apart. The searchlights picked up each plane before rope was dropped, but the bombing was good starting a few fires. The lesson learned was to drop the rope before the lights lock on them.

Feb 10, 1945. Six planes from the 64th and 65th hit Corregidor again but due to haze and dust the results were not well observed. There were no direct hits on gun emplacements. The 403rd had finally made its move to Tacloban and sent 2 planes to Surigao on Mindanao to use napalm bombs on inflammable targets. Some fires were seen but nothing more. The Sea Hawks hit Heito again into the 11th with 2 planes; each of them was caught in several cones of light that were difficult to shake. Their bombs fell on the revetments and taxiways. #898, coming in a bit later, was caught in the same lights but managed to drop its bombs in the maintenance area where a large red fire was started and was visible for 20 miles. Col. M.D. Burnside from V Bomber Command was aboard as an observer. Crews did not like having V.I.Ps. aboard as the feared pilots might take extra risks and an "old wives' tale" held that they were bad luck. The enemy was firing 90mm AA rather than the typical 75mm. Several rounds burst above #898, but there was no damage to the plane.

Feb 11, 1945. Two 65th planes bombed Corregidor individually to strike the gun emplacements. Nine direct hits or near misses were scored and one small fire was started.

The 64th sent 3 planes to Babo on Cebu Island to strike a road junction and assembly point for enemy forces. The bombing with 100 lb. demos was good with many hits on several buildings setting them ablaze. The 403rd sent 2 planes to Cebu City to drop leaflets consisting of 20 bundles of the SWPA Gazette written in Japanese. Preparations were being made for a major effort against a Jap task force that was known to be at sea and would be shadowed by the 63rd. The planes sent on such a mission would carry 2 x 2000 lb. demos and an extra bomb bay tank. [This latter action may have been on Feb 12th, but the manuscript is not at all clear about dates at this time.]

Feb 12/13, 1945. The 63rd sent 4 unarmed planes off in two hour intervals to track the convoy of 2 battleships, 3 destroyers and 1 heavy cruiser. The convoy was picked up at 11 10 N, 110 17 E. The 43rdm 90th and 345th were to make daylight attacks when it came into range. The convoy was believed to have come from Indo China and headed to Hong Kong. The 63rd maintained radar and visual contact from 2300 on the 12th until 0830 on the 13th. U.S.N. patrol planes had also picked the convoy up about 1615 of the 12th. At 0545 KEN'S MEN, along with the 90th and 22nd Bomb Groups, began to take off from Tacloban and Samar to find the fleet. Seventeen planes were to rendezvous over the north tip of Palawan and from there they were to head to the estimated position. Navy PB4Ys were to pick up the fleet and have it under radar surveillance after the 63rd

departed, but they did not. The weather around Palawan was so bad that the formations never got together although most squadrons found each other. Amid cumulus clouds towering to 20,000' and a near solid undercast below, squadrons of bombers and fighters were flying hither and yon with no one sighting the fleet. As the planes became low on fuel, they began to head home. The bombers were told to jettison the 2000 pounders to avoid possible problems of them breaking loose from their shackles as the planes landed. One 65th bomber turned back due to a gas leak and dropped its bombs on Bataan Peninsula.

Feb 13/14, 1945. The 63rd sent two planes out to try to establish contact with the enemy convoy. They had no luck. Two other 63rd B-24s, flying a different route, found the convoy again and maintained contact until relieved at 0600 on the 14th by 90th planes. The 63rd planes also spotted 4 ships that appeared to be headed to join the convoy that was now out of range of the heavy bombers. It had to be conceded that the convoy had gotten away. The Group sent 11 planes on the 14th to bomb personnel areas in and around Marivales Drome. The bombing was right on target and was a tonic to the crews frustrated from the past days mission failures. With no AA, the planes demolished the area with 45 tons of bombs.

Feb 14/15th. The Sea Hawks were beginning to operate more and more from Mindoro, the island from which they had done all of their convoy search. Glowing reports were sent to Tacloban of the fact that there was no mud there and that their camps were high and dry. The 63rd sent 4 planes to Hong Kong to look for shipping. No hits were made with all bombs missing their targets. One plane saw nothing, but the others did site ships making them determined to go back to the area again.

Feb 15, 1945. The Group sent 9 planes to hit the personnel area at Corregidor as the emplacements were all out of commission from previous bombings. The planes carried frags that seemed to be a wrong choice to use on a solid rock target, but most bombs landed in the assigned areas. Crews sighted American destroyers shelling Corregidor and Marivales and landing craft taking troops into the harbor at Marivales. The 403rd sent 1 plane to Puerto Princesa at the request of the 8th Army to get low level shots of Hondo Bay and Puerto Princesa Bay. Many photos were taken as the plane made low strafing runs at 50' to 100'. One seaplane was damaged and 1 barge hit. The B-24 took on 10 holes, but no one was injured. The 8th Army reported that the photos had been invaluable to them.

Feb 16, 1945. [No mention of this date appears in the manuscript.]

Feb 17, 1945. The 65th sent a plane to Puerto Princesa to photograph a different area with 25 pictures made from an altitude of 600'. The Rufe seaplane, object of the 403rd's attention the day before [?], had sunk in shallow water. Air Force G-2 announced there were 600 enemy fighters on Formosa.

This date was also the anniversary of the 43rd embarking on the Queen Mary three years prior. Now the 43rd is accepted by many as the best heavy bomb group in the 5th AAF, although this is disputed by many others.

The strike squadrons were scheduled for their first daylight attack against Formosa. They were also going to check out the H2X radar bombing system and were going to use "rope" as AA jammers. The target was Okayama, but due to weather, they were diverted to the secondary at Takao. With only each lead plane having H2X, the other planes dropped on the lead. Bombing consisted of dropping frags through a heavy overcast. Later photos showed that although the bombing was good, the choice of bombs for that target was not a good one. Demos would have been better given the fact that a large industrial area adjacent to the shoreline gave a good radar reading. AA was very erratic and no enemy fighters were sighted.

The 63rd was moving to McGuire Field on Mindoro and had no action this night.

Feb 18, 1945. The Group went back to Formosa with 16 planes. There was very poor weather, but they managed to bomb Takao Drome their tertiary target. It was not a good H2X target so the bombing was done visually with only a 10 second visual sighting. With a fine formation the bombing was good but the frags did not appear to start any fires. Since the bombs fell through areas where planes were spotted on the ground, it was suspected that the Japanese were using dummy planes to draw the Group's bombs.

The Sea Hawks made a long ferret using 2 bomb bay tanks and carrying no bombs. The rear bomb bays were filled with receivers and direction finders. The route was Leyte - Sibuyan Sea - Lingayen - South China Sea - Hainan - Hong Kong - N. Luzon - E. Luzon and back to Mindoro. The flight lasted 16 hours.

Feb 19, 1945. The daylight strike force hit Takao Drome with 18 planes scattering bombs all over the area. There was lots of inaccurate AA due to the dropping of "rope" by the B-24s. Frags hit the personnel area north of the strip and some hit the drome itself. A lead plane using H2X seemed to hit a toxic gas works. The weather below was broken. This night and into the 20th, the 63rd sent 3 planes out after shipping in the China Sea and Formosa Strait. #901 saw no ships and bombed Mako, the secondary target. #031 and #898 sighted a DD but the LAB did not function in both planes and all bombs missed.

Feb 20, 1945. The strike squadrons had the day off for maintenance. The 63rd sent out only one plane and searched the China Sea for shipping but in vain.

Feb 21, 1945. The strike squadrons were on a ground support mission north of Manila. This was a new type mission and with the Japanese dug into the hills or in caves, smoke pots and arrows were used by the Army to point out targets where frags were dropped. How much good was done remained a mystery, but 2 days later the Army asked for this support again.

Feb 22, 1945. Three 63rd planes went out at 0200 and found no shipping up and down the coast of Indo China. The mission was to be coordinated with the 345th's B-25s. Although they made radio contact with the 345th, they did not call out the B-25s due to the lack of

targets. One B-24 reported a railroad on the Indo-China coast as a place for future attention.

The daylight squadrons sent 18 planes on ground support west of Fort Stotsenberg. All 1000 pounders hit the target except those of one bomber in which the bombs hung up. The crews sighted a sign on the ground that read "Help USAAFE arms and supplies." Jim Pettus writes, "Let the G-2 figure out what it meant."

Feb 23, 1945. The Group's C-47 was lost on a flight from Owi to Tacloban via Yap. Seventeen men were missing. An extensive search was organized, but no trace of the plane was found. The weather was not bad, the plane was in good condition and no message was received from the plane was in trouble.

There was no Group activity this day.

The 63rd sent out 3 planes with little results. Takeoff was at 0330 and landing at about 1700 hours. A V.I.P. Brigadier went along but the plane, #031, missed a Sugar Dog. #901 saw nothing and returned. #304 sighted 2 DDs that headed into Vin Hao Bay (Vietnam). The B-24 contacted airborne B-25s but they headed directly to Cam Ranh Bay a bit to the north of Vin Hao Bay. Later #034 passed by Cam Ranh Bay and saw B-25s attacking 2 transports. There was a huge column of smoke, but sadly 1 B-25 was shot down.

The 63rd had 4 planes flying up and down the coast. One had taken off on the 23rd but the others were off by 0300 on the 24th. #396 went to Swatow, China, ENE of Hong Kong, but its run was unobserved due to undercast. #901 found no targets at Hong Kong, but did try to contact airborne B-25s with no luck. #397 sighted 1 ship while over Hainan, but could not make a run. It did attack several Sugar Dogs through overcast, and it did contact the airborne B-25s that homed in on its signal but they were weathered out.

Feb 24, 1945. This was a day that the 43rd could have covered itself with glory, but instead got mud in the eye. The target was an important hydro-electric plant above Takao. The 65th was leading and went up the east side of Formosa instead of the west side, probably because this gave the H2X a better radar return. This necessitated climbing over the mountains consuming valuable time. This combined with a cumulus buildup threw the timing off fouling up everything. Squadrons were making runs in all directions with bad results. To add insult to injury the AA was heavy and accurate with a number of planes being hit, but there were no injuries. No 43rd bombs fell on the hydro but other groups did hit the target.

The 63rd's #398 took off at 1900 and found 2 Sugar Dogs and a lugger in the Gulf of Tonkin. It missed the Sugar Dogs, sank the lugger and then found a Sugar Charlie nearby and dispatched it with 3 bombs

Feb 25, 1945. The Group sent 18 planes to hit the Ipo Dam area northwest of Manila where the Japanese had a large number of troops and stores concentrated. The drop of 214 X 500 lb. demos was in the target with only 2 falling wide; several buildings blew up with smoke and flames seen up to 2000'.

The Sea Hawks sent out 5 planes. Two were on the day shift but did not score, and 3 took off at 1930 hours. One was a ferret to the China Coast covering 2355 miles on a 15 hours flight. #809 went to Hainan and in Hoi Hoa Bay and it found a 10,000 ton Sugar

Able Love and 3 smaller vessels; one of which was very close to the SAL. On a run to string bombs across the SAL they got both ships. The explosion from the SAL was so violent that it shook the plane. The SAL disappeared from the screen and the smaller ship was left burning. The other B-24 did not do well. It attacked 3 ships but missed.

Feb 26, 1945. The Army was pleased with the bombing at Ipo Dam on the 25th, so another drop was scheduled for the 26th. All of the bombs dropped in the selected area. Smoke was seen to 3000' from numerous fires. Army G-2 reported that yesterday's raid destroyed at least 1 heavy gun emplacement, and that the fires had burned through the night. The Sea Hawks had 1 day and 3 night patrols. The daylight bomber attacked a DE at 1855N and 1104E, but no damage was claimed. #398 damaged a Tare Able with near misses using Torpex bombs causing the ship to come to a halt and list. Two DE escorts threw up plenty of fire, but with some hung up bombs the plane decided to continue the patrol and jettison the bombs. The second plane found two PT type boats, each towing a barge, but the plane ignored them to finish its assigned patrol coordinates. On its return the B-24 dropped its load on the PT boats and barges sending one PT boat end over end. The boats put up 50 cal and 20mm shells, but were silenced by the 50s from the plane as it strafed and set one barge afire with its tracers. #398 was hit in the hydraulic system, but lowered its landing gear with emergency procedures. #034 returned after drawing a blank searching in the Hainan area.

Feb 27, 1945. The 8th Army was soon to land on Puerto Princessa, so all 3 squadrons were dispatched to blast its beach defenses. Bombing was by elements and individual planes, some making 5 runs to be sure of a pillbox target. 1000 lb. bombs with 1/10 sec. delay fuses were the order of the day. 110 bombs fell in the defense area; a few were wide of the area and 1 load malfunctioned. One single engine plane was seen on a nearby runway, but it did not venture up. Enemy machinegun fire was seen by its flashes, but at 5500' the planes were out of range. The Sea Hawks sent up 3 planes this night but little good was done. Two drew blanks and jettisoned while #809 found some barges, but missed them. It did strafe them. Earlier the plane had sighted a sub, but while ascertaining there was no IFF, it dove.

Feb 28, 1945. The 8th Army landed at Puerto Princessa and encountered very little resistance taking the town and 2 airfields quickly. The strike squadrons went to Caldera Point on Southern Mindanao near Zamboanga. Eighteen planes with 1000 lb. demos hit a very heavily fortified defense area. The target was plastered by the 43rd and other groups, but dust and smoke obscured the results so which outfit did what damage was moot. The 63rd sent out 3 planes, but 2 jettisoned after a fruitless search. #809 found some barges, but was missed them so no damage was claimed. The gunners did get in some shots.

The month for the 63rd ended after 71 sorties that did a great deal of damage on Formosa, sank 4 ships totaling 10,000 tons and damaged 3 more of around 11,000 tons.

MARCH 1945

Tacloban had been a nightmare to operate from. The single strip with steel matting was very hard on tires and hard to maintain. Taxiways were narrow and inadequate as were the ramps on either end of the strip. If a plane developed trouble waiting to take off there was little room to get it out of the way to get others in the air. When bombers and fighters all had to get in the air in a short time, taxiing was chaotic and accidents frequent. Although usually minor these accidents could put a plane out for days due to the shortage of parts. The Sea Hawks were glad to move to Mindoro even though it meant operating out of temporary facilities. They left on February 19th. Everybody was getting ready to move to Clark and the word was that this was the end of the line for the heavies. The B-29s were to take the load for the attacks on the Home Islands, while the B-25s, A-20s and fighters were to take the tactical load. The B-24s would hit Indo-China, Formosa and mainland China, and seal off the sea lanes. To ease problems at Tacloban, the 64th moved an advance party to Mindoro on March 10th and operated out of there for a week. They then went on to Clark. The 65th and 403rd operated out of Leyte until March 15th and then headed north.

Mar 1, 1945. This date marked the beginning of a new kind of target for the strike squadrons. The target was Tainan, a major industrial complex in a large urban area. This beat dropping on jungle dromes. The load was incendiaries and 17 of 18 planes got to the target. 144 of 162 bombs hit the target and big fires resulted. AA was intense and accurate, but only a few planes were damaged. P-47s chased every enemy that dared to take off. The weather was good and morale was high; no more bombing rice paddies and jungle dumps.

The Sea Hawks had 2 planes out; one to the Indo-China coast and the other to Hong Kong. Capt. Butts, flying #898, found a destroyer escort with a small convoy moving south. He had only 2 bombs left after having sunk a barge farther north. Making a radar run at 1000' one of the two 500 pounders made a direct hit and with a large explosion, the ship stopped and soon sank. Lt. Van Etten, in #807, found a Sugar Dog but missed it, although the gunners had a bit of a strafe. It was a good start for March.

Mar 2, 1945. Fifteen planes with frags hit Tainan again. The object was to destroy and/or damage vehicles, plant equipment and buildings by using thousands of steel fragments from the bombs. With poor weather the bombers went to Kamka Drome and bombed using H2X. The bombs were thought to be wide of the target. Accurate AA damaged 3 planes. The 403rd sent a photo recco to Palwan for pixs of the Panigaran Pt. area; the run was made at 7500'.

The 63rd had 3 planes out. Two headed toward the Liuchow Peninsula. Lt. Miller, in #898, found 4 ships at 0135 hours. He made runs on an 8500 ton Fox Tare Able, and on the second run he made a direct hit on the bow; the second bomb was a near miss. Other bombs were long and the plane was holed between #1 and #2 engines. The ship was claimed as damaged. Three hours later Lt. Dickenson, in #807, found the same ships stationary but visibility was poor. The results of a run at 1500' were obscured by the murk, but a fire was seen a few minutes later. It soon died out. Lt. Van Etten made a run on a Sugar Baker Sugar, but missed.

Mar 3, 1945. The strike squadrons went back to Tainan with frags with the intention of hitting the drome. Again poor weather was met and caused much confusion. The 64th stayed in the area

for over an hour trying to find holes and finally bombed the secondary, the northeast end of town where the RR station was. It was visual run checked by H2X, but the results could not be seen through the undercast. The 403rd reported its VHF jammed so it could not use its H2X, so it tacked onto other elements and bombed. The AA was moderate with several planes damaged but no one was wounded. Another 403rd plane went to Palawan for photo runs at 17,000' and at low level. Films were dropped to the ground troops. Apparently the 8th Army wanted more photos, but the plane was out of film.

In this first week of March the move to Clark Field began. The forward echelon departed Tacloban on March 1st and arrived at Clark in their B-24 with Maj: Pressley McInnes and 6 "volunteers" - T/Sgt. Barker, Cpl. Peschiera, Sgt. Patton, Sgt. HighField, Sgt. Longe and PFC. Gerloski. They landed amid the arid dusty plains with no sign of mud encountered at Tacloban. There were signs telling one to beware of land mines and booby traps. Col. Pettus and Maj. Hallock had preceded them and had approved of the site. The first few days were very difficult, but Maj. McInnes and his crew were master scroungers and were equipped with several cases of gin; a bottle of which could produce lumber and have a road graded (at night) or get a water point. At night these pioneers were treated to Japanese machine gun fire in the distance and U.S. 105s closer by. There were ordinance people to blow land mines (only 1 was found) and flares, of which there were lots and very tricky to handle. Day by day the camp took shape as more and more plane loads of men and gear arrived aboard B-24s and C-46s. The sea lift left Leyte in several sections beginning about the 5th of March. The 63rd and 64th moved from Mindoro while the 65th and 403rd moved from Leyte. Even with all of this moving chaos, the strike squadrons were out every day of the month except for the 19th. (Another reference says it was the 16th. Also it appears that none was out on the 4th except for a photo recco.) Headquarters moved to Clark on the 15th of March. The 63rd flew every day or night of the month.

Mar 4, 1945. There was no group strike on this date, but the 403rd was back in the photo business at Palawan. Forty-five photos were taken of the coast line around Honda Bay. The exposed film was dropped to a ground station as ordered. The 63rd put 3 planes over the Hainan Straits and scored again. Lt. Grimm, flying #809, caught a 10,000 ton tanker and then lined up on the stern for a 15 degree run and let go 4 X 500s and 2 X 250s scoring a hit on a quarter tonner and two near misses. There was a shattering explosion and ship disappeared off the scope after the plane had flown a few miles away. The plane circled back but there was no tanker. A Sugar Able Love was on the bottom. The tanker may have been empty or only partially full as no enormous fire developed and because of the massive blowout. The other planes found no suitable targets.

Mar 5, 1945. The group sent 16 planes to Antipolo where there was fierce Japanese ground resistance. Almost all of the 500 pounders were on target. Lots of grey smoke and fires along with one detonation were observed. The 64th had 8 planes and the 65th only 3 on this mission. The Sea Hawks went to Hong Kong with some typical illogical military thinking. They had been told that all ships at docks belonged to the 14th Air Force in China, but any in the stream were fair game. Capt. Butts, in #807, was first over, but the weather was very poor and there were many hills around Hong Kong. He made 2 runs over suspected targets but no results were observed. There were lots of lights and medium AA. Both were inaccurate. Plane #809 with Lt. Potthoff piloting found a 2000 ton vessel outside

the harbor and made a run dropping 2 X 500s and an explosion resulted. The ship disappeared from the scope and was not seen again. It was claimed as probably sunk. Lt. Marley came in at 0400, missed several small boats but later dropped on an 850 tonner taking evasive action. There was an explosion, but the boat was still on the scope 10 minutes later. It was claimed as damaged.

Mar 6, 1945. The 64th and 403rd sent a total of 13 planes to hit Antipolo again. They hit the assigned area, but the results were a few explosions with much smoke and dust. The results would not be known until later.

The Sea Hawks had proved that Hong Kong was not as rough expected so it was off to the Hainan Strait where the hunting seemed to be better. Lt. Bryant, flying #031, found a destroyer lying in the Gulf of Tonkin. He made 2 runs and on the second one made a direct hit with a 500 pounder. Numbers of explosions resulted and the intense AA that had holed him ceased. The destroyer was claimed as probably sunk. Radar was out so runs were visual. Two other B-24s made no contacts, but made practice runs on reefs and dropped their bombs. One plane had made a radar run earlier and had dropped a flare to mark the target.

Mar 7, 1945. It was a bad day for the strike squadrons and the 403rd in particular. The target was ground support near Balete Pass and the weather was not good. The planes tried to get below the clouds and fly up the valley that was narrow. The planes could not turn after "bombs away" and thus tried to climb to clear the overcast and the surrounding hills. Tragically two 403rd planes hit the mountains. One of those planes, #979, hit the hill squarely and exploded killing all aboard. The other plane, #481, struck the very top of the ridge in a full stall so that the forward section fell on one side and the tail section on the other side. Amazingly 5 men survived this crash. [Names of those KIA are not given.] The remaining planes reformed at 8000' and bombed through broken cumulus clouds.

The Sea Hawks sent 3 planes to Hainan Strait again. Lt. Williams, in #676, found a two stack Tare at anchor off the Kuingshan Harbor. The first run was a failure, but the second straddled the ship with a near miss at the stern. A half hour later a flare showed the decks awash. Plane #898 lost its radar and couldn't find a visual target. Plane #901 jettisoned after finding no ships. Lt. Williams dropped his remaining bombs on the docks of Kuingshan.

Mar 8, 1945. It was back to Balete Pass again for the strike squadrons with 12 planes from the 65th and the 403rd. A solid overcast prevented the planes from dropping in support of the ground troops. The 65th jettisoned safely while the 403rd dropped on ETA near San Quintin. Great care had to be taken not to drop on friendly Filipino or U.S. troops. It was back to Hainan Strait for the Sea Hawks the target being ships in Haihow Harbor. #809 piloted by Lt. Compton found no ships and targeted the docks of Haihow with unobserved results. Lt. Van Etten, piloting #034, attacked a medium target with no observed results. He had reported sighting a 10 ship convoy, but they were outside the blind bomb zone. Plane #396, piloted by Lt. Patten, found several ships but did not score. The weather was spotty and visibility was poor. The two stack Tare sunk the night before had come to rest on the bottom leaving only the superstructure showing.

Mar 9, 1945. New night harassing raids by the strike squadrons were flown this night. Two planes from the 65th and 1 from the 403rd, equipped with H2X, went to harass Tainan City. The Sea Hawks planes, with new radar bombing sights, were kept on shipping searches. One 65th plane had a bad engine and returned. The other two pressed on to the target. It was a text book mission for the 65th. They found the target with radar, lined it up and made a run dropping 12 X 500 incendiaries resulting in 4 large and 2 small fires. There were no searchlights and only light AA. The 65th plane was informed by the radar station that it had a probable hostile plane tailing it but staying 10 miles behind. The 403rd radar went out, but they bombed on a celestial and ETA run and hit the city. One night fighter made a lone pass, firing from about one quarter of a mile away. Both crews came home pleased with what they had done.

The Sea Hawks had 3 planes searching the coastal area from Hong Kong to Amoy, with a secondary target of Takao. Capt. Butts, in #901, bombed a good signal north of Canton that turned out to be a reef. Finding nothing else, he went to Takao and hit the docks while stringing out a lot of rope after counting 14 searchlights. Lt. Morley, piloting #676, bombed a target that might have been a submarine. It was in the blind bomb zone and a flare showed bomb bursts in its wake as it dove. Had it been of the USN Group, he would have heard about it in short order.

Mar 10, 1945. The 64th made 6 plane trips to Zamboanga to hit shore defense installations near where a landing might take place. Bombing was right on the nose, 47 of 48 bombs trailed through the target. The squadron was treated to a sight of seeing the Navy shelling installations nearby. The enemy is getting it from all directions.

The 65th and 403rd sent 5 planes to the Ipo Dam area where the Japanese were still holed up. 30 X 1000 lb. demos all hit in the designated area.

The 63rd went on a shipping search from Hong Kong to the Hainan Strait. The specific orders were NOT, repeat NOT, to enter Hong Kong Harbor. To use LAB radar was too dangerous with all the hills' false readings. Lt. Rogers dropped on a radar target that turned out to be a sailboat, and on his next run the result was a navigation buoy. He then decided to hit the docks at Yulin, but the bombs were short. During all this time there were night fighters about, but they only dropped flares; they never tried to close and fire. Plane #809 had a rack malfunction and jettisoned its load. Lt. Miller, in plane #031, got the prize of the night, a 6000 ton Fox Tare Baker in Hainan Strait. On a run from 1200 feet the bombardier let go all 8 bombs, resulting in 2 direct hits. The plane swung around and dropped a flare, that showed the ship down by the stern with the bow sticking up out of the water. The other ships in the vicinity moved out after the bombing. (Group does not mention this sinking and the 63rd says only 2 planes out on the 10th.)

Mar 11, 1945. The 65th and 403rd went to Aparri and Wa-Wa Dam. The 65th hit the beach defenses at Aparri with 32 X 1000 demos in the target with one large explosion. The Wa-Wa Dam was difficult because of clouds so multiple runs were made. Large brush fires were started, but the ground controller said they were pleased with the results. The 63rd sent 2 planes to look for ships reported leaving Takao Harbor. Lt. Dickenson found 2, but failed to score and plane #809 had bomb rack malfunction. Finally, over Takao bombs were levered out with a screwdriver. Lt. Grimm sank a 500 ton escort vessel that blew up with amazing force.

Mar 12, 1945. The 64th went to Tainan Town and hit the railway yards with 48 X 500s all on target, but only minor fires resulted. was accurate, but fortunately only 1 plane was holed and there were no injuries in it. The 65th and 403rd went to Wa-Wa Dam, but it was weathered in and they hit the secondary at Aparri. The 65th was on the money, but half of the 403rd bombed the wrong target. There was evidence that the enemy was still bringing in men for the defense of Northern Luzon. This was the last day the 65th operated out of Tacloban, and they left without any regrets.

Mar 13, 1945. The 64th was given a real tough target, the power plant at Jutsugstutan that supplied electricity to much of central Formosa. The target was socked in as was the secondary, the naval base at Mako. However, the bombardiers were able to pick up Mako about 10 seconds from "bombs away" and, although scattered, several of the bombs hit underground oil storage tanks and smoke rose to 11,000'.

The Sea Hawks had only 1 plane out, plane #396 with Lt. Compton flying. He attacked several ships northeast of Swatow [China]. On the second run he had a near miss that started a fire on a Fox Tare Charlie. The fire was brought under control with 10 minutes, so the ship was only claimed as damaged. There was lots of AA from an escort, the FTC, and the shore, but no damage was taken.

For the 63rd Capt. Butts was rapidly becoming the champ if he wasn't already. He hit a 3000 ton merchant vessel outside of Macau, and to test their skill they dropped only 1 bomb. It was a direct hit and the ship exploded in all directions. Flames seemed to go as high as the plane, i.e., 1000 feet. Whatever it was, it was very volatile. At 0300 they found a launch towing a large barge and dropped 3 bombs - one a direct hit. A few minutes later a flare was dropped and, although the launch was here, the barge was gone. Two other planes were out that night, but the undercast and fog made it impossible to identify targets. Several were dropped on, but the results were unobserved. Still it was a good night. Unexplained are the flares that had been seen in that time frame. Apparently they had been dropped from the air as no rockets had been reported. It's possible that these were to guide night fighters to the B-24s, but no attacks had been pressed even when the enemy planes flew by a few miles away.

Mar 14, 1945. The 64th went back to Mako and the fire was still burning. The bombing was good, but no new fires were started. Smoke interfered with the first bomb run and a second was made. No AA or interception was there to greet them.

Mar 15, 1945. The 64th as well as the 90th and the 380th went to Bagio Naval Headquarters. The 19 X 1000 demos hit the target creating lots of smoke and flames as well as destroying buildings. No AA was encountered.

At noon this day Group Headquarters closed on Leyte, APO 72, and reopened at 1400 hours on the 16th at Clark Field, APO 74. The 64th remained in Mindoro until the 19th as did the 63rd. The 65th and 403rd were already at Clark Field.

Three B-24s from the 63rd went on a sea search with Mako [perhaps Makung] in the Pescadores or Hoihow [Haik'ou, Hainan] as secondary targets if no shipping was sighted. One plane accidentally released its bombs prematurely and hit the water below. A small picket boat was attacked and missed. Some bombs dropped amid ships in Hoihow Harbor while others were dropped on Mako where an undercast obscured any view of results.

- Mar 16, 1945. The Sea Hawks went to Swatow [Shant'ou], China, and the Hainan Strait sea lanes and were to remain there until daylight when they would be relieved by the 90th BG. Lt. Rogers in #807, and last to takeoff, found a Fox Tare Charlie anchored near Swatow. They missed on the first run, but made 2 direct hits on their second attempt. Since it was now getting light, they circled long enough to see the ship sink. During the flight one bomb bay door was ripped off. Planes #809 and #396 found no targets, but one saw a Tojo that put on an aerobatic show making no attempt to close.
- Mar 17, 1945. The 63rd went back to Hainan Strait but failed to sink or damage any ships. Plane #676, piloted by Lt. Dickenson, found a radar target but had not identified it. They circled the target, but when they opened the bomb bay doors, all the bombs dropped out. This was not a singular occurrence. The complex electrical system that prevented the bombs from falling when the doors were closed even if they had been released electrically, frequently released a bomb or more when the doors were opened. To avoid this, pilots would pull the red jettison handle between the pilot and copilot as this would open the doors and release the bombs simultaneously. Lt. Heckman found no ships so he bombed the secondary target, Mako, through a solid undercast, but they did sight fires still burning from the bombing 3 nights ago. Lt. Williams piloting plane #898 bombed a number of small targets through the undercast at Hoihow with no observed results.
- Mar 18, 1945. Two 63rd planes went out but due to poor weather, they bombed secondaries at Mako and Tien Ho Drome in the Canton area. Lt. Miller was the first 5th Air Force plane to bomb Tien HO. Lights were reported on in Canton and bombs fell on the drome, but the result went unobserved due to ground haze.
- Mar 19, 1945. The 64th flew its last mission from Mindoro. It was off to Samah Drome on the southern tip of Hainan Island, but the mission got off to a bad start as their transportation was 30 minutes late so they took off 30 minutes late. They arrived at the target just as the fighter coverage was leaving, but there was no interception. The bombing was very good with all bombs walking through the hanger areas. Very little activity was seen, no fires, big explosions or AA. The strike to Bagio [Baguio], Luzon, for the 65th and 403rd was called off due to weather.
- Mar 20, 1945. Sixteen planes from the 65th and 403rd headed to Balete Pass in the Bagio area, but weather won out and all bombs were dumped into Lingayen Gulf. The Sea Hawks had 2 planes out that night. Capt. Butts got a 100 ton lugger taking 3 runs, but leaving only splinters. In the Hainan Strait area a strange flare was seen again. It seemed to come from land and not from the air. Lt. Potthoff found no shipping and went on to bomb Tien Ho Drome from 5500'. A thick ground haze prevented any assessment of results, but it did seem that some bombs did not detonate. As they left the area 5 planes trailed them but did not try to attack.
- Mar 21, 1945. The group strike was against Samah Drome on Hainan. Despite poor weather en route and several turn backs, the planes that made it plastered the target and left burning planes and carnage. Eight or more planes were destroyed on the ground, several hangers were hit and other buildings were set on fire. The fighter cover was excellent as was the weather, but the AA was accurate and damaged three 65th planes and 2 from the 64th, but

the 403rd escaped any hits. This was good for the crews' morale after several days of frustration.

The 63rd had 2 planes out this night ranging from Hainan Island to Hong Kong to the north. One radar target was attacked blind due to weather and it was still on the scope after all bombs were dropped. Some junks were found by flares and were left alone. Bombs were dropped at Kuingshan Drome with unobserved results. Night fighters were around, but made no passes. Flares were seen in the strait area and it has been suggested that these were to alert shipping that U.S. planes were in the area.

Mar 22, 1945. The weather improved and 16 planes were off to Balete Pass. [Cherkauer's first mission in the 65th.] Bombing was not the best although 121 X 1000 demos were in the personnel areas with a few wide of the assigned targets. A few trucks were spotted and the road looked well traveled despite a few large holes that needed filling. The 403rd had a weather recco up soon after dawn and reported every half hour.

The 63rd had 2 ferret planes out to the South China Sea north to Hong Kong and farther north to Shanghai for a flight of 2520 miles of 16 hours duration. They found no targets so they headed to the secondary targets at Mako and Tien Ho. Lt. Gossens, in plane #807, hit Mako totally covered by clouds, but still a good radar target. Indications were that all bombs dropped in the target area, but no observation was possible. Lt. Bryant put bombs on Tien Ho, but ground fog prevented accurate assessment. Both planes were followed by night fighters that did not fire even though one came within 100' of one of the planes.

A third 63rd plane, #901, was lost somewhere between Leyte and Clark Field. The cause of the crash was unknown and there were no survivors. The plane apparently hit Mt. Babahao, a 500' high mountain about 60 miles south of Manila. [No crew names are given.]

Mar 23, 1945. The strike squadrons were off to the #2 power plant at Jitsugtsu-Tan north of Takao, Formosa. Eighteen planes were off to hit the target that turned out hard to find due to cumulus clouds. The 64th put the 2,000 lb. demos into the switch gear and transformer housed and put them out of commission with flames and smoke rising to 3000'. The 65th hit the power house with at least 2 bombs and had others within 50' of the main buildings. There was a great deal of smoke over the target along with AA causing some confusion. Bombs also ruptured the penstocks leading to the planets and great plumes of water spurted into the plant until it was cut off back at the dam valves. Three planes from the 403rd making individual runs hit the target with their 2000 pounders. AA hit two 64th planes, four 65th planes and two 403rd planes, but there were no injuries. Two planes went to the secondary targets at Takao and hit the railway yards. All in all it was a very satisfying day although the AA was a bit unnerving.

The Sea Hawks put up 5 planes with one heading for a new target, Ishigaki town on the island of the same name [Southern Ryukyus] that lies east of the northern tip of Formosa. The weather was poor en route but the island was easily picked up. Three runs at 10,000' put bombs on target with one fire reported. Four bursts of AA were sighted with no damage inflicted. Two of the other planes jettisoned their bombs due to fuel problems. The remaining planes found no shipping and headed to the secondary targets. Lt. Patton, in #814, hit the small boat docks at Kirun and caused a dandy explosion, shaking the plane at 3000'. The Torpex and incendiaries dropped also brought on secondary detonations and a blue tinted fire. Plane #814 stayed around for an hour observing their

handiwork. Lt. Williams went to Tien Ho but did not see a thing although radar indications from the Pearl River gave him a good fix.

Mar 24 1945. There was no group strike this day that was used to repair damage from the previous day. The 64th had an H2X mission on Ishigaki. The weather was poor with 10/10 from 5500' to 8000'. Three H2X runs were made at 10,000' and several fires were started. These were sighted after the plane dropped below the overcast. Fires were visible 10 miles south of the island. The H2X did not give a steady return on the shape of the coast, not did it pick up 2 jetties. From then on the 63rd would have some night time assistance.

Lt. Rogers in plane #809 flying at 2100' was headed for the Amoy Hainan slot. As the pilot was talking to Lingayen Fighter Sector a yellow alert was turned to red and AA opened up on them before they could get clear. By the time the mix-up was put right, the plane was badly damaged with shot out control cables, damaged hydraulics and hits on the #1 and #2 engines. Rogers made it out over the ocean to drop the bombs and make repairs to return to Clark Field. None of the crew was injured but the B-24 was a mess having taken some 20 shots. Lt. Miller, in plane #898, and flying his last mission ran into the red alert, but using violent evasive action managed to avoid the AA and made it to the gulf. There, crossing the shore, both planes saw the cause of their distress. A twin-engine Japanese plane was caught in the lights while heading south. After suitable clearance, Lt. Rogers headed back to Clark and landed at 2400. Williams [this must be Miller] headed for the hunting grounds and at about 0500 found an unidentified merchant vessel, maybe 3500 tons. The ship was stationary and had several craft around it, probably unloading as it was near Nanchow Island. Two runs were made and 2 hits were scored on the first run, but there was no fire and the results of the second were not seen. The ship disappeared from the scope in less than a half hour while they circled. Plane #076 flew another of those long ferrets, going from Shanghai to Saigon in just under 16 hours. The ferret planes had been away for several modifications done in Townsville, where they obtained better receivers and jammers as well as undergoing long term routine maintenance and several engine changes.

Mar 25, 1945. The 65th and the 403rd each sent one plane on a search mission to try to find any sign of a missing 90th Bomb Group B-24. A 5-hour search between Clark Field Lingayen found nothing in that mountainous territory that was so frequently cloud covered. The 63rd sent 2 planes to Hainan to look for shipping reported to be in Yulin Harbor. Finding none Maj. Brownfield, 63rd CO in #398, strung 8 Torpex bombs through the rail yards and ore loading facility. He flew at 5000' and encountered inaccurate AA. An hour later plane #396 came over the same target, and the enemy was ready for him. Medium and heavy AA holed his stabilizer, and one night fighter was in the area. All of his bombs were way off target and did no damage.

Mar 26, 1945. All 3 strike squadrons hit different targets around the Takao docks. Although there was no lead plane, all elements tried to get over the target at or as near the same time as possible to minimize the AA. The 64th had 3 planes hit; the 65th had 2; and the 403rd had 2, but there were no injuries. The bombing was very good. A good sized ship tied up at the docks but firing at them was sunk. Lots of fires and damage were seen although a few bombs did land in the water leading up to the docks and ship. A 2500 miles anti-radar ferret took off at 1530 and returned the next day at about 0800.

The Sea Hawks also had a good night with 4 planes out and the sinking of 2 ships. Lt. Rogers, getting by Lingayen safely, hit a Sugar Dog not far from Hong Kong. Two bombs were dropped with one scoring a direct hit. The small ship broke into parts and the bomber crew watched it sink. After more search the plane went on to Hoihow, the secondary, and dropped bombs through an undercast. No results were observed. Lt. Griffiths, in #398, found a Fox Tare Charlie at anchor off Liuchow Peninsula. The plane flying at 1000' dropped a string and scored a direct hit its stern. On circling back the crew dropped a flare and observed the ship settling stern down with the bow almost vertical out of water. Lt. Flinner, in #025, searched all night in vain and in desperation he ducked through the undercast at Hoihow Harbor and dumped 7 bombs on the docks from 1700' at 0930 hours. He did not stay around to observe the results, but instead sought shelter in the friendly clouds overhead.

Reports were coming in about a convoy off Indo-China and at 2022 Lt. Bryant took off in unarmed #898 to locate it. He found a DE, a large merchant vessel and a light cruiser or large DD along the coast near Vanfong Bay. At 0400 on the 27th, Lt. Williams took off with 8 Torpex bombs aboard. At about 1030 he found the convoy near Tre Island. The convoy now had several DDs and DEs plus a light cruiser and at least 4 merchant ships. This was a formidable target for a lone bomber on a clear day, but Williams said that he was there to sink ships. He began a run at 300' on the 10,000 ton tanker. As he lined up all hell broke loose as every ship fired at him. The tail section of the plane was hit and his rear gunner was slightly injured. Three bombs were dropped, but failed to explode probably due to fusing. Without hesitation the crew went back for a second run with the radar operator in the tail turret. AA was heavier than on the first run, but 2 hits were made on the ship that burst into flames and listed badly. As the B-24 peeled away and the crew marveled that they had survived, 2 silver Oscars attacked from 12 o'clock firing 20mm shells into the cockpit killing the copilot. A second pass from the rear killed the radar operator in the rear turret. A third pass from the front took out engine #3, and still the fighters came back. The nose and top turret gunners tried to keep the Oscars off and saw one smoke away into a cloud. Suddenly the B-24 was alone and headed for cloud cover. Two men were dead; 1 engine and the radio were out; there were fuel leaks; many instruments were out and 2 men were wounded but fortunately not badly. The controls, especially the elevators, were shot out; there was no trim; the plane was nose heavy and needed 2 men to hold her level and they were 650 miles from home. Everything not needed was thrown overboard. Only engines #1 and #4 were pulling full power; #2 was at reduced power and #3 was dead. For nearly 6 hours the crew fought their crippled plane back to Clark. Since they had not been heard of from about 1040 hours, the worst was feared as the plane could not be in the air much longer. The Air warning system alerted all that an aircraft was approaching from the west, but all efforts to contact it had failed. Its IFF was responding, so it was assumed to be friendly; Air Sea Rescue was alerted but did not launch a mission having no specific information on the plane. As it crossed the shore at Lingayen, word was passed that a B-24 on 3 engines was headed down the valley. The plane made it to Clark field, but without radio it could not contact the tower. A flare was dropped but it did not go off. The crew cranked down the landing gear and levered out the nose wheel. The plane was now committed to land as it did not have the power to go around for a second try at landing. With no brakes and part of the flaps gone, the plane hit hard, careened down the runway and came to a rest. There was no fire; all switches were cut and props were slowing. The crew had been in their crash positions and felt the grinding, wrenching, deafening noise of the airframe pulling itself

apart. Those alive got out of the wreckage as quickly as possible suffering some cuts and bruises caused by the landing. All were taken to the hospital but were back on duty in a few days. Lt. Williams was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action and the other crew members were awarded the DFC. It was a proud mission for the 63rd and KEN'S MEN. [There is confusion as to the number of Lt. Williams' plane between #076 and #676. If any of these men are in the association today and read this, please let Ed Gammill or Jim Cherkauer know the correct number of that B-24. At this point in Jim Pettus' manuscript dates seem to be getting mixed up. My diary lists the above as occurring on the 27th/28th.]

Pettus writes, "Wed. March 28, 1945. 63rd lost ship. Crash landed. Copilot & radar man had been killed." [One possible explanation for this is that Jim Pettus apparently was using records kept in the U.S.A. where it was always a day earlier than the date in the Pacific Theater. If it was Friday in the SWPA, it was Thursday in the States, etc. This one day difference in dates has caused confusion in many books and articles that I have read about the war in the Pacific.]

On this same night, 26th/27th, the 64th and 65th each had an H2X plane out over the Kiirun Docks. The 64th made 3 runs a few minutes apart at 8000'. They dropped 2 bombs on each run and spotted fires and explosions seen through the undercast after the last two runs. The 65th had good radar return, but no observed results.

Mar 27, 1945. With the enemy still holding out to the north on Luzon, the 3 strike squadrons sent 18 planes to Balete Pass. The target was a ridge north of Santa Fe where ground control designated the targets with white smoke. All bombs fell in or very near the requested drop zones. On this type of mission, weather permitting, the planes would make a familiarization run before dropping bombs.

The 64th and 65th each sent an H2X mission to Kiirun Docks [Formosa] this night and next morning. Weather was 10/10ths so this mission gave the crews experience over enemy territory and practice with the H2X on a target that might be hit later by the whole group in poor weather. The 64th had trouble with its H2X and bomber ETA. The 65th used H2X and was rewarded with an orange flash though the undercast. Night fighters were around with lights on. One made a firing pass beginning at 1000 yards. The B-24 did not return fire.

Mar 28, 1945. The Group sent 18 planes to hit Balete Pass again. It was much the same as the day before, except the bombers were rewarded with a series of explosions some of which could be felt at 5000'.

Another first for the 63rd was a mission to the mouth of the Yangtze River. Three planes staged through Mangaldan Drome on the Lingayen Gulf as it was the longest mission so far attempted. Two of the 3 planes found targets, but Capt. Butts, in #127, found a Sugar Baker Sugar off Fushan and scored a direct hit amidships. The ship sank a few minutes after smoke and flames erupted. Earlier Butts had seen small boat moving in the area and decided to go back and give it some attention. To their great surprise it turned out to be a gunboat that opened fire as did shore batteries. Luckily no hits were scored on #127. A twin-engine night fighter had been watching the action and made a pass from 7 o'clock high. The B-24 pulled off power and popped a bit of flaps to avoid the attack. Several of the bombers' gunners shot at the fighter but saw no effect from their shots. All planes returned to Clark without further incidence.

Mar 29, 1945. The 3 strike squadrons went on a major hit to Toshien Docks north of Okayama, Formosa. Bombing was excellent, although a few bombs were wild due to mechanical problems. The 64th hit a Sugar type tied up at a dock, then walked bombs into warehouses and caused explosions. A 65th put a string through 6 sub chasers tied up near the shore and possibly hit a Sugar Charlie. The 403rd had some problems, but had most bombs on the target. AA holed 2 of the 19 planes that made it to the target. The 63rd was sent on a patrol in the Formosa Strait with Kiirun Docks as the secondary. Two planes found no shipping and came back to hit the coal wharves and nearby oil storage tanks. Lt. Grimm, in #130, hit both with one very large red explosion from the oil tank farm. A few lights were diverted by rope. Earlier a hospital ship had been seen off Amoy. A 20mm shell hit #397 near the tail, the crew did not learn this until after landing.

Mar 30, 1945. The Group went back to Balet Pass and had good results as far as getting eggs into the nest. They even had a few explosions, one of which rocked the planes at 10,000'. The ground forces were reluctant to take excessive casualties to occupy this ground as the enemy couldn't escape, but the Japanese troops were determined to fight to the last and would be so accommodated.

Once again the Sea Hawks made new ground (or water). They sent 2 planes up the Yangtze River; one to search from Nanking to Tsingkiang and the other to search from the mouth to Tsingkiang. The briefing was careful as the planes were to avoid the AA at Nanking, and they were not to molest junks or sampans as these often were manned by friendly Chinese who do a rescue job for the 14th Air Force operation in China. The planes were not to go up the Whangpoa River to Shanghai. Weather in the area was hazy with a thin undercast. Lt. Van Etten made one blind run and finding nothing else jettisoned and came home. Lt. Potthoff damaged a large barge or floating dock, but it stayed afloat.

Mar 31, 1945. Eighteen planes from the strike squadrons headed out to Yulin harbor on Hainan Island. The 403rd had a series of miscues and only 1 of its planes went over the target after the other squadrons had bombed. The 64th scattered bombs all over, but managed to hit some barges and warehouses. Fire from the barges spread across the water. The 65th straddled a Fox Tare Uncle and also hit a Sugar Uncle that blew up and sank. The last plane across, that 1 lone 403rd plane, put its bombs into a group of Sugar Dogs and claimed hits on 2 of them. It also reported the ship hit by the 65th was sinking. Four 63rd planes went out this night and returned on April 1st. Two tried for small ships and missed; the other 2 bombed the secondary. Lt. Griffiths, in #807, searched until 0400 when he found a Sugar Dog but had rack trouble and missed. Capt. Rogers first bombed a reef, and then he went to Sanchu Drome near Canton, the largest Japanese Air Base on the Pearl Delta. He, too, had rack trouble and the bombs went in the water. Lt. Bryant, in #025, went to the same drome and was jumped by 5 night fighter while on his run. One twin-engine night fighter closed and fired, hitting the nose turret and slightly wounding the gunner. Two bombs hung up and were later levered out. The plane was also hit in 1 fuel tank and landed at Lingayen for gas en route to Clark. Lt. Flinner, in #130, missed a Sugar Dog, and he too, had rack trouble when 6 bombs accidentally released. The Sugar Dog was missed, and all came home to raise hell with the ordnance electricians about the bomb racks.

It was a busy month. The move to Clark was arduous, but it had some advantages. It was the best camp the 43rd had in months. There were no jungles or swamps and there were eager locals to do laundry and other chores. There were watermelons to buy and rot gut alcohol that would make you blind. KEN'S MEN built a fine camp on the premises with the idea that it was the end of the line for them as the B-29s would carry the war to Japan. Carefully hoarded supplies were brought out and used. Nice Enlistee Men's Clubs and Officers' Clubs sprang up. By the middle of April there were lights in every tent (thanks to the scrounging ability of Maj. McInnes, who induced the Navy to give him a generator and transformers - this exchange may have involved some whiskey, but such details were never discussed).

There were some drawbacks, such as Col. Pettus was the Commander of Clark Field, but there were service squadrons to do the work. There was dust and plenty of it, but the weather was better than Leyte's.

From a training standpoint there were a few problems, mainly bombing targets. Also the air defenses were highly sensitive and clearance had to be obtained to get out to the sea. The 63rd instituted training so that a crew would fly a plane in the day to calibrate the radars and get to feel comfortable with the plane they would fly that night.

Clark was very big and very busy with Army, Navy and Marines; there was even a detachment of the Mexican Air Force. Few people knew that Mexico was in the war on the U.S. side. There was also the feeling that "it won't be long now." VE Day was coming as Germany crumpled and Japan was in retreat, although nobody had any illusions that the end would be easy. Still there was no doubt about the outcome - only when.

The Sea Hawks had an outstanding month. They had flown 90 sorties and had failed to complete only two. They sank 20 ships of some 53,000 tons and damaged 4 others. Sadly, 2 men had been killed in action and 13 others had been killed in an accident.

It had also been a busy time for the strike squadrons. Everyday in March, except the 16th, some operational mission had been carried out. A total of 494 sorties were flown and 1230 tons of bombs dropped, ranging in size from 250 pounders to one-tonners (frags and incendiaries count for 260 lb. bundle.) No aircraft were missing or lost on takeoffs and landings. Two planes were lost when they hit mountains in Luzon during one ground support mission. Seventeen men were killed. One plane disappeared flying from Clark to Leyte on March 9th; the crew of 5 were declared lost.

APRIL 1945

Apr 1, 1945. The 63rd missions shown on Mar 31, 1945, ended in April of course. In addition a 65th plane equipped with H2X dropped 6 X 1000 lb. bombs through 6/10 cloud coverage on the Kiirun Naval Base. They used rope to dodge the lights and evaded 2 night fighters. [This was Easter Sunday in 1945. Cherkauer's diary indicates that a Japanese ammo dump near the 65th camp at Clark Field blew up with one terrific explosion.] The strike squadrons sent 9 planes to the airdrome at Giran; eight made it to the target and had good results with the drop of frags that caused flames to reach 300' and smoke to 4000'.

The 63rd sent out just 1 plane this night; the others may have been having work done on those defective bomb racks. Lt. Dickenson, in #398, found plenty to keep him busy. At 0400 the next AM, he made a run on a Sugar Charlie Love, 2300 tons, and scored a direct hit. The ship sank in less than a half hour. A dropped flare at 0415 showed the ship listing heavily. At 0430, when they returned, the ship was gone. The saw at that time a Sugar Dog and dropped on it. A near miss capsized the little boat. At the end of their

patrol they had a radar indication and dropped on it, but a flare showed a ship that had already been sunk and was aground.

This same night the 64th sent an H2X up to Shinchiku Drome with a load of frags. The weather was clear, so a visual run was made and was checked by radar. All bombs fell in the target area, but only impact bursts were seen. One night fighter began to fire from 1000 yards and received a few rounds in return. There was no damage to either plane.

Apr 2, 1945. Three planes, one from each of the strike squadrons, went after Ft. Drum in a kind of bombing competition. The load was 4 X 2000 lb. GP bombs. The 64th had 3 hits; the 65th had 2 hits [Lt. Donald McMahon, bombardier on Capt. Herb Agard's crew had 3 hits copilot Cherkauer's diary says] while the 403rd received a big goose egg.

Apr 3, 1945. Shipping in the Hong Kong area was the target for the strike squadrons as a major effort by the 22nd BG, the 43rd BG and the 90th BG. To prevent the bombing of hulks or vessels run aground, a pathfinder or spotter flight would be first over the area with photos taken the pervious afternoon. All planes on the mission had the photos, and ships already disabled were so marked. The pathfinder was to assign undamaged targets to each group; in all he would have to make 3 passes over the harbor. Col. Pettus, who had evolved the idea of the spotter, was to be in the lead with 2 other planes. There was 1 squadron of P-38s just to cover this element. There would be 4 squadrons of the 90th, 4 squadrons of the 22nd and 3 of the 43rd to bomb the targets assigned by the spotter. En route 1 plane of the spotter element dropped out. The weather was perfect. Weaving across the harbor to throw off the AA, the pathfinder sent targets to the 90th - all their planes missed the assigned target. Another spotter run over the harbor assigned the same targets to the 22nd, and they too missed. For the last run Pettus and James Klein, flying on his wing, took the biggest ship after assigning targets to the 43rd. So far there had been no enemy fighters seen, and for that matter no friendly P-38s either. Some of the squadrons that had bombed reported interception even though there were to be 3 squadrons of P-38s in the area. Just before "bombs away" Pettus and Klein were jumped by 3 Zekes, very aggressive, passing within 30' of the B-24s. The lead top gunner on Pettus' crew was seriously wounded, but fought on. One engine was shot out and several, including the pilot, received minor injuries. Bombs were dropped but missed their ship, and the B-24s decided to get away before the Zekes could come back. By this time the 43rd was on its bomb run and saved the day by superior bombing. They sank 4 ships and hit oil tanks, starting big fires. Two squadrons were intercepted, but not damaged. AA holed a number of planes, but not seriously. Col. Pettus landed at Lingayen, 1 engine dead, another almost out of oil. The heroic gunner, Sgt. Gangler, was transferred to the hospital, and after several operations; his leg was saved. In the critique that followed the mission, it was established that the P-38s had gone to Macau instead of Hong Kong. Of the 11 squadrons over the target, 9 were intercepted. The P-38s saw nothing. [Capt. Agard's 65th plane, #0915, got off late due to mechanical problems that were repaired. It never caught up with the other B-24s and hit the target as a solo. The AA was very intense, but no enemy fighters were seen. Lt. McMahon dropped the bombs on target, and #0915 headed back to Clark with no interception.] This night Lt. Grimm, in #076, flew a ferret mission from Hong Kong to Saigon, 2475 miles. Two other 63rd planes were out with no luck on ships or bombing. Lt. Williams bombed a reef, then he went to Mako but all bombs hit the water. Lt. Rogers had radar problems after part of the housing fell off, so their bombs were jettisoned.

Apr 4, 1945. The Group went to Hong Kong again with the docks being the main targets. All squadrons scored hits on vessels tied up or in dry dock. 144 X 1000 pounders were unloaded and did great damage. AA was meager and there was no fighter interception. (P-38s in the right place that day). Twenty KEN'S MEN took off and 18 reached the target.

Two 63rd planes were out this night and early morning. Lt. Van Etten, in #898, sank a 50 ton barge. They also damaged a Fox Tare Dog about 1000 tons. Lt. Patton, in #814, bombed a radar target and then went to Tien Ho Drome to hit a supply area. Being careful to avoid a nearby POW camp, their bombs went through the target with 1 large building rising in the air and disintegrating. Again there was rack trouble with 3 stations skipped. These bombs were salvoed at the end of the run, and one hit quite near a searchlight that went out. Canton was blacked out, but Hong Kong was a blaze of light.

Apr 5, 1945. It was back to Hong Kong for the strike squadrons. Flying an airborne standby, 21 planes took off with 20 making it over the harbor, but the weather made bombing difficult. Still hits were observed on the Royal Navy Docks and a tanker, and bombs hit 1 of the power stations. AA was spotty and only 6 planes were holed with no injuries. One DD seemed to be the cause of much flak.

Three Sea Hawks were out this night and next morning and Lt. Potthoff, in #694, found a convoy of perhaps 10 ships on a heading of 80 degrees. As it was now daylight, he was ordered to jettison the bombs and shadow the convoy as long as his fuel permitted. Lt. Flinner took off at 1000 hours on the 6th to take #694's place. Lt. Flinner, in #130 carrying no bombs, found the convoy at 1430. He flew at 6000' and was weaving through the cloud cover to keep a visual check on the convoy reporting that the enemy had fighter cover over it. At the same time #130 was sending a homing signal for A-20s to hit the ships. When they heard the A-20s say they would be over the target in 10 minutes, they got in position to watch the show. At this moment 6 camouflaged Tojos, apparently unaware of the approaching A-20s, came after the B-24. Flinner headed for some clouds and made it just as the first Tojo started a pass. Then the B-24 headed out to sea to draw the Tojos away from the convoy yet at the same time stay in the clouds for self protection. After about 30 minutes he went back to check the convoy and the results of the A-20s' attack. He found that they had sunk a Fox Tare Able and damaged a destroyer. Flinner then made a last position report and headed for home. (Pettus says these A-20s were at the extremity of their range, as he doesn't think Aparri was open by this time for an emergency landing.)

Also out this night were Capt. Butts, in #812, and Capt. Rogers in #398. Butts found no shipping, so he went after the ore loading docks at Bakli Bay. Two runs scored destructive hits on the docks and warehouse, some of which popped open like firecrackers. One night fighter was troublesome making several passes, but Butts shook him off by going down on the deck.

Rogers became the first Sea Hawk to bomb a lighthouse. Getting a good radar signal, they released bombs and straddled the target. Going back and dropping a flare, they found that it was a beacon on rocky reefs. A hit at the base had toppled it and no light was showing. The plane then strafed 2 Sugar Dogs and went looking for better targets. Just before dawn they found a Fox Tare Charlie of 2000 tons and used their last 4 bombs. A series of very near misses resulted in the ship exploding and sinking within a half hour. They then headed home.

One 64th and one 65th H2X planes went to Kiirun and dropped 12 X 1000 lb. bombs on the drome with unobserved results due to the undercast. There was little AA, but 2 fighters were seen.

During the night of the 5th and morning of the 6th, Sea Hawks took off every 3 hours to shadow and attack the convoy. Lt. Dickenson failed to find the ships. Lt. Croft, in #898, also failed to locate the convoy. It was thought that the ships may have made port by this time, so #898 went to the secondary target at Mako where, after bombing, it received a message that the lost had been found - too late. Lt. Grimm, in #807, also missed the convoy and hit Mako where he reported lots of radar interference. Last to take off was Capt. Rogers in #126. He found the ships and dropped in daylight on a DD from 4500' with unobserved results due to an undercast. Lt. Dolley in #076 flew a ferret from Amoy to Nanking.

Apr 6/7, 1945. The 63rd sent out 6 planes, 4 armed to hit the convoy, one unarmed to shadow it and 1 armed recco to Hainan. Lt. Van Etten took off at 1755 in #396 and found the convoy at about 2200 hours. He made 4 runs on a light cruiser, but 2 near misses were all he could manage. He estimated that there were 15 ships in the convoy. He counted 3 visually and the rest by radar. Just after midnight Lt. Patton, in #398, made several runs but did not connect. He relayed his position to those coming after him. Lt. Phillips, in #897 or #807, had mechanical trouble and rack problems. He too could not claim any hits. Last off was Lt. Wilson, in #812, with a crew making its first mission. A series of mechanical mishaps were rectified on the way out, and they were nervous about their initial encounter with the enemy. At 0210 they were over the convoy. They counted 4 ships on radar and lined up for a run at 1000'. At one quarter mile they dropped a flare and then loosed 4 bombs scoring 1 near miss, 2 direct hits and 1 overshoot. The AA was intense, but they managed to get away with the tip of the right wing gone. They came back for a second radar run and dropped 4 X 500 Torpex bombs and made 2 direct hits on a destroyer. This resulted in an enormous explosion. The ship stopped firing and its searchlight went out. As Wilson pulled up into the overcast a second detonation was seen. Counting themselves lucky not to have anyone injured, they took stock of any damage and noted that there were only 2 ships on their radar. They headed home knowing that they had done a good job on their baptism of fire. Wilson and his crew were credited with sinking a Tare Baker, 8000 tons, on the first run and a destroyer of 1700 tons on the second. Their plane had numerous holes and the tip of the starboard wing was missing.

Apr 7, 1945. A daylight search mission for the day was Capt. Welch in #130 with a pickup VIP crew - Major Brownfield, 63rd Squadron C.O. as copilot, Lt. Waller, an Armament Officer, as nose gunner went looking for daylight shipping. At 1600 they began to follow a radar indication, but they soon realized that it was aircraft and probably several when they came upon 3 twin-engine Nells. There was a spirited exchange of fire. With 2 Nells smoking and the nose and top guns in the B-24 jammed, they climbed into clouds to try to get the guns working again. Their day was just beginning. They sighted a 7000 ton tanker that was a few miles off shore and had a fire forward. They made a quick skip bombing run and scored 2 direct hits. The ship rolled over and began to sink. Next they encountered a large lugger loaded with cargo and personnel. Another skip bombing attack dispatched this ship with one bomb. Flying down the coast and keeping a sharp eye out for bogeys, they spotted a Sugar Able Love. Although they missed with their

bombs, they set the ship on fire with tracers. After 2 more bombing runs, they scored a hit and the ship sank. Finding no more ships, they went to lay their last eggs on the Hoihow Seaplane Base. Due to an overcast, they made a radar run and dropped their last bombs calling it a day. It was now 2000 and they were five and one-half hours from home base. All the sinkings were in clear weather and within 7 miles of shore and 20 miles of Fat Law Drome, but they encountered no interception.

The strike squadrons sent 18 planes to the Shinchiku Drome, but the clouds were nasty. The planes bombed by elements and hit other targets in Tainan Town and even Taichu. The 403rd hit 4 different targets. One plane was holed and the only fighters seen were many friendly U.S. planes.

At 0600 Lt. Potthoff of the 63rd flew an unarmed B-24 to shadow the convoy during the day. He picked it up at 1035 and reported 4 merchant vessels and 2 destroyers that seemed to be heading into harbor at Kaivang Point. Another 4 ship convoy was sighted coming out of Swatow and he and his crew kept track of it. All the time their flight was dodging in and out of clouds to avoid enemy fighters. The plane stayed in the area sending position reports for over 5 hours.

This night and into the next day, April 8th, 2 Sea Hawks went to Swatow. Lt. Rogers, in #694, made 2 runs in foul weather that seemed to be affecting the LAB causing them to miss the target by wide margins. At 0435 he headed home. Lt. Williams, in #128, did not find any targets and proceeded to his secondary only to find it closed in by weather. He jettisoned the bombs and headed home. #128 was trailed for a half hour by an enemy night fighter showing a bright headlight. The fighter came within 100 yards, but his light did not pick up the B-24. Neither plane fired any shots.

An H2X flight by a 64th plane put 6 X 1000 lb. bombs in the Kiirun Dock area, but due to an undercast no results were seen. AA holed the plane and a night fighter was seen but made no pass at the bomber.

Apr 8, 1945. Due to bad weather the Group strike with frags on Matsuyama Drome was a disaster. One 64th plane bombed the primary but the rest went to Taito Town. Bombs were dropped on targets up and down the west coast of Formosa. Due to clouds, several planes unwittingly flew near AA positions and several were holed.

The convoy was now beyond the range of the 63rd bombers, so 2 planes went out this night for other game. One was to search from Swatow north and the other from Canton south. Weather was poor and Lt. Dickenson, in #128, made no visual sighting and the radar contacts were poor. A flare only lit up the undercast. Lt. Flinner, in #397, found nothing and made a run on the oil storage at Mako, but only bomb bursts were seen through the haze and mist.

Apr 9, 1945. The 3 strike squadrons had the day off for maintenance and training.

At 0600 Capt. Butts took off for a daylight sweep in the Hainan area. He found no shipping, but took "targets of opportunity" that included blowing up with skip bombing a railroad bridge and a small freight yard that they also strafed. The latter resulted in an engine being dispatched in a cloud of steam. They encountered AA from Fat Law Drome but were not holed and they had no interception.

This night and into the next morning, Lt. Grimm of the Sea Hawks in #076, flew a ferret along the China coast from Hong Kong/Canton, around Hainan Island, on to the Indo-China coast near Tourane and then back to Clark at distance of 2160 miles.

Apr 10, 1945. The strike squadrons had no mission this day.

A 65th H2X made two runs on the Kiirun Naval Base and encountered meager AA. One interceptor was seen. Only bomb bursts were observed.

The Sea Hawks again had a daylight recco that took off at 0300 with Lt. Patton at the controls in #807. He skip bombed and strafed a tanker near Hainan only to find that it was run aground and abandoned. It was low in the water due to high tide at the time. He bombed Hoi How Seaplane Base blowing up a large building and getting a near miss on the base swimming pool. They then flew close to the shore looking for targets and enemy planes at several dromes, but they saw none.

A night mission by Lt. Croft, in #694 of the 63rd, had no luck at all. No shipping was seen in the Canton/Hong Kong corridor and he could not identify his secondary target, a small arms factory in Canton.

Apr 11, 1945. The day strike squadrons went to Fuga Island after finding the primary near Bagio was socked in by weather. Fuga is a staging area on the north coast of Luzon. The Group bombed from 3500' -5000' and destroyed numerous buildings. While flying in the Bagio area trying to find the primary target, they encountered light AA.

At 2100 hours the 64th sent an H2X to the Kiirun Bay area where bomb runs were made on 2 radar targets, but due to an undercast no results were seen. AA holed their stabilizer.

Also this night the Sea Hawks had 4 armed reccos out flying along the China coast towards Nanking. No shipping was found on the Yangtze, but bombs were dropped on the Pukow rail terminal from which material was shipped to Japanese forces in the interior. Nanking and Pukow were bright with lights, and the drome at Ming Ku Kung had its runway lights on. One of the bombers was trailed for several hours by fighters, but no passes were made.

At 2300 Lt. Dollar, in #108, took off to look for a convoy, but he found nothing except 1 Fox Baker that was possibly aground.

Apr 12, 1945. The Group strike to Kagi and Ikayama Dromes was weathered out, so it went to Tainan and bombed by H2X. They dumped 40 plus tons of frags from 12,000'. The results were unobserved but one plane was holed by AA. Although rope was used, the radar controlled guns soon got the range.

This night a 65th H2X plane bombed shipping in Kiirun Harbor. Their bombs hit amongst ships and strung out into town. No assessment of damage could be made. One night fighter was seen but there were no AA or lights.

The 63rd sent 4 planes towards Nanking, but only 1 made it. Two had radar problems and the third had a gas leak in the bomb bay. Lt. Flinner, in #898, made it to the target, but he found no shipping so he plastered the rail yard at Pukow and started a small fire. An armed recco also went to Tien Ho Drome and dropped a load of frags. Three enemy planes circled but did not fire.

Also there was a night mission by a 403rd bomber equipped with H2X bomber Kiirun. No results were observed, but 1 night fighter was troublesome but uneager. It fired from a half mile away.

Apr 13, 1945. The Group was off to Hong Kong again, but it did not fare too well except for the 65th that sank a Fox Able and hit the Texaco refinery. The 64th dumped most of its bombs in the water as did the 403rd, although the latter did manage to drop some bombs

on the docks. There was no fighter interception but 3 planes were holed by AA. On the flight home, 3 rafts with dye markers were seen and reported to Rescue.

This night the Sea Hawks headed for the China Sea and Shanghai. They were looking for ships and the Italian liner, Conte Verde, that was supposed to be in the area although the 14th AAF had claimed to have sunk it prior to this date. The 63rd was to hunt for this 17,500 ton liner many times with no success. Three of the 4 bombers hit a variety of targets but claimed no shipping although several ships had been sighted. Lt. Grimm dropped on a large area of lights that seemed to be floating. Although the bombs struck close or through it, no apparent damage resulted. Later it was thought to be some kind of a lighted trap to attract fish.

Apr 14, 1945. Kagi Drome was the target for the strike squadrons. Seventeen planes made it to the target where they dropped frags on planes on the ground. The results were fair to good. The 65th had all bombs on target and started fires. The other squadrons had 50%-60% on target but some bombs that overshot the target hit rail yards. AA was heavy and accurate with 3 planes being hit and 1 having an engine shot out [Capt. Agard, 65th in #540, QUEEN OF THE CLOUDS]. Aircraft were spotted on the ground about 10 miles from Kagi, parked along a strip, presumably dispersed from the center of the attacks. That night 4 Sea Hawks headed for Shanghai looking for the Conte Verde again. Three made it to the Whangpoo River and 1 turned back due to radar failure. There was a great deal of flak with 2 planes being hit but not seriously. No big ship was seen and the dropped bombs missed the docks. Lt. Wilson was last over the target and had rack trouble. The bombs were finally dropped over Pootung Point when the bombardier said, "NOW," and they were dropped using the emergency jettison system. They were awarded with a nice red colored explosion but no Conte Verde.

Apr 15, 1945. Aircraft on the ground at Shinchiku, the primary, and Toyahara, the secondary were the targets for the Group. The 65th found a hole in the clouds and hit the primary with good results. They destroyed a twin-engine bomber and started some fires. Some hung bombs were later salvoed on Kyoritsu Town where a large fire with smoke rising to 5000' was started. The 64th and 403rd went to Toyahara where they spotted a few planes on the ground and were greeted with heavy AA. Bombs hit several areas of the drome but with no spectacular results. Six planes were holed, but there were no injuries. This night the 63rd planned a big effort on the capital of Formosa, Taihoku [T'aipei?], on the north of the island. Six planes took off but 1 returned due to radar failure. The others dropped 500 lb. incendiaries resulting in many fires. The city was brightly lit when the first plane, Lt. Dolley in #809, went over at 2331. The city then darkened when Lts. Grimm, in #894, and Canevari, in #398, arrived but fires below showed them the way. Two more planes followed and the many fires all started soon merged into 3 very large conflagrations. Night fighters were around but did not fire. AA was moderate holing 1 plane. Searchlights were plentiful but very ineffective. This was the first of many poundings that city would get.

Apr 16, 1945. The Group sent 25 planes to Matsumaya and all made it to the target. Frags and 1000 lb. demos were dropped from 12,500' onto various targets including parked planes, guns and airplane hangers. Photos later showed a number of planes destroyed on the ground and fires attested to other destruction. The weather was clear, the AA plentiful

holding 6 planes and rocking all of them. Only one plane from an unnamed squadron dropped its bombs in the water. All in all it was a good day.

The Sea Hawks spent this night searching the Formosa Strait with no success, so they proceeded to the secondary target at Mako. Lt. Craig, in #694, found the target socked in and bombed by radar. Later Lt. Phillips, in #398, found a hole in the clouds and hit the naval barracks. Both planes had received a message that some shipping might be in the Amoy area and to make the secondary Mako. Phillips went to Amoy, but finding it totally weathered in he wisely proceeded to Mako since he had no maps of the area. Craig did not try to go to Amoy without charts.

A 64th H2X went to Kiirun Bay and bombed at 0125 on the 17th. Lights caught the plane after "bombs away" and held it for several minutes. Night fighters were airborne and visible due to their lights being on. The bombs dropped started one large fire.

Apr 17, 1945. The Group put 23 planes in the air to hit the primary target of Shinchiku.

Twenty-two made it to the target. Numerous fires were started although bombing was not too good with just over 65% of the bombs in the designated area. AA holed 2 planes and rocked others. Twenty-five OD colored single-engine airplanes were sighted in a clear area west of the target. Clouds and breakaway maneuvers prevented photos of these planes to determine if they might be decoys.

Two Sea Hawks were sent out this night, but they found no action. One plane jettisoned after an hour or so due to radio interference with its radar. The other plane came back after a long and fruitless search bucking headwinds that made it too risky to get to the secondary.

A 64th H2X hit Okayama Drome with frags. The mickey operator could not pick up the strip, so they bombed the dock area that could be seen. A large fire was started. AA holed the plane in 2 places and the night fighters were out as usual, but they did not fire at the bomber. Bombs were away at 0135 on Apr. 18th.

Apr 18, 1945. Seventeen Group planes hit Giran Drome, Formosa, with frags. Two planes on the bomb run had problems; one had all of its bombs drop when the bomb bay doors were opened, and the other was hit by flak so that the electrical system would not release the bombs that were later salvaged in the ocean when the formation went over the open ocean to avoid further AA.

[The takeoff this day was delayed for a fair amount of time when a P-38 came in to land with a hung up bomb under one wing. The pilot foolishly performed an Immelmann maneuver used by fighters when landing without a hung bomb. The maneuver caused the bomb to drop and hit a B-24 that blew up and set another P-38, that was in the air off the wing of the culprit, on fire. This pilot bailed out and hit the ground as his chute opened. He died later. A huge fire was started in a nearby hanger. In all 21 ground crew men were killed along with the one pilot. Recorded by Jim Cherkauer who observed the event from B-24J-190 *BARBARA JEAN* waiting in line to take off.]

The 63rd put one anti-radar ferret plane in the air only to have it turn back after completing about 30% of its mission before experiencing problems in engines #1 and #2.

Apr 19, 1945. The Group planes went to Shinchiku Town with plans to bomb by H2X and visually if the weather permitted. The weather turned out to be 50/50, i.e., half could see and half could not. The 64th had the flux gate compass go bad on the run, and they were off the aiming point by 2000'. The 65th lined up and dropped visually on 3 targets in the

H2X larger parameter. Several fires were started and violent explosions rocked planes at 10,000'. The 403rd followed the H2X plane and toggled on it; the mickey operator pronounced a perfect run, but clouds prevented any visual confirmation. AA was moderate with only 1 plane being holed. No enemy fighters were seen, but there were P-47s in evidence.

The 63rd had this night off.

Apr 20, 1945. Once again the weather was bad. The primary target was Tainan Drome with the secondary being Tainan Town using H2X. Only 1 element dropped on the revetments of the drome and with unobserved results, but in the target area. The formation then went around again making an H2X run on the town and starting a number of fires in warehouses near the marshalling yards. The AA was accurate and holed 6 planes, but there were no injuries. One plane had engine trouble and bombed Kato before turning back. Another plane had to feather a prop and lagged behind making a target for a lone Zeke that made a pass. The 2 planes exchanged gunfire with no damage to either. The Zeke broke off at some 500 yards, but his presence alerted our planes to be careful as there was at least 1 enemy fighter in the air.

This night the Sea Hawks sent out 3 planes. One flew a ferret doing a sweep of the China coast north to Shanghai and Hanchow. Two planes went to Sakashima Gunto, islands northeast of Formosa, and hit the town and drome at Mirara. Lt. Scroggs, in #809, finding no ships dropped in the target with unobserved results due to undercast. Lt. Fuller, in #398, hit barrack buildings at the Mirara Drome on the same islands that were active in the attack on the 10th U.S. Army when it landed on Okinawa on April first. There was no AA, but one night fighter appeared and followed #398 for 30 minutes and once fired into a cloud.

A 403rd H2X raider went to Tainan Town this night and dropped 12 X 500 incendiaries starting many fires. One night fighter was seen and it trailed the B-24 to the southern tip of Formosa. A new kind of AA was reported. It was a kind of rocket bomb that burst well in front of the plane while making a high arch trailing a short streamer. The crew estimated its speed at about 400 mph. (This would be close to the apex of its arc.)

Apr 21, 1945. There was no Group strike this day.

An H2X plane from each of the 64th and 65th squadrons hit the town of Taihoku this night with outstanding results. These conflagrations were visible 30 miles from the town. Night fighters were present and made at least 1 firing pass with no damage resulting. The 65th bomber sustained a hole in one vertical stabilizer.

This same night the Sea Hawks had 2 planes on a sea search along the China coast. They had the docks of Swatow as a secondary target. At about midnight Lt. Dickenson, in #807, detected a night fighter coming in from 3 o'clock. The Jap kept coming until he was perhaps 100 yards away when the tail gunner fired. The Jap continued to come and flew just under the tail of the bomber. Since he did not fire, the crew feared that it was an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The B-24 sought cloud cover and recovery of the crew's nerves. The fighter was not seen again, so the bomber continued and hit warehouses on the Swatow waterfront. Only the bursts were seen. The second plane came over just before dawn and plastered the business district, but the crew did not see any spectacular results.

A 63rd ferret went from Hong Kong to Saigon and as usual when unarmed, a target was found. Off Tiger Island there were 13 ships of various sizes; at least 2 were large.

Apr 22, 1945. The Group tried to take out a bridge north of Balete Pass, but the weather closed the area; so they hit the secondary at Iligan Town. Here the retreating Japanese had stores and barracks and were making a last stand. Numerous buildings were destroyed and one large explosion, probably ammo, went up. The load was 96 X 1000 lb. demos and 90% fell in the target from an altitude of 5000'.

This night, 22nd/23rd, a 403rd bomber equipped with H2X went to Matsuyama with frags, but only a small fire was their reward. There were lots of searchlights in the area, but rope seemed to divert them. A 65th plane on the same mission had to turn back with a severe hydraulic leak. Shortly after midnight, a 64th H2X bomber was over Matsuyama Drome to hit barracks near the west dispersal area. Bombs were released on radar plan and visual checks. One large explosion resulted some 15 seconds after the bombs hit. Two night fighters appeared. One made a firing pass, but evasive action was underway and no damage was done. There was no AA and the searchlights were uncoordinated. Three 63rd planes headed to the Shanghai/Whangoo rivers to hunt for the liner, Conte Verde, where the V Bomber Command had reported it. It was not there. What was reported to have been the ship turned out to be an island with dense vegetation. One crew member remarked upon his return, "It was some camouflage job if the Bomber Command thought that it was the liner!" All 3 dropped some bombs on the Woosung Military Depot, but without spectacular effect. AA was moderate with no damage reported. The city of Shanghai was lit up when the first plane arrived, but the lights began to dim after the first bombs were dropped.

Apr 23, 1945. The Group strike was to Yulin Harbor on Hainan Island where numerous small ships had been seen. Bombing was excellent and targets destroyed were: 2 Sugar Charlie Sugars; 1 patrol craft; 2 large barges; 2 luggers; and a Fox Tare Dog was a probable. Bombs also destroyed buildings in Yulin Town, and the wharves were damaged. AA was accurate holing 4 planes, but although interception was airborne, it did not attack. Some phosphorus shells were seen, but they were not effective.

This night the Sea Hawks went to the Gulf of Tonkin to look for ships there were supposed to be in Yulin or nearby. Two planes found nothing but junks, so they headed for land targets. #807 hit the Hoihow docks. Lt Craig, in #812, went to Bakli Bay where he found no ships; so he bombed the docks and adjacent areas. When he left, there were 2 large columns of smoke rising. One 63rd plane went to Formosa Strait and found a small unidentified ship and overturned it with 3 bombs. He then went to Mako's oil storage area and put 5 Torpex bombs into the concentrations of buildings. Fires were burning brightly as he exited the area.

A 65th H2X plane dropped on Taihoku town using 24 X 260 frags. Flashes and glow came through the undercast, but the crew soon turned its attention to 3 night fighters trailing along. The B-24 took evasive action in the clouds and soon lost the fighters.

Apr 24, 1945. There was no Group strike this day.

This night the 63rd had a field order from V Bomber Command that the "island" they had sighted 2 nights ago was actually the Conte Verde. They were to "Find it and sink it." If it could not be found, there were secondaries. Lt. Wilson, in #130, went up and back down the river at 150' in the undercast that made lateral visibility almost nil. He could not pick up the big liner. The Kiangnan Docks and Woosung Depot could not be picked up on radar. It was too dangerous to search under these conditions, so he bombed a

stationary target and missed. On the flight deck they wiped the sweat away as they pulled back up to 2500' for the trip home. Lt. Scroggs, in #014 or #614, searched the lower river for shipping and found nothing. Weather was so solid that he could barely find the Woosung Military Depot. LAB radar was not for navigation. It could pick up objects as it swept, but what these objects were or exactly where they were, it could not distinguish. Unlike H2X, it could not give a coast line from altitude and a river mouth or spit of land from which the plane's position could be determined. They dropped on the depot and hopefully hit the rail yards.

Apr 25, 1945. The daylight squadrons went bridge busting at Balete Pass. The weather was good. Five 64th planes dropped 2000 pounders on Bridge "C" and dropped 3 spans with 3 direct hits. They also damaged 3 other spans from an altitude of 5000'. The 403rd hit the bridge northeast of Dupex using 2000 lb. demos making individual runs while in a traffic pattern. Two direct hits were scored with 1 near miss. Seventy-five percent of the bridge was down with major damage also done to the approach road. The 65th missed their bridge but heavily damaged the road leading to it. Japanese traffic would be stalled for quite sometime.

Two more 63rd bombers were sent this night to Shanghai to find the Conte Verde. Only #397 searched for the errant ship and looked for over 2 hours. With reduced visibility and no other sightings, Lt. Fuller dropped on some barges, but 1 bomb did not explode. Lt. Dolley found 2 Sugar Dogs and made 2 runs on them, but he could not tell the results due to the undercast. Bombs were heard and felt to go off. The fog seemed to hang over the river at these early morning hours. The bombers passed near Lungwha Drome and sighted 15 planes on hardstands. There was vehicle traffic in Shanghai and the area was brightly lit. There was no AA, no interception and no Conte Verde.

A 403rd and a 64th equipped H2X bombers headed for Tansui Floatplane Base. The 403rd plane returned with radar and radio trouble, but the 64th pressed on. He completed his mission in soupy weather, dropping 12 X 260 lb. frags by radar. One twin-engine night fighter trailed them over the base when the AA went off below.

Apr 26, 1945. The strike squadrons headed to oil targets at Toshein in central Formosa, but the weather interfered. This resulted in a wild and confusing day. The target did not lend itself to H2X bombing, so the planes bombed many targets. There were some 90 B-24s milling around over the island. The 43rd bombed Toshien with 3 planes; Tainan with 5 planes; Koshun with 3 planes; Shajo with 4 planes; Kato with 2 planes; and Hotei with 1 plane. The enemy fighters and AA command must have had a busy day. One plane was damaged by AA, and all straggled back to Clark Field.

This night, 26th/27th, Major Link flew an anti-radar ferret to the southern tip of Kyushu, one of the longest ferret flights undertaken. Armed reccos were still looking for the Conte Verde, but even bright moonlight failed to reveal the elusive vessel, although he flew low over suspected hiding places. Lt. Murphy, in #130, was first and with good visibility brought out the AA on both sides of the river near Pootung Point. His plane was holed in several places including the bombardier's office. It was too hot to go back so they hit Woosung Military Depot and picked up some more holes, but started good fires. Lt. Croft, in #127, searched lower down the river and failed to hit 2 patrol boats that had taken refuge amongst some junks. Considerable AA was encountered and 1 troublesome night fighter was around but caused no damage. Lt. Flinner, in #694, went to look for a convoy near Swatow, but found nothing. So he hit the warehouses in

Swatow. Last, but not least for the 63rd, was Lt. Williams searching but finding nothing in the Formosa Strait. He went to Mako after the oil storage area, but only bomb bursts were observed.

Three H2X missions went to Tansui Seaplane Base; 2 from the 64th and 1 from the 403rd. It had nine-tenths cloud coverage, but the radar brought it up and 12 frag clusters were dropped on each run. There was 1 large explosion and a brief flash. Both 64th planes were intercepted, but only 1 of 3 enemy fighters fired causing no damage. One 64th bomber was holed by AA. The 403rd arrived a bit later and saw only clouds. A night fighter appeared but did not fire. The 403rd saw no AA.

Apr 27, 1945. There was no mission of the strike squadrons this day, but there was plenty of action this night.

Two Sea Hawks headed for the Yangtze, but 1 returned early with radar problems. Lt. Carnavari, in #898, pressed on and located a Fox Tare Dog (700 tons). Making 1 run at 100', he put a bomb on the stern and the ship soon sank. Some barges were spared due to being off line at so low an altitude, but AA was active as he passed the Woosung Military Depot. His plane was holed as he flew up and down the river; all had a shot at the low-level raider.

The 64th flew a single H2X mission to Tansui just to show that they were not forgotten. Frags were the load and no fires were seen. Searchlights were active, holding the plane for 1 minute on the breakaway.

Apr 28, 1945. Seventeen 43rd B-24s made it to the Toshein oil storage area, but only 3 bombed the depot. The 64th got honors for hitting the oil jackpot as 2 of their planes went down to 9000' to make sure of the target. The load was 24 X 250 lb. demos. They used an H2X/visual run and hit the pump house and started 1 large fire. One 403rd plane bombed the primary but was well wide of the target. Other planes either jettisoned bombs or hit areas in the vicinity of Toshein. There was lots of AA, and 3 planes were holed. One fighter attacked a 64th that returned the fire from a great distance. It wasn't a very successful day.

This night, April 28th/29th, was not a good one for the Sea Hawks. Four planes went the Shanghai to hit oil facilities at the Standard Oil and Texas installations. B-24 #814 piloted by 2/Lt. Raymond Kahn and crew disappeared. The plane made a routine check in at 2300 just before entering the target area. The weather was CAVU and their altitude was 1300'. No word was heard after this time so all Rescue in FEAF and the 14th AAF notified that the plane was no longer in contact. Nineteen hours after taking off when all fuel would have been exhausted, the plane was declared missing. (Pettus says Larry Hickey has the names of the crew members, but gives the date as April 26th. Brownfield's official report dated 4/30 gives 2300 on the 28th as when the last message was received.)

Lt. Phillips, in #397, had a wild night. On his target run intense AA was encountered from both sides of the river and the plane was holed 18 times. "In addition a phosphorus bomb exploded in the waist, causing a fire that was soon extinguished." (It is not clear what happened. The 63rd record says "A flare could have been ignited, but not easily put out, or a fragment of a phosphorus shell that the crew did not see in the dark, could have come through.) In any event bombs fell short and the plane headed for home where the nose wheel collapsed on landing resulting in a washout. However there were no injuries either from enemy action or the landing.

The other 2 planes encountered no real trouble; both had bombs on target, but a number of them were not seen to explode.

Apr 29, 1945. There was no Group strike this day.

This night Capt. Rogers, in #943, flew an anti-radar ferret past Shanghai and up to Nanking. Several ships were sighted and reported. The flight covered a distance of 2800 miles.

Apr 30, 1945. The strike squadrons were off [0845 hours] to Toshien to hit the oil storage again, and this time the weather was perfect. The load was again 250 lb. demos. A great deal of damage was done. Many large and small fires were started and some of the pumping facilities were damaged. Despite fires close by and hits, some tanks did not ignite. Possibly these tanks were empty. [The Group made 2 runs over the target.] AA was moderate with 3 planes being holed. Leaflets were dropped to advise the Emperor's men that this was only the beginning.

This night and early morning the 63rd sent 3 planes on armed reccos in the Hainan area. Orders were to bomb Samah Drome if no shipping was sighted. They were to report the weather too. No ships were seen and Samah seemed to be mostly deserted. The planes made visual runs and had no or interception. One plane on the ground seemed to have its lights on, but a dropped flare showed no activity and there was no reaction to the flare. [When the planes returned home, it was the first of May.]

In summary the Group flew 519 sorties in April 1945. The strike squadrons flew 426 sorties and the 63rd flew 93. A total of 11 ships were sunk including 1 destroyer for a total of 23,750 tons. Another 3 ships totaling 6,250 tons were damaged.

MAY 1945

May 1, 1945. This May Day the target was to be Kagi Town and spreading destruction over Formosa. The Japanese had a secret weapon, the weather, so May Day turned into another day like April 26th and Toshien. KEN'S MEN rained incendiaries all over western Formosa. Several planes hit Kagi by H2X, but the returns on the scopes were not good, so there is no telling where those bombs went. Squadrons and elements separated and there was little concern of interception as fighter cover ranged up and down the west coast. Tainan caught 92 bombs and fires were started. Elements cruised until they saw an opening and then they looked for a target. Two planes hit Toko and 2 more hit Koshun, and Takeo, Doheki, Kobi and Shabo all got the treatment. Other groups were in the area encountering the same experiences. One 65th plane was intercepted with no damage resulting. Only over Tainan was the AA effective; it holed 5 planes.

This night and into the next morning the Sea Hawks sent 2 planes to the China Sea, the Hainan Strait and the Gulf of Tonkin. They found nothing even though they searched close to the mainland shoreline where ships might be hugging the coast for safety from submarines as well as aircraft. The planes bombed on their ETA and hopefully hit Kiungshan Drome.

Two H2X planes, 1 from the 65th and another from the 403rd, dropped 1000 lb. demos on Kiirun with unobserved results due to cloud cover. Kiirun Harbor had a good return on the H2X. One night fighter was seen but it caused no damage.

May 2, 1945. The 43rd Group was off to help the 43rd Division near Ipo Dam northeast of Manila. Using frags the 3 squadrons managed 80% of their bombs in the target area. The weather was spotty and some planes made 3 runs over the target. "Snap Uncle," the ground controller, seemed to like the job done by the Group's planes.

This night Lt. Flinner, piloting #076, flew an anti-radar ferret from Clark to Hong Kong, Hainan, Saigon and back with no sightings. The plane did record lots of technical data. Following this flight, the 63rd took 2 days off to work on their planes.

May 3, 1945. The Group was off to Ipo Dam again with daisy cutter frags, 260 pounders with extension fuses. Thirteen planes made individual runs for over an hour, [some making as many as 12 runs]. The weather began to close in before all had dropped their bombs, so they dropped then either in the ocean or on the practice bombing range on Tabones Island. Again the ground controller liked the job done by the 43rd.

There was no night activity on the 3rd/4th.

May 4, 1945. Again, on May 4th planes were loaded with 1000 lb. demos and were off to hit the Ipo Dam area, but the weather beat them to the desired location. This bombing had to be very precise to protect nearby American troops and Filipino civilians. The 65th and 403rd jettisoned their bombs safely in the water off east Luzon. The 64th brought theirs back to Clark.

It was left up to the squadron commander and the pilots to decide if they wanted to bring their bombs back. Certainly there was a risk if the plane had an accident and burned, especially on the runways or taxiways. Planes were usually not overloaded on landing as their fuel had been used, but some pilots did not wish to land with a load of bombs.

There was no criticism of them if that was their decision. The 63rd always jettisoned their bombs as they used Torpex HE bombs that were much more powerful and less stable

than the ordinary HEs. Strike squadrons were not permitted to carry Torpex bombs while in formation as any could be set off by impact of AA fragments, a direct hit by machine gun or cannon. In the early days of the war there was a shortage of bombs, but this was no longer the case, and it was really up to the pilot if the bombs were brought back or dumped safely.

This night the Sea Hawks went back to work with 4 planes on the Shanghai beat. Each plane had a bomb load of 4 X 500 lb. Torpex and 3500 gallons of gas with 2 bomb bay tanks. This permitted about 19 hours of endurance. The planes were to search the Whangpoo River and the mouth of the Yangtze. Capt. Rogers, in #099, was first off and had problems. His engineer injured his arm in the nose turret, but painful as it was, he said to press on. Then the command radio went out, so it was decided to make a short search and head back. Two hundred miles short of Shanghai they encountered a subchaser and attacked. Bombs were near misses, but brought the 350 ton craft to a halt and it was strafed. They claimed it as damaged and turned for home.

Lt. Williams, in #898, made a run on a Tare Baker, but had a malfunction of his bomb release and got shot at a lot for his trouble. So he looked elsewhere and found a target with a large funnel and the bombardier jettisoned the load on it - a lighthouse.

Lt. Phillips, in #812, bombed 2 ships, but missed and got his left tire shot out for the effort. This was Phillip's third such incident in 250 hours of combat time.

Lt. Carnavari, in #127, found no ships, so he hit the Standard Oil Docks and started a small fire.

May 5, 1945. The Group target was Shinchiku Drome [Jim Cherkauer's log shows Mako Air Drome], and the load was 100 lb. demos. Each squadron had an H2X lead, but the weather was CAVU. Hangers and revetments were the objectives in hopes that planes would be hiding there. Bombing was good with bombs falling in many of the revetments, adjacent hangers and shops. One SSF was destroyed and several fires were started, one with smoke to 2000'. A 65th plane with problems headed home early and dropped on Ryushu-Sho starting fires in 3 buildings. AA was moderate and holed 2 planes.

Only one 63rd plane was out seeking targets on the 5th/6th as sightings from the night before and air recco showed U.S subs near the blind bombing line. So the lone plane out was to stay far up river from the mouth of the Yangtze. Lt. Wilson, in #099, dropped on a tug and barge, but missed and then strafed. The target was claimed damaged; the other 2 bombs were dropped blind through haze with unobserved results. Lt. Morley did an anti-radar ferret along the China coast from Amoy to Shanghai.

H2X 64th and 65th planes went to Takao Drome with frags in hopes of finding planes on the ground. Bombs were seen to fall in the ramp and revetment areas, but no fires were observed. They could spot no planes on the ground due to a haze. AA was slight, and fighters followed both planes, but did not fire. The B-24s did not fire so as not to give away their positions.

May 6, 1945. Twenty-one KEN'S MEN made Toshien their target this day only to find the target protected by weather. Much damage was done, however, but they got a lot of flak. Many buildings were destroyed and big fires were started by the 65th, one of whose planes had an engine shot out. It jettisoned its bombs and was able to keep up with the squadron after leaving the target. The squadron slowed down for him as a Tojo made threatening moves. The 403rd did not do well and had no excuses as only 30% of their

bombs fell in the target area. The 64th was on target and had a plane with a tire shot out. When the crew saw the flat on approach, the pilot pulled up and had the other tire shot out. He then landed with no trouble except new wheels would be needed.

This night Lt. Dolley, in #128, and Lt. Scroggs, in #898, went back to Shanghai and the Yangtze. Unaware of each other, they both found 3 ships, a DO and 2 merchant vessels that were stationary at the mouth of the Yangtze. Scroggs made an identification run and got a big dose of 20mm and MG fire. Swinging wide and getting everything lined up, he came back an hour later and went across again with no opposition, but was off line and didn't drop. On the third pass he dropped with unobserved results due to haze and fog. He was still 8 hours from base, so he headed back. According to the navigator's logs, Lt. Dolley made a run a few minutes before Scroggs' first pass and scored a hit forward on the destroyer, but did not silence its guns. He came back for the next run and found fierce AA from the DD and from Hegsha Island. As their bombs smashed into the DD, a 20mm seriously wounded the rear turret gunner (can't find name) in the face and hands. He subsequently lost an eye. The bomb hit amidships, causing an explosion that blazed up for a bit and then was obscured by the fog and mist. A few minutes later Scroggs came back for a second run, but probably not over the DD. In any event, there was no flak and after making a third run, he headed home. Dolley circled getting back on course and making the wounded gunner as comfortable as possible. As he did so they saw the DD slip from the radar screen. The B-24 was holed in the rudder and left elevator, but not seriously. One night fighter made a brief appearance but caused no trouble. The DD sank in shallow water and subsequently crews could see its superstructure and stacks above water at low tide.

At 0400 hours a 64th H2X bomber dropped 12 X 250 lb. incendiaries on Taihoku town from 11,500' causing at least 1 fire. The plane exited the area as a night fighter was nosing around and it was getting light.

May 7, 1945. There was no Group strike this date.

The night of the 7th/8th one plane went to Shanghai and another flew the Hong Kong/Swatow search area. Neither found any shipping. En route to Shanghai Major Link, piloting #130, picked up a radar indication near the blind bomb zone. Getting no IFF return, he dropped a flare. Whatever had been there was now gone. A submarine? Whose? Three bombs missed the Texas Depot on Gough Island. The H2X/Swatow plane dropped on Tien Ho Drome, but only bomb bursts were seen.

May 8, 1945. Bashing the Japanese still holding out on Luzon was the mission this date. There was no escape for the enemy, and they would not surrender, so it was peck away at them and not waste American lives. Bombing would make their life miserable and eliminate some gradually; they would be worn down and a few would surrender; others would die of disease and at the hands of the Filipino guerrillas. At Echague the enemy had a supply and personnel area in very difficult terrain and what was left of an airstrip. Filipinos relayed that Japanese planes had been in at night, but this was not verified by American radar. Bomb runs were individual with 95% falling in the assigned targets. There was no fire, and no AA - a real mild run.

This night and next morning 5 Sea Hawk planes were out. Lt. Williams, in #127, looked in on Amoy en route and bombed a good radar return - a reef. He then tried for 2 mine sweepers, but their evasive action was too good. He had AA from the ships but with no damage. #398 returned early with radio failure. Capt. Rogers, in #807, reached Taihoku

on Formosa. His objective was the government center and incendiaries were the load. Dropping from 4500', the bombs were on target and fires were started. One was visible for 25 miles. The plane went on to search for shipping but found none. Lt. Flinner, in #694, also was headed to Taihoku, but received a message to go to Canton and carry out a shipping search. With a headwind and weather Canton was too far with the bomb load, so he was told to jettison and proceed. The plane went to Canton, but found no ships; weather recco 100% complete. The last plane of the night was an anti-radar ferret to Shanghai. This unarmed plane spotted 2 ships of medium size, but there were no armed planes in the area to make an attack.

May 9, 1945. Tien Ho Drome near Canton, China, was the Group target, and 21 planes made it to the target. Two H2X planes were in the lead as the weather was 8/10 in some places. Bombing was mostly visual as holes appeared at opportune times. Fires were started and several planes were destroyed on the ground. AA was plentiful and the 65th had 2 planes damaged. P-38s were much in evidence. Thousands of copies of newssheet with world events in Japanese were also dropped. [Some 9 hours and 45 minutes later the planes were returning to Clark Field.]

This night and next morning five 63rd planes were out. Two went to the Hong Kong/Canton area to be sure that the weather was reported. Lts. Dolley and Scroggs, in #s 809 and 126, were to disrupt the government at Taihoku and they did so. Dolley went over and started big fires to lead Scroggs in. There was little interference with #809, but when #129 arrived, more than 24 lights caught the plane and held it. Scroggs got his bombs on the money, but flak clattered around and night fighters were in evidence. The crew was glad to find friendly darkness. Near Canton Lt. Phillips sank a stationary lugger and went on to Tien Ho Drome to use the rest of his bombs and report weather. There was grey smoke to 500' when he left. Also, Lt. Horley did an ETA run there, but as the overcast had rolled in, results were unobserved. Near Shanghai, Lt. Wilson, in #812, had a bout with a frigate, but could only claim it as damaged. He had used all his flares to be sure that it was not a reef, and although his last bombs were a near miss and/or a hit, he could not ascertain whether or not it would sink.

May 10, 1945. Despite 2 weather planes in the Canton area on May 10th, the Group strike to University Drome, Canton, was a washout. "Gangway" leader told crews to turn back as the front was too tough to get through. Only 1 element of the 65th pressed on, and using H2X dropped on the revetment area and probably destroyed 2 fighters on the ground. AA was moderate resulting in no damage and there was no interception. An unarmed 63rd weather recco in the Luzon Strait was easy going for Lt. Williams and crew in #894 this night and early morning. It was left to Major Link en route to Shanghai to bring out the enemy night fighters. Four or 5 enemy night fighters escorted Major Link for an hour and a half. They kept the B-24 gunners on alert, but as far as they could tell only 1 green rocket/missile was fired across the nose of the B-24. The night fighters were finally lost in the clouds. Due to bomb release problems, the plane made an unsuccessful attack on a frigate. On the way home night fighters again picked up the plane and stayed with it for up to 2 hours but never attacked. Lt. Croft, also en route to Shanghai, got an IFF return of some 20 signals in the Formosa Strait. A quick check with the U.S.N. advised no friendly ships in the area and it remained a mystery. The plane had no success attacking the secondary target. Lt. Flinner flew an anti-radar ferret to the Gulf of Tonkin.

- May 11, 1945. The military facilities at Toshien Town were the targets for the Group. The bombing was good, and the incendiaries started many fires with the smoke going up to 3000'. The AA was intense and accurate holing 10 planes. A 65th plane had 2 men injured, one seriously, and it slipped out of formation after dropping its bombs. This B-24 was some distance from the rest of the Group's planes and heading for Luzon when it was intercepted by a single plane. Although no damage resulted it was another example of the danger of getting out of formation. This plane would only have arrived at Clark a few minutes sooner than the formation. Leaflets were also dropped. [Perhaps Jim Pettus was unaware that after a mission to Formosa we seldom stayed in formation when heading home except for the first few minutes away from the target.] Early the next morning, 0205 hours, a 403rd H2X B-24 dropped a load of frags on Tien Ho Drome near Canton. The lone Sea Hawk out this night and morning was piloted by Lt. Fullenwinder who headed to Shanghai where intelligence had reported numerous ships in the harbor. All he could find was a Sugar Dog and a subchaser. Rack trouble prevented the total destruction of the vessels but they were strafed.
- May 12, 1945. Weather was an unpredictable science and on May 12th the V Bomber forecasters were at their worst. Sixteen Group planes took off for ground support at Lal-Lo in the Cagayan Valley. All bombs were jettisoned at sea as the target was 10/10 covered. This night and into the morning of the 13th one 63rd plane went to the old hunting ground around Hainan and Haiphong Harbor, but with no success. Lt. Phillips, in #807, found that small islands and reefs around the entrance to the harbor clouded the scope and made radar runs too tricky. With limited visibility and a solid undercast he made an ETA run over Hoi How. Lt. Canevari, in #127, went to Shanghai and had the old reef problem. He then dropped on a frigate but missed.
- May 13, 1945. Once again the Group tried to help the Army, but they needed good weather to be successful. Seventeen planes stayed in the Ban Bang area for over an hour as the clouds got thicker. They then called it a day. At the very start of the planes arriving in the area a 403rd plane was able to drop bombs, but the results were impossible to measure. The plane did drop leaflets urging the Japanese to surrender and giving instructions as to how it could be done. The other planes jettisoned their bombs. This night and next morning one 63rd plane flew to Tien Ho Drome and another flew to Shanghai. Lt. Scroggs took #025 over the drome and walked 15 X 260 lb. frags throughout the dispersal area. Bomb bursts were seen but no fires. There were a few searchlights, but after the run the enemy was glad to see him gone. Lt. Dolley went to Shanghai and found only a Sugar Dog and missed. One 65th H2X hit Shinchiku with a load of incendiaries and started 4 large fires. Night fighters intercepted but were uneager to engage. Twelve searchlights held the plane for 2 minutes, but the bombs were dropped from 10,000' at 2240 hours.
- May 14, 1945. The Group had a new target, Hosan Town, and a new bomb load 100 lb. napalm incendiaries. These were actually 100 lb. practice bombs filled with napalm rather than sand. The 22nd Group had preceded the 43rd, and the area was well covered with smoke. About 34 tons of inflammables were dropped, but how much of the city was burned out

would have to wait for the photo reconnaissance. AA was accurate on the 64th holing 3 of its planes.

This night and into the next morning 3 Sea Hawks were out. One headed to Shanghai and the other 2 were to be reccos after bombing their primaries. Major Link encountered such heavy weather that he did not make Shanghai and went to the target of last resort, Mako. There the bombs fell in the water. Lt. Croft went to Takao that had given much pain in the past, but he dropped frags on the drome from 5000' with no interference. Departing and heading north he picked up 2 planes on radar, and 5 minutes later had two rockets pass very close to his plane's nose without ever seeing the enemy planes. As they flew by Okayama they saw it was still burning from day strikes.

An attack on Tien Ho was to have a first attached to it. A photo was to be taken of the bombing and/or the target. S/Sgts. Dagamn and Tarcliffe had been working for a long time to get the right equipment lined up to get flash pictures. This night was to be the test. All went according to plan. The bombs were dropped and a few seconds later the flash went off and the deed was done. Two night fighters were around, but they gave the bomber no trouble. In the morning the S/Sgts. developed the film and found they had good pictures of the wrong airdrome. The film showed a drome with more activity than was believed to have been there. This was an unplanned bonus and a good job. There no doubt would be more night photos.

At 0259 hours a 64th H2X bomber dropped frags over Taihoku from 11,000'. There was a solid undercast with searchlight probing the mist. A few AA shots were well off target. Scope pictures were not too good. One of the reasons for these missions was to get practice with the equipment and learn its limitations. Scope pictures were also taken for comparison with other photos and the actual terrain.

May 15, 1945. The Group sent 19 B-24s to hit Shinchiku, but only 16 made it. They were attempting to get all of the planes over the target in 5 minutes or less so as to limit their exposure to AA. Crews took to this tactic without question and began to fly better formations. Targets were harder to hit and squadrons could not make last minute corrections. It would also require some different targeting. About 50% of these bombs were in the assigned areas, but even those outside were in other target designations. Planes that did not hit the primary dropped on other coastal cities and scooted for home. All had some mechanical problem. In 1 case a 403rd rack did not check out on the way up and they knew they would have to jettison, so they dumped on Ryuku Sho Island with a nice fireball.

Two 63rd planes went out this night. One headed to Shanghai and the other to Tien Ho. Both carried bombs to hit the enemy, but they also were to report weather in detail. Lt. Flinner went to Shanghai and saw a Sugar Dog and dispatched it with 1 bomb. Two bombs on an unidentified target could not be verified due to a flare not going off. Lt. Phillips, in #694, got caught in the lights of Tien Ho and had to go back for a second run due to his bombardier being blinded. This time frags hit off the dispersal area and into buildings and the depot. After bombing, he headed to Amoy. While en route there a bandit fired a rocket from 8 o'clock, but it gave them no further trouble. All the rockets observed seemed to come from angles such that it was difficult to make a hit (thank goodness), and this was the subject of much debate. So far there were no stern attacks or head-on passes that were the favorites in the European Theater.

Also out this night was an anti-radar ferret to Shanghai. On the way north they picked up a possible convoy of 9 ships and they reported this and continued on course. Seventy-

five miles east of Shanghai they were picked up by 2 night fighters that flew one on each side of the B-24 while signaling to each other. One fired a green flare while the other fired a glowing rocket from 4 o'clock, but it fell short. Both then disappeared. The B-24 stayed in the area for another 3 hours reporting weather in detail when another night fighter appeared. It was time to head home, so the bomber took evasive action to shake the bandit but this used up enough fuel that they landed at Lingayen for fuel.

May 16, 1945. The Group had 17 B-24s take off with 16 making it to the primary target, Taichu Drome. They dropped frags to hit aircraft on the ground. Some 90% of the bombs fell on the target and several planes on the ground were known to be destroyed. Nearby barracks were also put to the torch. There was a great deal of AA that holed 5 planes but caused no injuries. There was some white phosphorus that gave a good show but seldom did any harm. There would be more and more raids on aircraft on the ground as the Kamikaze was becoming a growing hazard as an official policy and not just individual bravado. This also marked the time that the enemy was making dummy airplanes to appear as real ones and attract our bombing them. Of course these dummy planes had no fuel in them so they did not burn even when hit. One 65th plane experiencing engine problems turned back and dropped on a village west of Tainan. For this ingenuity, the plane was met with a good deal of AA that put one small hole in the plane. This night [Jim dated this as the 17th/18th, but I am sure he meant 16th/17th as he also lists the former dates coming up in their proper place.] Shanghai was given a pass this night at it had been unproductive, so two 63rd planes went to Nanking. Lt. Wilson, in #812, hit the rail terminal at Pukow. Wilson arrived unexpectedly and unannounced until the bombs hit. The city was lit up, and when the bombs hit the alert rocket was seen to go up. 4 X 250 lb. and 2 X 500 lb. Torpex bombs demolished a roundhouse, fired warehouses and blew up tracks. Fires could be seen for 20 miles. Two hours later Lt. Fullenwinder came over the target while guided by the fires. He was 2 hours late taking off due to mechanical problems. He put 4 X 500 lb. Torpex slightly to the east of the fires and started 3 more. Photos by the photo/flash flare were to bring back proof of this bombing, but searchlights set the camera shutter off before the bombs went off, so there were no pix. He made several runs to observe the damage and then headed home, but with some bandits trailing along. One plane fired and the tail gunner replied, but no hits were made on either side. AA was slight to medium with no hits. On the way home they strafed some barracks at dawn on the Pescadores and also tried to hit a lighthouse. Two other B-24s were out that night. Lt. Canevari, in #807, made 3 runs on Tien Ho before the bombs would release. When the crew observed no damage, they flew on to Swatow to report the weather. Night fighters blinking their lights followed the plane for some time but did not fire. In #126, Lt. Scroggs found Takao totally blacked out. He dropped bombs on the runways and dispersal areas but started no fires. They encountered a great deal of ground haze. This same night a 403rd H2X weather recco went south of Foochow, then to Hong Kong and then back to Matayama Drome to drop frags. The bombs dropped long and there appeared to be no damage. One night fighter was around and kept his lights on. This night fighter's lights being on was another subject of long discussion. Were they signaling each other? But in this case there was only the 1 plane, but still he flicked his lights on or turned on different ones.

May 17, 1945. There was no Group strike this day.

This night the Sea Hawks sent out 4 planes. Two headed to Nanking with hopes of results like those of last night. Alas, this was not to be. Lt. Dolley's bombs were all duds and Lt. Morlery's landed in the rail yards away from the congested areas. One small fire was all he got for a long night's work. AA was meager and inaccurate and night fighters were airborne. Leaflets were also dropped.

An armed weather recco loaded with napalm in 55 gallon drums headed north up the China coast. He was to drop these on Takao while heading north. Dropping these drums involved a bit of sighting guess work as there was no trail angle for a 55 gallon drums. Each drum had an igniter inside. They hit some buildings and caused 4 big fires visible for 35 miles. These 400 lb. incendiaries were declared a success, but they were cumbersome to load and a harness had to be fitted to each to hang it on the shackle. The igniter presented a problem fitting it while in flight. The plug had to be removed so the filler hole had to be at the very top when the drum was in place. Major Link hit buildings and the dispersal area at Tien Ho Drome but saw nothing. Flares dropped on subsequent runs showed no sign of planes on the ground. Leaflets were also left at the drome and at several regions nearby.

At 0202 on May 18th, a 65th H2X plane gave Taihoku Town the 55 gallon drum treatment that started fires visible for 40 miles. Night fighters were a nuisance and made numerous passes, but only fired once. Some heavy AA caused damage to the nose turret and earned the gunner the Purple Heart. There were lots of lights that did not seem to be distracted by rope.

May 18, 1945. The Group sent 21 planes with frags and 2000 lb. demos to blast parked planes on the ramps and taxiways at Tainan Drome. [AA was intense and accurate. Lt. James J. Franklin, in #358, received a direct hit and his plane exploded.] This plane was loaded with frags and it is possible some went off. [Not just possible, as they did go off and several hundred pieces of shrapnel riddled #373, piloted by Lt. Cherkauer on Franklin's right wing. This story was written up in one of our newsletters of about a year ago.] In any event, the plane plunged to earth, a mass of flames, and with no chutes seen. The plane flying nearest #358 received a massive dose of the explosion, knocking some 200 holes in it and wounding 3 men. The bombardier, who was over his bomb sight, was knocked unconscious. [This is a very controversial issue not to be taken up here.] Bombs were salvoed by the copilot [actually by the pilot] as a fire started in #2 engine [there was smoke and flames in the bomb bays at the time and #1 engine was also in flames]. They got the fire[s] under control and headed south [with #1 and #2 props feathered but being able to get #1 engine to put out some power an hour or so later], landing at Lingayen to leave the wounded at the hospital. But the bad day for the 65th was not over. As they pulled off the run another 65th plane was hit, its #4 engine went out and its #3 engine began to run away as the prop governor went out. [Actually, Lt. Wilt, flying on Franklin's left wing, was also blasted by the frags from Franklin's plane at the same time that #373 was hit by frags. All 3 planes had been hit directly by AA at about the same instant, but only Franklin's plane blew up.] When Wilt's plane got down to 6000', the crew bailed out. All 11 chutes were seen to open, but 2 men went under before rescue could get them out and they disappeared. [Rescue was by a couple of Cats and the 2 men who were not found were reportedly not wearing Mae Wests due to a shortage in the squadron when it put up 7 planes with approximately 72 or more men.] The 65th lost 14 men killed or missing and 8 wounded/injured on this one mission.

The 403rd and 64th did pretty well, but there were not many planes in the target areas. Some 403rd bombs were sent long but hit in shops and a motor pool. One 403rd plane never found its squadron and bombed Taichu with the 90th Group.

This night and the next morning saw 7 Sea Hawks out. Two headed to Nanking; 1 weather recco went to Takeo but aborted due to engine failure; 1 weather recco was off to Canton; 2 went to Taihoku; and 1 ferret was out. Lt. Phillips and Lt. Canevari went to Nanking and the first to arrive found the city lights on. Their bombs fell on the railway terminal but with no dramatic results. Leaflets were dropped, the AA was slight and there were no searchlights. The bombing at Canton and the China coast weather recco were spoiled by very bad conditions over Canton. The target of University Drome could not be found, so after spending several hours in the vicinity, the aircraft had completed 85% of its recco and went to Paratas Reef to bomb the radar stations at dawn but with little damage. Lts. Wilson and Scroggs went to Taihoku with napalm, but heavy rain prevented an accurate assessment of the drops. There were night fighters in evidence, making several firing passes but were well away. The ferret was a bust as it was to plot Taihoku night fighters and go to the Pescadores, but the radar went out completely. Although the crew did most of the route by dead reckoning while trying to get the radar operating, it was fruitless.

May 19, 1945. Eighteen Group planes carrying 2000 lb. demos hit the rail yards and adjacent buildings at Kiirun Harbor causing 1 huge explosion with smoke to 4000'. AA holed 3 planes. One B-24 took off late and bombed the seaplane base at Toku. A 403rd crew saw a mid-air collision of 2 B-25s near Lingayen; one was seen to crash and burn. Four 63rd planes loaded with frags were out this night and next morning; two to Nanking and weather reccos that dropped on University Drome and Takao. Nanking was very tough due to haze and ground fog. Both runs were by ETA and results were unobserved. Lights did probe through the mist and there was some medium AA. One night fighter was seen. News sheets were dropped giving all the latest news in Japanese. At Takau 6 drums of napalm started 6 fires visible for 40 miles. Then the aircraft made a calm recco to Amoy and reported weather. Lt. Dolley woke them up at University Drome by stringing 260 lb. frags through revetments, but he saw no damage. On the run 5 lights came up, but rope threw them off. The recco then went south for weather reporting. At 0350 on May 20th, a 64th H2X hit Taihoku from 10,000' with 7 napalm drums. Fires were seen for 10 miles and there was no opposition of any kind.

May 20, 1945. There was no group strike this date.

This night the 63rd was back looking for shipping. Lts. Croft and Wilson headed for the Yangtze. Croft in, #812, picked up 2 strong radar returns near Hangchow Bay. A flare showed it to be a 4000 ton Fox Baker, stationary and a real prize. On the first run 2 bombs fell short; on the second a 500 pounder was 75' short; on the third run a 500 lb. Torpex hit the water amidships causing a great plume of steam and debris. There was no opposition and the ship sank inside a half hour. He dropped his last bomb on a moving ship not far away but missed. Wilson had no such luck, and after a long search, he dropped on the Texas Oil Depot that was cloaked in heavy rain.

This night and morning there were 2 weather reccos with stops at Takao and Tien Ho to drop calling cards, frags at Tien Ho and napalm at Takao. One plane was probably destroyed at Tien HO and large fires were started at Takao.

May 21, 1945. A 65th plane went on a weather recco to Hong Kong/Canton with a side duty to take photos of Kitchen Bay and Tunk River shipping. This was a bit dicey and had to be done soon after dawn. There were too many enemy fighters in the area for them to be alone long. As soon as photos were done, they headed home and sent their last weather report.

There was no Group strike on this date.

Two 63rd planes flew to Shanghai/Yangtze again this night and next morning. They found ships. At 0100 Lt. Phillips found a Fox Tare Dog (1000 tons) near the river mouth and made a run. Dropping 2 bombs, a 250 lb. and a 500 lb. Torpex, he got a direct hit with the second and the ship sank in a few minutes. Five miles away they found a Fox Tare Charlie (3500 tons) and the bombardier, Lt. Greffe, dispatched it with the remaining 4 bombs, one of which made a direct hit. Lt. Wilson, in #126, searched until almost dawn before he found a target, but it was a good one, a Sugar Charlie Love (4000 ton tanker). A 500 lb. Torpex hitting on the stern superstructure soon sent the aft portion of the ship under the waves with the bow pointing skyward. While waiting for the tanker to go down bombs were dropped on a dredge and on a patrol boat. It was a good night after a long dry spell of no sinkings. Lt. Dolley flew a long anti-radar ferret to Hainan, Hong Kong, Amoy and back.

May 22, 1945 [Date not shown in manuscript, but it must be this date.] The weather over Formosa was very poor, and the Group's primary target Jitsugetsu was closed in as was the secondary, Kiirun. So they took their 2000 pounders to Toshien and hit the barracks. Using both 50/50 visual and H2X most bombs were in the barracks complex. At least 8 large barracks were destroyed and a number of fires were started. AA holed 4 planes wounding 1 man slightly.

This night a 64th weather recco dropped by Takao and left 7 X 55 gallons drums of napalm that started small fires. AA was accurate and holed the plane once. The recco was 100% complete to Amoy and return.

After the success of the previous night four 63rd B-24s went back to Shanghai/Hangzte. The blind bombing zone was within 50 miles of Shanghai, and the Texas Oil Depot was the secondary. Lt. Scroggs, in #898, had radar failure and returned early. The 3 that reached the area found no success; 1 missed a ship; the other 2 dropped on the oil depot. Most of the bombs failed to explode. This caused great anguish to have gone to so much trouble and danger and then not have the bombs go off. The reasons for this were given intense study because it seemed to happen more often on land targets with the Torpex bombs than when bombs were dropped on surface ships.

May 23, 1945. Again there was no Group strike this day.

Two Sea Hawks were off to Shanghai this night and next morning, but they found few targets. Shortly after 2400 hours Lt. Fullenwider found a Fox Tare Charlie (1500 tons), and with his last bomb he hit it in the stern. Number 127 circled for half an hour after seeing the ship hit, but it could wait no longer to see if the ship sank. It was claimed as damaged. Lt. Canevari found no shipping and dropped short at the oil depot. Leaflets were dropped over Shanghai proper. Night fighters were around and fired on #127 inflicting no damage.

Lt. Dolley, in #943, made an anti-radar trip over Taihoku to get plots on the guns firing at the 22nd's Group H2X plane and also to see what radar were guiding night fighters to the nightly B-24 visitors. In all the ferret made 9 runs over the area. "Clay pigeons,

that's what we were," was Dolley's comment at the debriefing. However, there was no damage from the AA or from the 4 night fighters that were around.

This same night the 64th drew 2 H2X sorties. One went to Takao warehouses and the other to White Cloud Drome. After leaving their calling cards, they were to do a weather recco on the China coast, north and south from Hong Kong. One plane en route to Takao turned back due to mechanical trouble. The second plane delivered 24 X 260 lb. frags by H2X. No results were seen due to a 10/10 undercast. One night fighter fired but did not press the attack.

May 24, 1945. With poor weather over Formosa and Luzon, the Group was ordered to try and put Appari Drome in northern Luzon out of business. 2000 lb. demos were the dose for the strip that the Japanese were using to evacuate officers, technicians and wounded. Planes bombed individually due to clouds and they made multiple runs each. Only 1 plane was sighted on the ground and it was probably not serviceable. Over 60% of the bombs hit the runway. The Japanese would have a job filling those holes.

This night and into the next morning a 65th H2X went to White Cloud Drome and dropped 24 X 260 lb. frags at 0155 with unobserved results. Two night fighters made a coordinated attack on the bomber and fired. The B-24 returned fire, but there was no damage to either side.

Four Sea Hawks were sent to Shanghai. Lt. Phillips, in #130, found a Fax Baker that immediately began evasive action. Although the B-24's bombs missed on the first 2 runs, the ship stopped. Of the last 2 bombs dropped, 1 made a direct hit aft of the superstructure. The Torpex bomb struck a fatal blow and as the plane passed over at less than 1000', #130 was holed by flying debris. A flare was dropped, and the crew watched the 4000 ton ship sink in 20 minutes. Lt. Orton had radar trouble and bombed Chomosui Strip in the Pescadores. He got some black and some grey smoke from the ground as well as holes in his stabilizer. Lts. Wilson and Scroggs reached Shanghai, but bombed the Texas Oil Depot. Wilson missed. Only 1 of Scroggs' bombs exploded even though he had hit the depot.

The 64th had an H2X early run the morning of May 25th. At 0335 hours they dropped 7 napalm bombs on Taihoku starting fires that did not seem to enlarge. The AA was well away and they did use rope.

May 25, 1945. There was no Group strike on this day.

May 25 - 26, 1945. Three Sea Hawks prowled the Yangtze, and all found the same ship, a Fox Tare Charlie. Lt. Fullenwider made 4 skip bombing runs and missed (2 bombs were duds). When Lt. Canevari found the ship it was moving, but LAB runs and skip bombing did not bring this Emperor's sailor down. So it was roundly strafed after a near miss had brought it to a halt. Lastly came Lt. Dolley who made 2 LAB runs and missed. These Japanese sailors had a lucky night. While all this was going on Lt. Croft was doing the "clay pigeon" routine over Taihoku. Searchlights coned the B-24 and could not be shaken by rope. Over Kiirun lights on the plane again, but again the rope did no good. There was no AA in either place, almost as if they knew why the ferret was there. No gun laying radar frequencies for you tonight. This flight also went by the Pescadores, and for a little excitement they decided to strafe the radar station which looked undefended. Bullets flew from both sides, but a bedspring antenna was toppled, a water tower holed and luggers targeted. From the ground came a hail of return fire, holing the plane in 7 places and wounding one of the radar men, who really don't get paid for this

sort of gathering of electronic information. The bomb bays of the ferrets were filled with complex electronic equipment, mostly receivers that could monitor hundreds of frequencies a minute, and when they picked up a signal would take a directional reading. If the shrapnel that hit the operator had damaged this equipment, there was sure to be some very angry people when the plane got back. Occasionally ferrets flew on regular bombing missions as a part of the formation. It was scary in any event and more so in the black bomb bay when the flak began to go off and when the bombs hitting the ground could be felt.

May 26, 1945. Echague Drome, south of Appari, was suspected of being used to take Japanese VIPs (such as remained) out of Luzon, so the order was to give them a dose of 2000 lb. demos and to make the strip U.S. for a while. The weather was bad over Formosa anyway. Twelve planes went up, 4 from each squadron, and they left the drome a mess for a few days at least. There was the same old problem with the one-tonners as the shackles didn't want to release at times.

This night and next morning 2 planes went to Shanghai. Lt. Booth, in #126, was on his first mission. It was a long mission for a first, but there were no short ones. Lt. Orton was also out, but both missed a Fox Tare Charlie. Booth and crew got into the swing by strafing some Sugar Dogs and received some AA in return from a patrol vessel.

A 64th H2X bomber hit Taihoku Town at 0405 on the 27th. It dropped 7 napalms and started fires visible 30 miles away. The AA was off, but lights held the plane regardless of rope.

A 65th hit a target of opportunity from an H2X plane and dropped napalm on Taito at 0322. The fires soon died down. Leaflets were also dropped.

May 27, 1945. The 403rd had a daylight weather recco in the Canton area. The plane was ordered to stay away from trouble spots and stay near clouds. It reported the weather every half hour.

The 3 strike squadrons were on a mission to help the GIs. Each went to different targets with 2000 lb. demos - the kind that doesn't like to drop when they are supposed to. The 65th targeted a personnel area 10 miles out of Appari. Seventeen of 20 bombs went in the target with the others close. A 64th bomber hit what was thought to be an underground storage dump, but although they chewed up the ground, no dump was revealed. Seven bombs failed to release and were levered out over water. One went out as the bomb bay doors opened taking a front bomb bay door with it. The 403rd hit a small strip at Gamu. Fifteen of 24 bombs dropped when they were supposed to and hit the strip. Several others fell out unexpectedly and 4 were dropped out at sea. Great care was taken not to drop near Filipino civilians.

This night and next morning (28th) 4 bombers were to go to Shanghai by orders from V Bomber Command. Crews had been flying every third night and were worn out by this night. Three regular crews participated and a fourth pickup crew was piloted by Capt. Butts. First off was the reliable Phillips in #812. He found a Fox Tare Charlie and sank it in short order when 250 and 500 pounders made contact. Another 3500 tons were added to the total tonnage sunk. He tried for another ship later, but missed. Lt. Seaman reached the area, but found nothing after a search of 2 hours, so he returned. Lt. Wilson had bad luck as his plane did not gain speed or altitude. He jettisoned his bombs safely and made an emergency landing only to have the gear fold. There were no injuries, but the plane was a washout. (Note by Pettus - can't find what happened to cause this, but

sounds like flap trouble.) Butts and his pickup crew were last off and on approaching the Yangtze he heard the location of ships attacked by Phillips. They soon located a Fox Tare Charlie and after several runs, they sank it with 2 skip bombing hits. The ship was blazing from stem to stern when they left it.

A 403rd H2X bomber dropped on Takao at 0010 using napalm. Fires did not last long although the bombs were in the town proper.

May 28, 1945. Another strike made by the Group but this time to UGAC, against the Japanese who were being squeezed into smaller and smaller confines on Luzon. Thirteen planes were over the target for 2 hours making careful runs to render the whole area unsuitable for aircraft. The landing strip itself was a mess. There was little activity seen, but at nearby Pangul Strip the holes had been filled in, but no wheel marks were identified. The big bombs were less troublesome this day. Maybe the armorers were getting more used to them.

This night and into the next morning 4 Sea Hawks were off to Yangtze. Wilson, who had bad luck the night before, was first off in #812. On the way he ran into problems with his #4 engine. It seemed to have caught on fire, but after being shut off and restarted, it ran in a fashion. Being close to the target area, he pressed on and soon found a treasure trove of ships. He sighted 2 Fox Bakers, 4 Fox Tare Charlies and 5 escorts. Taking the Fox Baker on the edge of the group he made a LAB run. His bombs missed but AA from all the ships didn't. Shrapnel through the nose destroyed the bomb sight, caused holes in the radar compartment and the flight deck and wounded the copilot. The plane's #4 engine quit. They jettisoned the remaining bombs and made the long trip home on 3 engines. They had back luck two nights in a row, but they felt lucky to get home.

Lt. Ray, flying his first mission, found the ships and made several runs on a Fox Tare Charlie. The results were unobserved due to spray, but his bombs were close. Sea scatter clouded his radar and he lost the ships. So he then dropped a flare only to see junks. He was in the big leagues on his first night out.

Next, the old vet Scroggs found 10 ships in all and attacked a Fox Tare Charlie and got a 500 lb. Torpex on its stern. With all bombs gone he looked around the area and then came back to look at his victim. It was partially under water. Another 3500 ton score. Last off was another newcomer, Capt. Bancroft, also flying his first mission. He ran into bad luck, losing an engine just north of Formosa. The aircraft jettisoned its load and returned home.

Also out this night and morning was a 63rd weather recco to Tien Ho. Lt. Dolley laid 15 X 260 lb. frags in the dispersal area, but no big results were seen other than detonations. Seven accurate searchlights were encountered and heavy flak rocked the plane but caused no damage.

It was a good night for the Sea Hawk - 2 ships sunk and 7000 tons into the mud of the Yangtze Delta.

May 29, 1945. The target was Kiirun with a maximum effort being called for. The weather was perfect. The 65th took off with 10 planes and all bombed the primary. The 403rd also had 10 planes and 7 hit Kiirun, Formosa. The 64th took off with 5 planes and all hit the primary. Their load was 1000 lb. demos and almost all were on the money. The AA was intense, accurately holing 5 planes in both the 403rd and 65th. The 64th did not suffer any hits. The bombs ran through a variety of targets, starting fires and a number of explosions. "Juke Box" rescue was standing by and followed one 403rd plane to be sure

it made it to Lingayen. One plane [Lt. Cherkauer's #257 OUTTA THIS WORLD] reported unusual AA streamers that might have been wire wrapped AA shells. Lt. Tighe, the flak intelligence officer, planned to check to see if the Japanese were known to have such shells. Lots of leaflets were dropped. Gene Tight later became a three star general and head of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

The V Bomber Command wanted 3 Sea Hawks sent out this night and next morning, but the 63rd could only put up two. The pressure of the last few weeks was telling on equipment as well as on the crews. These 2 went to the Yangtze, but the sightings were few. A Fox Tare Charlie was missed with 4 X 500 lb. bombs, but smaller ships were bombed and strafed with no damage claimed.

At 0223 on May 30th an H2X 64th B-24 woke up the enemy in the vicinity of Tien Ho with 10 X 260 lb. frags dropped through the undercast. Tien Ho did not have a good return on the H2X scope, so it was doubtful if this did more than send the enemy to their guns.

May 30, 1945. Too many planes were being damaged by AA over Formosa. The loss of 2 [actually 3] 65th planes a few days before was unnerving. The bombing accuracy suffered because of the need to make shorter bomb runs. This raid was on AA at Takao, and the 43rd put up 27 planes with 24 of them dropping on the AA emplacements. Although it was hoped to destroy some of the guns, the main purpose was to confuse and blind the enemy with smoke and dust so that other squadrons coming behind would have a clearer run. This idea was agreed upon by the group commanders, and KEN'S MEN drew the lead. It was not any more dangerous since the planes attacked by elements, and all were to be over the target as close together as possible. Aiming points were the gun batteries and a large earthen radar dish. The load was 260 lb. frags to be dropped from 17,000'. ROM and rope were used and immediately after the 43rd dropped other groups were to come in and hit the usual targets. The higher altitude for the AA attackers made it a little safer, but it also meant that immediately after the first wave, the next attackers would be much lower and different fuses would have to be cut by the AA gunners. The 43rd received very little flak, only one 65th was holed, and the following groups also faced much less AA than usual. All agreed it was a successful tactic and would be used again. Leaflets were dropped as usual.

The Sea Hawks ended the month on this 30th/31st with a bang. V Bomber Command said they needed one more medium sized ship to put them over the half million ton mark for the first 5 months of 1945. The 63rd gave them two.

Lt. Canevari was first off in #130. All crews were to be on the lookout for a possible convoy along the China coast. #130 received radar indications of ships north of Formosa about half way to Shanghai. There was no visual sighting and they were not to attack without permission. After the report, they continued to the mouth of the Yangtze and came upon a Fox Tare Charlie moving slowly. They backed off and made a run dropping all 4 of their precious 500 lb. Torpex eggs. Two scored hits or near misses, and the crew circled back again. It was misting and very hazy, but the scope would not bring it in. At this time permission to bomb the convoy was given. Now without bombs they headed back to see if the convoy could be found. The aircraft did not find the radar returns, and by now being short on fuel, it headed for home as other planes were on the way and would take up the search. The damaged ship could not be confirmed as sunk, though it was certainly badly damaged and could not be found on the scope. Lt. Orton, in #794, did not find the convoy and proceeded to search the area. He found a Fox Tare Charlie

near Tsungming Island and dispatched it with two 500 lb. Torpex bombs. The ship was settling as they circled and in a few minutes it had disappeared from the scope. Attacks were made on 2 other targets, but the bombs seemed to be duds. The last 2 planes both found the ship; Canevari attacked at the coordinates of the action. It was blazing from stem to stern and both said it should be regarded as sunk. Another Fox Tare Charlie near the burning vessel was then the target of these 2 planes, but it escaped. The month ended for the Sea Hawks by putting V Bomber Command over the half million ton mark and making the month one of the best ever for the squadron despite a slow period in mid-month.

A 65th H2X plane started the 31st at 0045 by dropping 24 X 260 lb. frags on Tien Ho Drome. Results of this H2X run were obscured by clouds. Photos were taken of the scope which was all part of the learning process to use this technique. The run was 17 miles long and there were a few bursts of AA after "bombs away."

May 31, 1945. The month ended with another maximum effort by the daylight squadrons with 25 planes making it over Taihoku Town in northern Formosa. Although 29 planes took off, 4 turned back. Government buildings in the capital were the objective, and they were hit numerous times. Over 75% of the bombs were in the assigned targets, but since targets abutted each other, many outside the target area were damaged also. The last planes over the target had difficulty picking up aiming points due to smoke and dust. One plane bombed a target of opportunity at Toi. The AA was accurate, holing 10 planes, 5 each in the 65th and 403rd. The 64th got off easier. These maximum efforts were hard on the equipment as planes were pushed to their limits, and although safety was primary, small problems could come up that might have been avoided if more thorough checks had been done before the planes took off. Many of these planes had flown the day before when 24 were over Takao and even the day before that when 22 were over Kiirun. There were many checks that had to be done, especially electrical having to do with bomb release and the turrets. There crews were not as hard pressed on these maximum efforts as were the planes. It showed as the number of aborts was generally higher on the maximum effort missions than on the regular missions.

JUNE 1945

The war in Europe was over. Japan was in retreat and although much blood and anguish lay ahead, the outcome was certain. The Pacific and China were the only theaters of operations; no longer were they second priority. Airplanes were in abundance as were replacement crews. The original Queen Mary men who had sweated it out for years could now go home and return to the ZI was in prospect for many. Mail came and fresh food was available; the Pacific War of shortages was over. A long 3 years was coming to a close in the Philippines.

June was a busy month for all operations, but life was better as the camp was in good shape. Materials that had been hidden away were used, and the word and feeling was that Clark was to be the end of the line for what were now - the smaller airplanes. The B-29s and coming B-32s would carry the war to the Japanese homeland. These planes were designated super heavy or SH. The B-24s would hit China, Indo-China, Formosa and do sea searches. Treasured cement was now being poured. Cement was one of the hardest commodities to get, and it was needed for mess halls, showers (there was never enough water), work shops, storage areas, almost everything, and the worst thing was that you could not take it with you when you moved. Now there was hope that the moving was at an end. KEN'S MEN HAD MOVED EVERY

THREE MONTHS FOR THE LAST TWO AND A HALF YEARS. Fighting the war was hard enough, but to have to tear down and build up, then tear down again was more than arduous. The camp had lights that were the envy of Clark Field. This was a coup of Major Pressley McInnis, Communications Mogul. How he got hold of such treasures as generators and transformers was never revealed, but our commanding officer supplied him with 2 cases of real Scotch whiskey. EM Clubs, NCO Clubs and Officers Clubs sprang up. There was beer - not enough but good, and there was plenty of coke. The whiskey was terrible and bad for you, but the Quartermaster did issue, at a great price, a drink that passed as whiskey and would not hurt the consumer other than give him a thick head. In short, life was good. Smiling Filipino children canvassed for laundry and even returned most of it. Watermelons were for sale at the front gate, that had to be set up to keep the local population at bay. Years of shortages had made many of them too light fingered. Still operations had to go on despite the comforts of the flesh.

An extra burden was heaped upon our Commanding Officer, Col. Pettus, as he was made commander of Clark Field. It was the policy of the 5th Army Air Force that the senior tactical officer present on an airdrome would be the airdrome commander. This was not a good system as the C.O. of a tactical unit had plenty of work to do aside from the problems of the airstrip. At Tacloban, where he was also commander, the unit was operating at a greatly reduced capacity, and there were lots of men he could use to help. At Clark the 43rd was operating all out and even though there were service squadrons to run the housekeeping chores, decisions had to be made. There were Army, Navy, Marines, hundreds of planes, dozens of units all wanting better parking areas, priorities, etc. There was even a squadron of Mexican Air Force flying P-47s. It was a thankless job to be C.O. as you could not please everybody. Sad to say when KEN'S MEN moved to Ie Shima, he was C.O. again.

May 31-Jun 1, 1945. At 0220 on June 1st a 64th plane started the month with an H2X/visual on a Canton target. The load was 8 X 500 lb. incendiaries and 3 fires were stated that were still burning as the plane left the area 30 minutes later. Searchlights were around but there was no AA although rope was used and leaflets were dropped.

A convoy of possibly 20 ships had been reported and sighted on radar on May 30th. It was to look for this prize that 6 Sea Hawks took to the air to begin the month. Four were carrying 3500 gallons of fuel and the other two were carrying 3100 gallons each. If no convoy was found, the first 4 were to go to Shanghai. Lt Wilson, of recent hard luck, found no convoy, so he headed to the delta in search for ships where he found a Fox Tare Charlie. Two LAB runs were well off and bombardier F/O Blackett feared there was an internal problem and suggested they try a skip bomb run. The Fox Tare Charlie had been throwing up a hail of AA and this next run would be no exception. Despite spraying the ship from the plane's forward guns, the flak persisted. As the plane passed over, the crew saw two 500s make contact. At same instant the B-24 was rocked when the tail turret was hit by a 20mm. S/Sgt. Elmer French was seriously wounded in both arms and his back. The plane also received numerous holes, so #898 turned and headed for home. Sgt. French was bandaged up and made as comfortable as possible for the 7 plus hour return flight to Clark. This was that crew's fifth sinking.

Lt. Scroggs went to Shanghai, made a run on a destroyer and was shot up for his efforts. On a second run, an enemy hit in the hydraulics caused his bombs not to release so he headed for home after levering the bombs out.

The third plane had radar trouble and turned back.

Lastly, Lt. Dolley reached the Yangtze, sank a stationary patrol craft, and then went after a large tug with his last bomb that resulted in a near miss. His crew then strafed the tug. Although the tug seemed to be low in the water, it could only be claimed as damaged. The short range searchers found nothing. One plane turned back with a gas leak and Lt. Patton made a day light run over Mako, the secondary, and was seriously shot up. A direct hit from 20mm destroyed the nose turret and killed the gunner, probably S/Sgt. Leonard L. Brown. (The Group casualty list has him as injured in action.) The 63rd had added 4300 tons to shipping sunk, but at a price.

June 1, 1945. AA was again the target at Takao for the Group strike. The technique was different this time in that the planes would bomb individually. They were to approach the target by elements but then each plane in the element would take a gun position in a battery as its aiming point. Half the elements would run east to west, and the other half would run from west to east. As soon as the AA suppression units had bombed, the 3 other heavy B-24 Groups were to hit their Takao targets. For better accuracy the altitude was down to 11,000'. Twenty-one planes took off and 19 bombed Takao. Strangely, no AA was received from the batteries that were being attacked; they did not fire. AA was received from nearby Toshien and Heito whose guns could reach the approach corridor to Takao. Four planes were holed. Hits were claimed on at least 7 or more gun pits of the 6 batteries attacked. Smoke and dust were problems for the second elements. Even bombs that did not hit the aiming point were not wasted as the whole area was surrounded by military encampments or industrial targets. Later raids on Takao proved that these raids had been successful in reducing flak over this once "hot" target. Hardly a shot was fired even though bomb coverage had not been total.

Four 63rds were out this night and into June 2nd. Three went to Shanghai near the mouth of the Yangtze and one went to Hong Kong. Of the 3 that went to Shanghai, 2 attacked the same Fox Tare Charlie. First, Lt. Orton and crew had a go and missed with 4 bombs. Then Lt. Fullenwider missed on a skip bombing run, but on a second try scored a hit using LAB. The ship was seen listing 30 degrees, but they could not wait to see if it sank as their fuel was getting low. So a "damaged" was all they were credited with - 3500 tons.

The third plane had electrical problems and dropped its bombs 500 yards off a Fox Tare Charlie. The Hong Kong plane found nothing and could not reach its secondary near Canton due to a fuel problem.

A 65th H2X plane started June 2nd off with an attack on Kiirun Town. This was to be a warm up of the daylight raid by the strike squadrons. At 2256 hours from 10,000 feet 12 X 500 lb. incendiaries were dropped and they started several fires that were visible 20 miles away.

June 2, 1945. The daylight raid to Kiirun did not get there due to bad weather, so they bombed Takao to try out the AA after the previous day's raid. There was little flak from the target; only one plane was holed. Bombing was fair as the 403rd got zero for the day - all in the water or on a sand bar. One huge explosion with smoke to 1500' was heard as the group pulled away. Leaflets were dropped and rope was used. Photos the next day showed numerous buildings destroyed as well as damage to the shipyards where many small craft, i.e. barges, luggers, a dredge and some Sugar Dogs were blown up. It had been a tough two nights at the mouth of the Yangtze so on the 2nd/3rd three more planes went back there. They had no luck with ships. Lt. Orton tried for a Sugar Dog

and later bombed a reef. Lt. Scroggs found no ships and settled for Woosung Cotton Mills and a third plane did not make the search area, but due to radar problems went to Mako.

A fourth plane out that night was an anti-radar ferret to Nanking. Radar failure made him turn back after 40% of the mission was completed, but the crew's excitement was not over as Clark Field was closed in, and the plane had to go all the way back to Laoag, an emergency field for night operations, where it made a night landing. The plane returned to Clark the next day

A 403rd H2X plane hit Kiirun Town at 0135 on June 3rd with 12 X 500 lb. incendiaries that started good fires. The run was made on H2X, but just before the plane reached the target, there was a break in the weather and a visual rate was established. Rockets were fired at this plane from an unknown source, but they failed to reach the altitude of the B-24. Upon returning to Clark they could not land due to ground fog, so they landed at Porac strip, south of Clark, and returned later that morning.

June 3, 1945. The primary target for the day was to be the power stations, Jitsugetsu-tan, on Formosa. This vital spot had been hit before, but it was now producing up to 60% power on line. The weather turned out to be too bad for this strike, so the squadrons went to Takao again doing more damage and seeing very little AA. The 403rd had all kinds of problems and dropped bombs in the water and everywhere except the target (but near to it).

Unfortunately, a 65th plane [#980] on takeoff and beginning to assemble crashed into Mt. Arayat that was NNW of Clark Field. The normal procedure was to make a 180 degree turn after takeoff. Each following plane made a shorter turn with assembly taking place on the downwind leg. With another 180 degree turn the squadron would be brought together and heading up the valley towards Lingayen Gulf. On this day Mt. Arayat was partially shrouded in clouds with the peak projecting above the clouds. Pilot, 2nd Lt. Frank L. Chisman apparently flew to the prescribed assembly that sadly took him into the clouds and disaster. Clouds covering Mt. Arayat were a common occurrence and the 180 degree turn was to be taken sooner to keep out of the mist. [It was not known for some time that the plane hit this mountain. Discovery of the remains took place after the group planes returned from the day's strike and #980 was missing. It is also the memory of Jim Cherkauer that on the days that Mt. Arayat was clouded over, we made our 180 degree turn in the opposite direction than was the usual case. This took the entire group away from the mountain, but it seems that Lt. Chisman did not follow this procedure.]

This night and into the next day, June 4th, the Sea Hawks went back to the Yangtze with 3 planes. Lt. Phillip was the only one to find a ship, a Fox Baker. He dropped 4 bombs getting 1 direct hit and a near miss. A flare showed the bow awash and the ship sinking. He then headed home. The second plane missed the Woosung Docks. That old vet Dolley found an apparition of 800 tons with center pagoda and a glass dome. Whatever it was, he bombed it by LAB but could report no damage. The Navy and V Bomber Command would be looking up what this might have been.

At 0345 that morning a 65th H2X hit Taihoku with 12 X 500 lb. incendiaries starting some fires that did not seem to spread. One night fighter caused trouble as it made 4 firing passes but scored no hits. The B-24 did not return fire and lost the night fighter using evasive action.

June 4, 1945. The 43rd was to join up with the 22nd Bomb Group to hit Kaihoku [probably Taihoku] Town with 1000 lb. demos, but the target was hidden by thick clouds so it was back to Takao to hit the rail yards. The bombing was excellent with great damage inflicted and big fires started. There was no AA and the usual dropping of leaflets took place. Later photos showed extensive damage to a roundhouse and water towers. Many cars were destroyed and 15 direct hits were credited to KEN'S MEN. Those 1000 demos do the work.

This night and into the next morning 3 Sea Hawks were off to Shanghai and the delta. Lt. Croft found a Fox Tare Charlie, but failed to hit taking 4 LAB runs. A nearby frigate threw some 50 cal. that creased his plane. At this time 2 night fighters were circling and took some very long range pot shots at the B-24. The crew felt that they had enough excitement for one night, but with 1 bomb left, they flew over the Woosung Dock area and dropped it - a dud. So they took night photos and then headed home. Lt. Orton was only 25% of the way to the target when he lost his #3 engine and jettisoned all bombs and ammo, but he still had about 2500 gallons of fuel. Lt. Canevari missed a Fox Tare Charlie due to radar malfunction and was very cross indeed. Once again, the anti-radar ferret to Nanking was a bust after about 40% of the mission was completed when the radar went out so they returned home.

Early this same morning a 64th unarmed daylight recco did about 75% of its assigned track of South China Sea via the Pescadores. They found an impenetrable front off Amoy.

June 5, 1945. The strike squadrons were to hit Taichu Drome aircraft on the ground. This was to help counter the Kamikaze problem that was getting severe around Okinawa. The Empire's secret weapon, the weather, prevented any of the 43rd's 17 planes that reached central Formosa from hitting the primary. The targets of opportunity, named secondaries, were either socked in so bad as to make it dangerous for so many B-24s to be barging around in the clouds. The load was frags and they were well scattered. The rule was BOMB WHAT YOU CAN SEE as there were B-25s also in the area and on the deck. The 65th was on a run on Takao and were told to pull off and bomb separately where they could visually see the run up. Taito got the most attention from the 403rd and the other groups. Numerous fires were started, but damage assessment was very difficult. Enemy fighters were sighted by several squadrons, but they did not press attacks even on single planes. Orders were "If alone and you see an enemy fighter that even hints that it is going to make a pass, give him a squirt." KEN'S MEN were loading extra tracers in some guns, i.e. 1 in 3 instead of 1 in 5. A tracer shell looks as big as a bowling ball and timid pilots often stay away when they realize that the quarry they are tracking is watching. Tracer ammunition is very erratic in flight and the other shots in a burst do not necessarily follow the same path. AA holed about 4 planes, but it was hard to say where some of it was coming from. One large explosion was reported in Taito Town. The Sea Hawks made the long grind to Shanghai again this night and next morning. Lt. Phillips spotted a juicy big ship out of the blind bomb zone and asked for permission to attack. The answer was negative, so he headed to the Yangtze's mouth where they attacked a good radar return and missed with 3 bombs. A flare showed it to be a hulk already on the bottom. The last 2 bombs were dropped on a U/I ship, but the results were unobserved. Lt. Seaman was next into the breach and he too was suckered into bombing a good radar return that was a reef. Chagrined, but not discouraged, they dropped a single bomb on a Fox Tare Charlie, hit it at the water line, and it sank after a big

explosion. Another Fox Tare Charlie was nearby, and it received a treatment of a 500 lb. Torpex and gave forth a big explosion. This was their last bomb and fuel did not allow them to remain and confirm the sinking - it was claimed probably sunk. Two hits with 2 bombs. Last off was Lt. Moore, and he to bombed a hulk and found no other shipping. He also bombed a land target and started a small fire. Night fighters were seen, but they made no attempt to close.

June 6, 1945. At 0800 an unarmed 64th weather recco took off on the long haul of the South China Sea to Wenchow. It returned at 1900 hours.

There was no group strike this day.

Again 3 Sea Hawks were off to the Yangtze delta and Shanghai this night and into the morning of the 7th. This was the beginning of a 2-week dry spell for the 63rd as far as shipping was concerned. The distance to the search was some [1]200 miles, which was over 14 hours transit time. This left 2 hours or so for the planes to hunt in the area or find the secondary land target, drop their bombs and then head for home. The planes carried 3500 gallons of fuel, enough for 20 hours plus in the air. The bomb loads were 2000 pounders, either 4 X 500 lb or drop off a 500 and add 2 X 250s - Torpex was the rule. It was long, tiring and dangerous work.

All the planes hit the Woosung Docks with varying results. Some buildings were destroyed and some fires were started, but the returns were small when compared to sinking a ship. The odds were that a ship contained vital war materials, either going or coming, or was the vehicle for the trans-shipment for the same. A warehouse might be full or empty, and even if full, it might have little effect on the Empire's war effort. An attempt was made to photograph hulks so they could be more easily identified, but the glare on the water destroyed the image.

June 7, 1945. Again there was no group strike.

A 65th H2X plane went to Taihoku for what usually was a routine drop from 10,000'. The run was at 0050 the morning of the 8th. The AA generally was inaccurate, but 1 fragment punctured an oil tank. As the plane broke away, searchlights and 5 night fighters picked them up. Passes by the fighters were eager and as close as 20'. MG and cannon fire knocked out the #1 engine and shot out the left tire. The attackers had their landing lights on and these partially blinded the B-24's gunners at critical times. The attacked plane soon found clouds for coverage. The crew congratulated itself that no one was wounded and so headed home. They nursed #1 back to life for a while, but it quit north of Lingayen. They decided to land at the big 10,000' long runway at Lingayen rather than come down the valley with dicey weather caused by ground fog. One landing gear collapsed and the plane was a salvage job, but nobody was injured in landing. The B-24 was an unforgiving plane on any emergency landing on land or water. There were long arguments as to what was best to do when 1 tire was flat. Should you shoot out the other tire or try holding the wing up as long as possible, even allowing a turning into the flat tire to put the stress on the good wheel and at the same time use parachutes to slow down while not using brakes on the side with the flat tire. This discussion never was settled, but all agreed that it was important to see that everybody was in his crash position on landing.

The word from the weather people was that a big front had descended on Luzon and the Formosa Strait so planes might not be flying for several days except for the Sea Hawks who flew in all weather.

The night of June 7th/8th a maximum effort was called for to search the delta to see if the Japanese had found an alternate method to enter and leave the Shanghai/Yangtze complex. Although 4 Sea Hawks planes were on this search, only a lugger was found and it was missed. Nothing was found to indicate that the Japanese had found an alternate route. One of the B-24s turned back after experiencing a fuel problem. The 403rd sent a weather recco to the China coast north to Wenchow. These reccos carried no bombs so there would be no temptation to attack if they saw a convoy. They were to report it and stay in the area for further instructions. This B-24 was shadowed for 40 minutes by an enemy fighter who made what appeared to be a pass one time while the B-24 sent some tracers in his direction. The weather was so bad that of the 12½ hours of flying time, 6 were on instruments.

Jun 8, 1945. [There is no mention in Jim Pettus' manuscript of what took place with the 3 strike squadrons this day.]

On the 8th/9th the 63rd was again in the Yangtze/Hangchow Bay area to look for ships, but only some luggers were sighted. The planes bombed the Woosung Docks, the rail yards and warehouses. There were few lights and little AA. One plane had to jettison its bombs after the crew spent 40 minutes trying to fix the jammed bomb bay doors. For that crew it was a long trip in vain.

Jun 9, 1945. Rain saturated Clark Field so there were no daylight strikes this day.

The Sea Hawks could not fly either and had the night off. Those 15 hour missions to Shanghai were hard on both men and planes.

Jun 10, 1945. The entire area was closed again. The 403rd was called on to do an armed weather recco. The plane was to dump its bombs on the Pescadores on the return flight. The crew spent 8 of the 12-hour mission flying on instruments. They found only a few open spots along the China coast. A Tojo made 1 pass firing a burst and received several in return. The bombs were dropped on a village in the Pescadores when the crew luckily found a break in the clouds. The B-24 RONEd at Laoag due to a fuel shortage and bad weather at Clark Field. These long reccos were hard on the turret gunners as the guns had to be manned at all times when there was a danger of interception. Nose and tail turrets were very cramped. They leaked and were cold so gunners had to be spelled off from time to time. The waist gunners would change places with them. The engineer and radio operator were needed on or near the flight deck at all times.

This night, 10th/11th, two 63rd planes went to Shanghai, but 1 experienced IFF trouble soon after passing over Lingayen and had to turn back. Lt. Seaman, in #108, pressed on and found no ships so he went to the secondary target, Woosung Docks. The bombs would not release and by the time the crew discovered the problem they were near Kiang-Wan Drome, so they decided to pay this drome a call. Bombs were dropped, hitting the runway and dispersal areas. Photo flash pictures were taken, and upon examination later, the target turned out not to be Kiang-Wan, but instead a camouflaged uncharted air field 3 miles away. One comment from the crew was that, "The bomb run seemed very long."

Jun 11, 1945. The strike squadrons were again weathered in, but a 65th weather recco headed to the China coast to look for shipping that the B-25s and A-20s could eat up if they were within range. No ships were found, but at the secondary, Mako, a Sugar Able Sugar was

sighted tied up at a dock. The bombs fell long and no damage was done. The weather had improved at Mako - it was CAVU.

The night of the 11th/12th was a bad one for the Sea Hawks as 2 of their planes went down. One plane was listed as MIA. It was #206 with one of the newer crews and piloted by Lt. Ray. The plane checked in at 0120 within the blind bombing zone with no indication of any problem. It was assumed the plane went down over the secondary target. (Pettus note says that this info is on pages 47/49 of the 3/7 cas. list.) [Chuck Rauch is in possession of a letter written on September 21, 1945, by Marvin K. Nester, one of 3 survivors of this crash. His aircraft position is unknown. To summarize briefly, he reports that at 0330 the plane was on a low altitude run to bomb a ship in the Yangtze River, but apparently due to some error, probably radar, the plane hit the water at a considerable speed. Three men survived. One, Lt. Redmon, probably not the pilot, was injured, and with the help of the Chinese farmers they were hidden from the Japanese and stayed in one of the farmer's homes for a time. Redmon was given good medical attention and care. Using many modes of transportation, including walking and riding in wheelbarrows, the Chinese managed to get them back to safety. This editor has asked that a copy of the letter be given to Ed Gammill for use in a future newsletter.]

The second plane, #809, was piloted by experienced Lt. Scroggs when he flew it into the blind bombing zone and found no ships to bomb. He then hit the Woosung Docks and headed for home, but a series of mistakes, misunderstandings and head winds brought them to a situation where it was impossible to make land. They had to ditch some 200 miles north of Luzon. Eleven men of the 12 aboard survived the ditching although 5 were seriously injured. One of the plane's 2 life rafts would not inflate, so all crowded together while Lt. Scroggs went back twice to the sinking plane to look for Sgt. Dickson who had not emerged. Just as #809 slipped under the waves, Lt. Scroggs swam back, but he had not found Dickson. As the crew was getting into the 1 life raft, engineer T/Sgt. Rickey floated away but was brought back by the tail gunner who knew Rickey could not swim. There were heartbreaking moments when the flares did not go off to attract passing planes. It was not until the evening of the second day that a B-17 "Jukebox" dropped them a boat with supplies, water and clothes. They now knew that they were saved.

It was very frustrating that they could not start the motor of the lifeboat, but they knew that help was on the way. The next morning a PBY dropped a note to say that a PT boat was on its way as the seas were too rough for the PBY to land. Fifty-four hours after ditching, they were in the PT boat and on their way to the PT base. The injured went to a hospital and 5 others were returned to duty after a few days. The reputation of the Rescue Service was highest in the eyes of KEN'S MEN.

Jun 12, 1945. A new tactic was used by the strike squadrons on the raid to bomb Hong Kong on this date. The load was 8 X 55 gallon drums of napalm to be dropped on concentrations of small ships and barges in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. Our C.O. raised the question at the Bomber Command briefing as to why we would bomb small craft when many were fishing boats on which many families lived. This seemed contrary to the rule not to attack junks as they often helped downed airmen. The reply was that all persons resident on any boats would be told by authorities to leave the anchorage. There were 2 Japanese high speed wooden patrol boats amongst the fishing junks that would be targeted. The raid had the approval of Australian authorities who, with the British, coordinated targets

in the Crown Territory. After the briefing our C.O. told VBC Operations that those people would never leave their boats and a lot would be killed.

The raid was counted as a success. About half the barrels hit in the area and exploded (they had a different fuse for the water landing). Destroyed were a 50-foot tug, 12 cargo barges and 15 or more fishing boats (the high speed boats were untouched). AA was weak holing just 2 planes. One 403rd plane had a harrowing day when just after a dummy run on the target it lost the #3 engine. The pilot jettisoned and headed for home; 30 minutes later #2 engine began to lose oil and act up. The pilot kept it going as long as he could, maybe a bit too long. If oil pressure dropped below 45 p.s.i., the prop would not feather and in this case the prop ran away, the oil was gone and the engine eventually froze. On only 2 engines everything of any weight was thrown out, and with #1 and #4 pulling at nearly takeoff power, they made Lingayen and landed safely. This was a real sweat job and a lesson in watching oil pressure.

The Sea Hawks had a new chore on this date. They were track a typhoon, but they first had to find it. The route was to southern Luzon and then on to Leyte, Samar and back. No typhoon was found.

Only one 63rd plane went out to Shanghai the night of the 12th/13th. The firebug of V Bomber Command gave orders that the load of 4 X 500 lb. incendiaries was to be dropped on ships or clusters of small boats if found. No targets were found. Visual bombing was impossible with a 300' ceiling. So they made an ETA run on a river boat and there was a nice glow in the clouds at 1500' as the bombs landed on shore (LAB could not be effectively used as they were too close to the shore). A large well lighted hospital ship was seen at 29°10'N - 12°35'E with red crosses on top and white crosses on the sides.

Jun 13, 1945. A 65th armed weather recco flew along the China coast with a secondary of Mako. Due to weather and a fuel shortage it did not hit Mako and dropped on a Sugar Charlie Sugar at Matshasha Island. All bombs missed and the ship was later deemed unserviceable anyway.

The daylight strike was to Takao Boat Basin and V Bomber Command's firebug ordered napalm loads. The weather was very poor and only the 65th made an H2X run with unobserved results. The 64th and 403rd turned to Taito Town, Formosa, and started numerous fires and explosions. AA at Taito was accurate and holed 3 planes in the 64th, wounding 2 men. There was a problem with the napalm drums in that they seemed to leak in rough air. Several were jettisoned for this reason. In all nineteen 43rd BG planes were over Formosa.

The 63rd ran into much the same weather over Shanghai this night. Two planes loaded with 4 X 500 lb. Torpex bombs crisscrossed the harbor, but the bombs were dropped in the vicinity of Woosung Cotton Mills. The results were unobserved due to clouds. A large fire, for which they could not claim credit, was burning near Chitung Town. This night the 403rd sent one H2X plane to Canton to the area where the elusive small arms factory was. They dropped 8 X 500 lb. incendiaries with only 1 bomb burst seen through the undercast. This was an H2X run and 4 bombs failed to release; they were later kicked out over water. Two night fighters were seen, but they were no problem.

Jun 14, 1945. There was no daylight strike this date.

One 65th plane went out to search for the ditched 63rd plane and found a grey boat with 7 occupants. The sail was up and 3 men waved. The plane left the area when it was

relieved by "Playmate 24." (This boat of survivors probably was not Scroggs and crew; it is not mentioned in either debrief that the 65th plane came over. Nor was there any mention of the Playmate on station over the boat. Also it is pretty close to the P.I. where it ditched. Still 7 men fit.) [Weren't there 11 men in the boat holding the 63rd crew survivors?] The bomber later strafed some boats described as 40' passenger boats lined along the shore at Ryuku Sho. None of the boats sank, but they were certainly leaking. (The boats strafed are not explained, but they might be boats that were taking Japs down to Luzon and/or bringing them out until air patrols got too fierce and the boats were abandoned.)

At 0155 on the 15th and H2X from the 64th had a hairy few minutes over Taihoku Town. Starting 30 miles out for the H2X run, they dropped rope on the way in but were caught in lights and by night fighters that fired and holed the stabilizer. AA was accurate and holed the plane twice on its last run. Violent evasive action shook off the night fighters and bomb bursts were observed through the undercast. Some small fires seemed to be started, but the crew did not stay around to see what was happening. They also dropped leaflets.

A single 63rd plane went back to the delta on the 14th/15th. Finding nothing afloat, it lined up on the Woosung Cotton Mills. The ever-trusty Canevari and crew laid their Torpex bombs through the undercast and hit something. A large explosion rocked the B-24 and a flash was visible through ground fog. The comment was "Whatever it was, it sure went off." (Dust and waste cotton by-products could be very explosive.)

Jun 15, 1945. The daylight strike was to Taichu, Formosa, with the objective being planes on the ground, of which there are few. The bomb load was 20 lb. frag clusters with each squadron given ONE plane each to destroy. The 64th blanketed their revetment but started no fires. The 403rd did the same with what was to be a twin-engine bomber in their revetment. Photos showed that the bird had flown before the bombing took place. The 65th missed altogether. [Jim Cherkauer led the second element and reported in his diary that their revetment was empty.] The AA was moderate and accurate holing 6 planes. One burst reported to have emitted shiny cables about 20' long with balls on the ends. Phosphorus shells were also seen. Leaflets were dropped. [Intelligence had told the 43rd before the mission that the 22nd BG would precede them to the target and knock out the AA.]

The 403rd sent an H2X to Wenchow for a weather recco and to hit the small boat harbor. Three stationary small boats were seen and 40 X 100 lb. demos were dropped sinking a Sugar Dog. Some bombs fell on the docks but the results were unobserved due to clouds. This B-24 developed an oil leak, landed at Laoag and returned to Clark the next day. This night and next morning the 63rd sent out only 1 plane to the Shanghai area, but again no ships were sighted. So it bombed the Shanghai Cotton Mills, but the bombs were well off the mark. There was no opposition by the enemy. On the return flight the plane detoured to investigate a stationary Sugar Able Sugar, but alas the plane had no bombs. In the wee hours of the next morning another 403rd bomber hit the Whampoa Docks at 0205 hours with 12 X 500 lb. demos on an H2X run. The return was excellent until a few seconds from "bombs away," but hits were thought to be made on or just beside the docks. AA was present with the plane being holed twice. Rope was used and leaflets were dropped. Night fighters trailed and made 1 firing pass causing no damage. One night fighter trailed the bomber for 2 hours.

An anti-radar ferret tried to make it to Nanking, but made it only 90% of the way due to headwinds and fuel shortage.

Jun 16, 1945. Nineteen 43rd bombers hit Kiirun Harbor with 600 bundles of 260 lb. frags. The bombing was good and there were numerous fires and explosions. The 22nd and 380th Groups also were present so even if some bombs were off one target they were into the next. Heavy smoke prevented accurate assessment of the bombing but wide spread damage was done. AA was heavy and accurate with 7 planes holed. One 64th took off late and bombed with the 22nd at Takao. This plane laid its bombs along the shore and peppered numerous barges starting fires and 1 large explosion. It too was holed. One 64th plane was listed with "major damage to the aircraft" due to a shot out hydraulic system and a dragging tail. Upon landing it skidded to a stop with no brakes.

The 65th did an armed daylight weather recco to the South China Sea and Wenchow. It dropped 4 bombs on a three-mast junk and missed, but it then went to its primary target, Mako. Eight bombs fell on target but did not seem to do any damage to the underground oil storage facilities. The AA was medium causing one small hole in the stabilizer. A Dinah was seen passing within 150' of the plane, but it did not fire. The B-24 did fire a few rounds at the Dinah.

This night and into the next morning the 63rd had only 1 plane out. The pilot was the old Sea Hawk, maestro himself, Major Butts, who was going after the enemy at Shanghai. But the same fate awaited him; no ship was identified and 2 drops on radar targets produced only detonations.

This same night and morning the 65th had 1 H2X to Canton - Whampoa Docks. Bombing at 0055 from 10,600' with 12 X 500 lb. demos, they hit 200' north of the river and in the target. Night fighters intercepted the plane after the bombs were away. The fighter made several passes, but the B-24 took evasive action and did not return the fire. Leaflets were dropped, and both Macau and Hong Kong were lit up.

Jun 17, 1945. The 403rd sent an armed weather recco to the China Sea - Wenchow area and then back to Mako to bomb as it had found no ships in the first area. No shipping was sighted, so bombs were dropped on the graving docks and oil revetments. The fuel storage tanks were either empty or too well revetted since no fire was started. A lone Frank made a pass at the bomber as the bombs dropped. He fired but was too far away to do any damage, and tracers from the bomber kept him there.

The daylight strike was led by 3 H2X bombers. The target was an industrialized area of Kiirun. The 8 X 1000 lb. demos were well placed with 60% in the assigned target while those outside the area also started fires. In all 18 planes were over the target, but one had engine problems and had to jettison its bombs. Many fires and explosions were seen and heard. It seemed as though V Bomber Command had decided to turn this city into a rubbish dump. AA was heavy but meager with only 3 planes being holed.

This night and into the next morning 1 Sea Hawk went to Shanghai, but it found nothing but rain and more rain. Four bombs fell within the vicinity of the Cotton Mills, but no one was sure where.

Jun 18, 1945. The day began with a 65th plane at Taihoku at 0130 hours; it dropped 12 X 500 lb. incendiaries. These started fires the got bigger and then merged. Five night fighters met this lone B-24 and made several eager passes with much ammunition being exchanged. A new AA weapon was noted. It appeared as a biggish ball of blue/white fire spitting

fragments. It seemed to be on a parachute although none was seen despite the ball coming quite close to the bomber. The bomber dropped rope but the lights remained on except for a few seconds on the bomb run.

It was a maximum effort against Kiirun by the strike squadrons with their bombs being right on target. Numerous fires were seen with smoke rising to 8000' as the city suffered from the 1000 lb. demos dropped on it. One fighter made a daring pass [on the 65th #246 bomber in the lead element] but was greeted with lots of bullets from the top turrets. No damage resulted and he did not make another pass. AA was scattered and accurate with 5 planes being holed, but there were no injuries. A 403rd bomber had 2 bombs hang up, so it detoured by way of Kizan-to Island where they were dropped on some houses near a jetty with a large explosion being their reward. Smoke rose to 4500'.

A lone 63rd plane headed to Shanghai this night but turned back after 3 hours of flight due to the radar being out.

A lone 65th bomber on the night of the 18th/19th gave Taihoku a wake up call at 0402 with 12 X 500 lb. demos on an H2X run. This was to have been a fighter escorted mission, but the P-61 night fighter ran low on gas at Giran and had to head home. He missed greeting the 5 or 6 Japanese night fighters that attacked the B-24. They knocked out the #1 engine and put three 20mm holes in the stabilizer. Anti-fighter chaff did no good. There were phosphorus bombs dropped by the enemy. Ten to 20 blue searchlights were waving around without coordination. After the bomber left the target area, the waist and tail gun ammo was dumped to ease the weight. This flight seemed to have been over the target too late as it was getting light at that altitude, and the coordinated attacks looked like more aggressive enemy pilots were taking over. Much discussion was focused on why enemy planes often stayed so long with one of the night raiders but did not attack. But these fighters did not hang around. They made only one hard attack.

Jun 19, 1945. One 403rd bomber flew to Wenchow on an armed weather recco with shipping the hoped for target and the Mako ammo dump as the secondary. The weather was poor over the South China Sea and over the mainland for up to 40 miles inland. The flight went to the Pescadores and made several runs to put its load of 24 X 250 lb. demos on target using H2X due to the weather being 7/10 cumulus. The bombs fell in the west half of the target and destroyed at least 1 building. Two enemy fighters watched from a respectable distance.

This was the day the residential/commercial section of Kiirun was to catch it - and it did. Twenty 43rd planes went over the target and over 90% of their bombs were on the nose. There were always a few hang-ups or door problems, and this raid was no exception. The AA was accurate holing 5 planes with no injuries. There were lots of smoke and dust, but no major fires. Bombing was from 12,000' with a load of 1000 lb. instant fusing bombs - just the thing to blow up buildings.

The 63rd had a daylight weather recco to go south and look for a storm east of Samar. The storm area was located, but no effort was made to determine intensity. Typhoons move from south to north or northwest, and they didn't want one in the Philippines or Okinawa where there were hundreds of friendly ships offshore and not in protected anchorages.

Three Seahawks were out this night of the 19th/20th; two to Shanghai with the same old story - no ships - hit the secondary. However, the secondary couldn't be seen due to fog and haze. Bombs were dropped, but how much good they did was questionable. Still the recco had to be done, for sooner or later shipping had to come back to the delta. The

third plane was the anti-radar ferret to Nanking, and this time it was 100% complete. Lt. Croft and crew won the prize. Two enemy planes watched the Black Invaders over Shanghai, but made no effort to interfere.

Jun 20, 1945. The day started with the 403rd giving the Whampoa Docks a pasting at 0345 with 12 X 500 demos. The crew was delighted to see a very large fire result that lasted over 20 minutes. The run was coordinated visual/radar with altitude at 9500'. There were no searchlights, and AA was meager and inaccurate. Night fighters were much in evidence, although not very aggressive. Some shots from far out were fired at the B-24 which did not reply and it experienced no damage. The lights were on in Hong Kong. Shinchiku Drome with planes on the ground was the target for the daylight squadrons. The weather was only fair and the run began on H2X with visual corrections made in the last half minute of the run. The 403rd dropped all using H2X while toggling on the leader. The load was 20 lb. frag clusters from 12,000'. AA was meager, holing 3 planes. Clouds covered part of the target, but black smoke indicated that some planes were probably destroyed. There was a problem that could have been dangerous as some of the bundles of frags broke open too soon and pieces of the hardware hit the planes following, and in one case two bombs themselves hit the nose and top turret of one plane causing extensive damage. The bombs did not explode but the gunners were injured slightly and plenty shaken up.

More and more attention was to be paid to the Kamikaze menace.

The night of June 20th/21st was the first mission for a new 63rd crew as well as a long one from Clark to Shanghai to Nanking and back. Lt. F. Neal Fugate and crew joined the delta trippers and finding no shipping, climbed to 10,000' to hit oil storage at Nanking. Bombs were off target, but hit some warehouses. Rope was used and no AA was seen by either this plane or Lt. Canevari's following. Nor were any night fighters around, but searchlights probed the sky. The second plane laid bombs through the target and started a small fire. Both planes dropped leaflets and landed at Laoag for fuel as they encountered headwinds on the return trip.

Jun 21, 1945. There was no daylight strike on this date.

Jun 21/22nd, 1945. The 64th went to Shinchiku Drome with frags with hopes of getting a fighter or two on the ground. They made 4 runs in an hour, dropping 60 bombs each time beginning at 0135 hours. Undercast blocked any assessments. Meager AA low, no night fighters, rope seemed to divert the search lights.

Once again the Seahawks went to Nanking. An H2X plane was to precede the LAB bombers and light some fires in the oil storage area before the 2 followers arrived. The H2X plane was being flown by a new crew but they could not get a good return on the radar, so they dropped where they thought it was and hoped for the best. There were nil fires to light the others in. There was haze and smog over the area and the first plane could not be sure where the tanks were, neither could the two followers. They too dropped blind. No searchlights, no AA or no night fighters were seen, and no bomb damage was seen.

Toshien got a wake up call at 0114 on the 22nd when a 64th plane kept them up for 2 hours. Frags were dropped from varying altitudes with the plane being holed once. No results were seen from the dropped bombs due to the haze. The bomber harassed the coast between bomb runs and was intercepted near Takao where an exchange of fire took

place, but no damage was done to either side. Leaflets were dropped. Toshein's day was just beginning as the strike squadrons would be back in a few hours.

Jun 22, 1945. Ken's Men had a poor turnout with 11 of only 12 planes that took off make it to the target, Toshein, Formosa, striking an oil refinery with spectacular results resulting in lots of fires, smoke and explosions as both refining and storage facilities were hit. The 64th had 5 planes over the target dropping 1000 lb. demos from 13,000'. Smoke rose to 10,000'. The AA was accurate and heavy, holing 6 planes. One 65th plane was intercepted when the pilot went back to take an oblique photo. An Oscar made one pass shattering the copilot's windshield and cutting his hand. This Oscar must have been hanging around the clouds and seeing the B-24 leave the formation, he made the one quick pass. The crew was lucky and had another lesson in the importance of staying together. Despite the 43rd's poor turnout, the damage was great. This night and into the 23rd, 3 Sea Hawks were out. Two went to Shanghai/Nanking with one ferret doing the Hong Kong to Indo-China route. Nanking was 10/10 covered with clouds so bombs were dropped on a guess and ETA/H2X. Four bogeys were sighted on radar, but aside from blinking lights at each other, they did not venture closer than a quarter mile. The ferret flight was very quiet and the one probing searchlight from near Canton did not seem to be looking for the B-24.

Jun 23, 1945. Early this morning a 65th H2X bombing Canton started large fires using 12 X 500 lb. incendiaries. The bombs were dropped on radar on a prominent point in Pearl River at 0113 hours. Moderate AA holed the plane once while night fighters made 2 firing passes closing to 100 yards, but there was no damage and the fire was returned. The 64th had a daylight armed recco to Wenchow and the China coast dropping 7 X 100 lb. general purpose bombs on the Taiharo Sugar Refinery. AA holed the plane once. Weather was reported, but no shipping was sighted. (Pettus says he checked this [weird] bomb load twice.)

The strike squadrons were given a new target, Koki, with sugar refineries the aiming points. Formosa sugar was important to Japan as food, but also to make butanol. Bombing was good using 8 X 1000 lb. demos from 12,000'. The run was started on H2X but opened up and almost every bomb was in the mass of buildings that burned and exploded. Despite considerable AA only 2 planes were hit. One Tony made a very fast pass at the 65th and was seen no more. [Jim Cherkauer has a very interesting story about this mission in his diary and memoirs, but it does not belong here.] Two 403rd planes experienced mechanical problems and bombed targets of opportunity, one at Taito and one at Mako where the Japanese used smudge pots to try to hide the fuel storage. The bombing results were unobserved.

This day was both a happy and sad day for KEN'S MEN as that great campaigner Lt. Col. Harry Staley completed two full tours with the 43rd and had flown in every major campaign of the unit. During his second tour he was Deputy Group Commander and Col. Pettus' strong right arm. He would be missed by all.

Again with missions starting on the 23rd and finishing the morning of the 24th, one 63rd plane was out to check the Shanghai blind bombing zone for traffic. The crew found one Fox Tare Dog, but due to faulty radar they missed it. Two big junks nearby that seemed to be loading or unloading were worked over by strafing and were either badly damaged or sunk.

Jun 24, 1945. There was no daylight strike this day. But the 65th started the day early at the Whampoa Docks near Canton with at 0030 the B-24 made an H2X run of 12 miles and dropped 12 X 500# lb. demos. The target was hard to make out on scope and a 10/10 undercast made results impossible to determine. Two night fighters followed the bomber for a few minutes but never made any aggressive moves.

The 64th had the day weather recco to Wenchow. No shipping was sighted so 2 runs were made on Mako, the secondary, with poor results due to bombardier malfunction. The AA was moderate and low, and there was no fighter interception. Japanese seem to flight at night at Mako rather than in the day.

This night and next morning the Sea Hawks sent one plane to keep an eye on Yangtze and Nanking. No ships were seen and 4 X 500 lb. bombs were dropped on the oil storage depot. The results were unobserved due to searchlights and haze. No big fires were sighted. One night fighter was in attendance but did not attack. A bright fire and signals of three dots-three dashes were seen half an hour after the B-24 left the target.

The 403rd had the weather recco this early A.M. going to the Canton area. The target was the Whampoo Docks, and the load was 24 X 250 lb. demos. The run was H2X due to ground haze and only bomb bursts were seen. One night fighter made a long range firing pass but received no return fire. This night fighter was joined by 2 others that flew a quarter mile away for half an hour.

Jun 25, 1945. The daylight weather recco fell to the 65th and was flown along the China Coast from Amoy to Wenchow and then to Mako for bombing. The front was still around Wenchow. The bombing was off due to C-1 malfunction. The recco was only 90% due to the command radio going out.

There was no daylight strike this day.

The same routine was followed with the 63rd planes going out on the 25th and into the 26th. The route was Shanghai/Yangtze/Nanking and no ships were sighted. Bombs were dropped at the illusive oil depot with no results observed. A night fighter followed the B-24 for a few minutes into the delta area. Nan-Tung Drome was lighted and truck traffic was seen almost as if they knew #694 was not headed for them.

June 26, 1945. There was something new for ferrets - a daylight strike for the 63rd along the China coast from 0550 to 2200 hours. Amoy to Hong Kong and environs with no incidents, but a tiring day for the turret men, who if not in the turret, had to be just outside in case radar spotted a bogey.

The 403rd had the early H2X to Whampoo Docks again. A P-61 escort was not seen or heard from and bombs were away at 0335 from 10,500'. The load was 24 X 250 lb. demos, but 4 hung up. After the bomber left the target, 2 night fighters appeared and were quite aggressive for a few minutes. The enemy planes showed no lights as so often had been the case.

Maintenance had 18 bombers ready that took off for Tanshi Sugar Refinery this day. Fifteen made it over the target with 1000 lb. demos at an altitude of 11,550'. About 75% were on target and many buildings were destroyed with fires resulting. AA was moderate but accurate damaging 5 bombers. Of the 3 planes that turned back, one hit Koshun Town and destroyed buildings.

A 63rd B-24 went to Shanghai on the 26th/27th and it did find some small Sugar Dogs, but sea scatter on the scope saved the ships. Three bombs were dropped with all missing the target. The bomber took the last bomb to bomb the Texas Oil Co. but missed. With no

bombs left and fuel running short, the plane skipped going to Nanking. Shanghai was blacked out but one of the airfields had its runway lights on.

Jun 27, 1945. There was no daylight strike on this date.

A 64th H2X went back to Canton and the Whampoo Docks with 24 X 250 lb. demos. The plane was over the target at 0325 with an altitude of 10,500'. The AA was meager and only one night fighter trailed the bomber for 10 minutes. An undercast prevented any assessment of the bombing results.

The 65th had the day's weather recco to Wenchow, but again the bombing was bad due to the C-1 being off or out. 12 X 500 lb. bombs went in the water that must have given the Japanese a laugh and some fish. Meager AA still holed the plane once. Two twin-engine fighters paid a call but only fired once from 600 yards. When it appeared that they were turning for another run, the bomber gunners fired a few tracers, but then the bomber found a friendly cloud to hide in. The fighters no doubt took credit for breaking up the bomb run.

The night of the 27th/28th a ferret to Shanghai and Nanking was completed without incident. These ferret flights always carried members of the ferret detachment assigned to the 63rd. Two or more operators sat in the bowels of the bomb bays looking at the scopes and revolving receiver tuners. It was a boring and tiring job with no window to see out of.

A lone Sea Hawk found the same paucity of ships in the Yangtze. The secondary target was the Woosung Cotton Mills, but conditions were so black that the target could not be seen. Bombs were dropped on ETA and no results were seen. One U/1 plane was seen in the Formosa Straits; it closed but did not fire.

At 0250 that morning a 403rd H2X tried for the Small Arms Factory in Canton. 12 X 500 lb. demos went down through the undercast from 9000' after a good run and return on the scope. AA holed the plane once. There were no night fighters. The P-61 fighter escort was contacted by radio while the bomber was on its return flight some 200 miles from the target and only after the B-24 had fired a flare and turned on its lights.

The day weather recco to Wenchow and the Pescadores encountered some radar jamming while off the coast of Formosa. Weather was reported and at Mako there were towering cumulus clouds that made bombing difficult. Sixty miles from Wenchow one fighter paid a call but did not fire. Again, when it looked as if he might come in, the B-24 gunner gave him a bit of tracer.

The daylight strike was to the Keishu Butanol Plant and all 18 bombers made it to the target where they dropped their bombs very well. The 65th had half its bombs in the target as did the 64th. The less said about the 403rd the better. Still large fires were started and much damage was done by the 1000 lb. demos that hit. Altitude was 12,000'. To add insult to the bombers, 8 of them were damaged by AA but with no injuries. Rope and jammers were used, but it did not seem to put the enemy gunners off. V Bomber Command decided that the butanol plant was temporarily out of commission as a result of recent attacks. [This strike may have taken place on the 28th.]

Jun 28, 1945. [No mention is made of what the day strike squadrons did this date, but the above mission by the day squadrons may have been on the 28th as seems to be indicated by remarks made for the 29th's mission. With no times being mentioned, it is difficult to know if the actions for this day and into the 29th are in chronological order.]

One Sea Hawk heading to Shanghai had radio trouble and turned back dropping its bombs on the ever available Mako. The bombs were short in the boat basin, but there didn't seem to be any boats there anyway.

Another 63rd chased a patrol craft near the China coast, but the patrol skipper was clever and all bombs (8 X 500 lb.) missed from an altitude of 1000'. This air search was from Amoy to Swatow, but again no ships were sighted.

An anti-radar ferret in the Canton/Hong Kong area ran into violent thunderstorms that cut the mission down to 60%. Off the China coast a night fighter was encountered, but although he closed to 150 yards, he did not fire, nor did the B-24.

June 29, 1945. The Wenchow weather recco was the 65th's, and again they came back to Mako to get some bombing practice and excitement. The run was made at 1133 with 12 X 250 lb. bombs dropped on the target and the other 12 had to be levered out as they would not release electrically. Hits were scored on buildings and a large fire sprang up. One interceptor came up but was put off by several squirts of tracers.

The Shinchiku Oil Refinery was the target of the daylight squadrons, but only 12 planes were scheduled to take part. Eleven made it over the target and the 403rd was determined to atone for its disgrace on the 28th. [That mission above was on the 28th and not the 27th.] Seventy-six of 88 bombs were on the nose and destroyed buildings and started fires with smoke to 8000'. One bomb that fell long hit tanks and started fires. Also 7 bombs that fell 200' south of the target touched off 3 explosions. The 403rd was 100% in the target. AA was accurate and holed 6 planes but there were no injuries. Several planes had bomb release problems so a second run was made by them and the confusion spread formations with 2 enemy fighters taking advantage as usual. There was smoke to 10,000' and flames shot high in the air.

On the 29th/30th two Sea Hawks went in opposite directions, one to Shanghai and the other to Haiphong. The Yangtze mission found no ships but was fortunate to have visibility, and they gave the Cotton Mills a good lick. A large building was demolished by bombs and a large explosion was heard.

The Haiphong plane found no big ships, but it did find a bunch of small ones. After one pass over the harbor, it saw 6 Sugar Dogs together at a dock. Coming in at 250' it let go 6 X 500 lb. demos and blew up at least 4 as well as hitting the docks. The crew felt pretty lucky having spent 2 hours looking for bigger ships while flying up the river. On their way out of the harbor they saw what they might have been sent to find, i.e., 5 medium sized vessels and more Sugar Dogs. Haiphong lies up the Cua Cua River (now Red River) in a very complex delta. Radar returns are very hard to get from this area due to the large number of islands and shoals. Somehow they missed the reference point, so they went in to attack the ships in the city itself. Night fighters were around and made firing passes but did no damage. The Sea Hawks had sunk boats after a very long dry spell.

Jun 30, 1945. Denying the enemy alcohol was again the objective on the 30th, and 15 B-24s hit the Heito Sugar Refinery. Bombing was good but could have been better. The target was smothered with 1000 lb. demos and great damage resulted. Flames were seen to 500' and smoke to 7000' with intermittent explosions making a spectacular show. AA was heavy and although not too accurate, 4 planes were holed. One 403rd plane was seriously damaged losing control on the run due to a shot out elevator cable. The crew regained control and landed using auto pilot and trim. Three men were injured; one, though

walking, went to the hospital. The 403rd made a second run as the plane dropping out had thrown the first run off. Regardless, only one plane put its bombs on target.

The 403rd completed the month when at 1158 they dropped 7 X 500 lb. demos 1000' off target at the Keishu Butanol Plant. The plant appeared to be 50% burned out. The plane went on to Foochow on a weather recco that was 90% completed. A destroyer escort was sighted at 2610N - 1195E and reported.

A 65th H2X scored a bull's eye on an oil refinery near Canton. At 0106 the plane dropped 12 X 550 lb. demos starting 3 large fires. Ten minutes after bombing 2 twin-engine night fighters made non-firing passes but were soon lost in the clouds. AA was meager and inaccurate; rope and chaff were used. Their P-61 escort was seen later in the area of Lingayen Gulf.

A Pettus tale that he can't find in the Group or Sqd. Histories is given below in Jim's own words. Gen. Whitehead called me and said that he had two visiting RAF Air Vice Marshals who wanted to look at a bomb group and go on a mission. He called me, knowing I had been in the RCAF, to look after them. I said I thought they were foolish to want to go on a mission to Formosa as the AA was dangerous, but that was up to them. Did the generals want me to fly them? or lead? The answer was NO; just show them how we do it, nothing special.

The AVMs arrived after dinner and spent the night with me. I was up at 0430 to have breakfast, go to the briefing, and to see them off. They flew in different squadron lead planes. I did not fly; this was during my time as Clark C.O. "In flights" messages came in saying AA was heavy, accurate and several planes had been hit, but with no injuries or emergencies. Bombing was described as excellent.

When they were due back, I went to the strip and picked up the first man, then waited for his companion. We learned by radio that the plane carrying the #2 AVM had had an emergency; the engine was out and they wanted a straight-in approach. That was granted, and then we heard the plane had a second engine out, and then a third quit. We headed for the crash site looking for the smoke when we saw the plane going down the runway in the opposite direction with three engines feathered. Clark had a large roll-off, about 1200 - 1550 feet circular, and then end of the double strip and here the plane came to rest - no added damage, but something was wrong somewhere.

By the time we arrived the AVM had the shaking crew in front of the plane taking their pictures with the three feathered props in the background. As we rolled up #1 AVM calls out, "I say Freddie, did you push the wrong button or something?" The crew were all saying Hail Marys. I believe the pilot was Capt. Agard. In any event both AVMs were very cool; they could not stop talking about the "Wizard Bombing - absolutely wizard, never saw anything like it. We did not believe these reports and will tell Whitehead." I delivered them back to Fifth Air Force Headquarters.

We found the problem with the engines, a small piece of flak. It had hit the main fuel transfer line, but as long as the engine driven fuel pumps were on, fuel was sucked past the hole, (although there was some leakage) to the engine. As soon as landing procedures went into effect, it was "tank - to engine - to cross feed," and booster pumps on. The booster pump was located at the base of the main tank and had a pressure GREATER than the engine driven pump. So fuel was being pumped overboard from the cross feed line that fed all engines. In combat mode the tank fed only its respective engine. So we nearly lost a plane and an AVM. We changed the landing check list to DO NOT TURN ON BOOSTER PUMPS unless you have a loss of fuel pressure on that engine.

That's the tale of the "Wizard Bombing."

[This concerns the mission on June 23, 1945, that Jim Cherkauer stated earlier that he had a story about too. It differs considerably with that of Col. Pettus. We discussed this once at a reunion a few years ago. Jim Pettus did not accept Jim Cherkauer's telling of what took place on this mission to cause the 65th C.O., Max Williams, to run out of fuel when approaching Clark Field for a landing, but Cherkauer not Pettus was on the mission and saw what took place first hand. The last paragraph of the Pettus tale does not jive with what the flight engineer told Jim C. about 8 years ago, but it may well be a true but partial explanation of why Major Max Williams (not Capt. Herb Agard), 65th C.O. landed with only one engine partially operating. All this could have been avoided had the Major followed normal procedures during the mission. The rest of this story as recorded by Jim Cherkauer will not be given here.]

JULY 1945

Jul 1, 1945. The old Army adage, "Hurry up and wait," now became a reality as everything was frantically packed to head north and there were no LSTs for the sea life. 6 X 6s were loaded, flight operations were confined to weather reccos and the 63rd visits to Shanghai farther north. Everybody waited.

The 64th drew the Wenchow weather recco and hit Mako on the way to China and a target of opportunity on the way home. At Mako 22 X 250 lb. demos ran through the target and caused an explosion with flames to 300' and black smoke. On the way home Simouisen, on the southern tip of Formosa, was hit with two 250 lb. demos falling into a housing area; the plane was holed for its trouble. Their bombs had hung up and it was thought wiser to drop elsewhere than to do another run for just 2 bombs.

Two Sea Hawks went to Haiphong and the South China Sea looking for ships on June 30th/July 1st. Four junks were found, but only 2 bombs were expended. The bombs missed, so the planes went on to look for better things or to hit the city and docks. The results were only fair as half of the bombs had to be dropped by ETA and went into the river. The other half fell on a cement plant and rice mill on the edge of the water. Black smoke was visible after the planes left the target. The visibility was limited and AA was inaccurate. Another plane went to Shanghai and tried to hit the Texas Oil Refinery again. The bombs were dropped on ETA with the last 500 pounder on target, but no damage was done. Visibility was very poor and the AA inaccurate.

On the night of the 1st/2nd only one 63rd plane went to Shanghai. Lt. Seaman, in #398, found 2 luggers unloading a Fox Tare Baker and dropped a bomb hitting the one lugger that exploded and sank. He then skip-bombed 2 on the Fox Tar Baker; one of which hit the ship in the stern and 30 minutes later only the superstructure was above water. A second Fox Tare Baker was in the area but got away as it moved up river and the radar returns were lost due to background interference. As it was getting time to leave, they tried for the other lugger but missed. On the way home, at 0713, a Tojo tacked on to them off the coast of Formosa. He trailed them for 30 minutes but did not fire. They landed at 1105.

Jul 2, 1945. There was no weather recco on this date. All further combat operations were cancelled pending the move, the date of which was put forward several times. No strike missions were flown until July 18th.

Jul 3-13, 1945. There was now a concentration on training. 1) Bombing practice for both the 63rd and the strike squadrons. Targets were available and were booked by the squadrons. 2) Checking out of copilots. 3) H2X operators were busy teaching others and getting more practice as it was felt that there would be more cloud interference farther north. There was lots of maintenance carried out and all planes were ready to go. During the first 10 days of the month there was conjecture as to where the move would be. Some said China while others said Okinawa, but none said Ie Shima, that was known only as the island where Ernie Pyle was killed. By the time the first truck loads left for Subic Bay on the 14th of July, the destination was recognized to be Okinawa.

Jul 14-17, 1945. This was a memorial day for a "working party" that went to the hills to collect some lumber and to look for souvenirs. It was one of the few working parties for which there were plenty of volunteers. The volunteers were armed to the teeth; a few worked

while most stood guard or poked into the bush to look for Japs or souvenirs. Upon arriving near the saw mill, and before they had time to organize, 13 Japanese surrendered to them. These sons of the emperor had been in the hills for months; they were not combat troops and they were hungry. They knew that if they surrendered to the men in khaki, they would get to the P.O.W. camp alive, but if they surrendered to the men in combat green, their future was much less secure. So when the 65th truck pulled up, they were ready to give up. If they had wanted to ambush the 65th truck, they could well have done so. They were duly brought down the mountain, past the non-smiling infantry check point personnel who saw what happened. Stotsenburg MPs would have none of them, but when the right people were called they came to the 65th camp area to remove the P.O.W. Many pictures were taken, and the only people unhappy were the infantry in the hills. [One of the prisoners wore either a Harvard or Yale class ring and spoke perfect English as noted by Jim Cherkauer.]

There were Japanese stragglers all over the area, and guards were posted at night as hungry Japanese came to steal anything, but mainly food. There was far more danger getting shot by a guard or some vigilantes than by the enemy, if there was a rumor going around that there was a Jap in or near the camp. A week before one was captured when wounded after a jeep chase. [In the 65th camp one Jap surrendered in the wee hours of the morning to an officer who went to the latrine. When the startled pilot released the clip from his 45 rather than the safety lock, the Jap bowed down, picked it up and handed it to the frightened lieutenant who then screamed at the top of his lungs. Dozens of officers came to his rescue.]

There was too much stealing, and though most were sorry for the Filipinos after their being under the Japanese so long, enough was enough, and security was tightened. Most men were ready to move on; they had been to Manila, warned about the women and the liquor, and were glad to get closer to the war.

Jul 18, 1945. At Clark the training continued, but a mission to Matsuyawa Drome by the strike squadrons was cancelled due to weather. That night the 63rd flew a weather recco to Wenchow and the China coast with Mako as the alternative target. 6 X 500 lb. demos were strong through the west side of the target with no visible damage.

Jul 19-21, 1945. This move to Ie Shima was by far the most difficult that the unit was put through. Some trucks had left for Subic on the 14th only to be called back after being there a day. Buildings torn down for the move had to be partially re-erected as mess halls. In the midst of this a mini-typhoon came through, soaked everything and laid some tents flat. Finally, 10 days after the first trucks had gone to Subic Bay, they began loading again; but it was not until the 27th that the convoy left for Ie Shima.

Jul 19/20, 1945. The Sea Hawks sent out 2 weather reccos to the China coast this night. One returned early due to battery failure; the other completed the circuit. No shipping was sighted, so bombs hit Mako through a solid undercast. but no bombs were thought to be on the drome. In all 3 runs were made. There was no AA. Unarmed #694, with Lt. Little as pilot, went up the island chain towards Okinawa and reported weather.

Jul 20/21, 1945. Two night reccos were out from the 63rd this night, but one came back due to instrument failure. The crew then took off in a spare plane that had no bombs but they

completed the circuit. Lt. Brim, in unarmed #694, went farther north to Sakishita Gunto and reported weather. Lt. Mueller, in #983, completed the southern portion of the China Sea recco and came back to Mako where he made 3 runs to bomb due to the undercast. No results were observed.

Jul 21, 1945. Some of the 65th and 64th planes made the journey to Ie Shima from Clark. The air echelon movement continued for 3 days. Flight time was 6 plus hours. A limited number of C-46 air lifts were supplied, but NOT enough.

That night and into the 22nd two Sea Hawks were out on a weather recco to Wenchow and to bomb an ammo dump at Gyoo-To Island. No shipping was spotted, so bombs were dropped with 2 explosions being seen. Lt. Redmon, in #969, went to Saksshima Gunto and the north Pacific to report weather. The flight lasted 12 hours and 20 minutes.

Jul 22, 1945. This day 9 B-24s of the 403rd took off for Ie Shima loaded with 6 X 500 lb. frag clusters, one bomb bay tank, 15 men and their clothes and such gear as they could cram in the plane. [Jim Cherkauer's diary indicates that 65th planes also left Clark for Ie Shima this day.] The weather on Ie Shima was cool after the Philippines, but rain and mud promised problems. A camp of sorts had been established, and some men and crews were in transient camps. A few men slept in the planes and also stood guard duty. The B-24s that flew to Ie Shima brought very little gear as they had a bomb bay tank and a load of bombs. Only personal clothing and tools were on the bombers. Some smart crews managed a tent, but there was a great shortage of poles. All the tents from Clark were on frames that were now loaded on the trucks. The sea lift sailed from Subic on July 27th and did not arrive at Ie Shima until August 4th.

Ie Shima was a small island off the west coast of Okinawa. It was pear shaped, about 6 miles long and a mile and a half wide. At the larger end were two 7000' long air strips. There was a small mountain, Mt. Suribachie or hill 601 (its height in feet) on the narrow end. There were steep drop offs at both ends of the runways. A major hazard was that the north end of the runway was 50' higher than the south end, and the prevailing wind was north to south. The question was - did the planes takeoff uphill into the wind or downhill, down wind? This aeronautical problem was debated by pilots, the C.O., tech reps, engineers, etc. Finally, Col. Pettus made a decision; if the wind was more than 8 miles per hours, you dropped off 2000 lbs. of bombs. The 43rd did not lose a plane on takeoff.

The island had some good aspects. There were no civilians, no enemy stragglers roaming around, and very few women (American nurses at the far end from where KEN'S MEN had their camp). Also, every souvenir had been picked clean by the infantry that had taken the island in some bloody fighting, and by engineers who followed. In the beginning conditions were bad, and the exhausted men were content to stay in camp. After a week or so, their need for some sightseeing was taken care of by some truck tours just to show them there was really nothing to see, just lots of dust and mud. Soft taxiways and hardstands were another problem. A fully loaded B-24 weighed about 69,000 pounds and many bogged down on the new hardstands and taxiways. A near war erupted when the fighter group had to move out of the best hardstand area so the B-24s could park without sinking in. Here again, Col. Pettus was the airdrome C.O., so what KEN'S MEN needed, they got.

This night a 63rd crew in #786 took off at 1905 but had to return due to radar malfunctions. They jettisoned the bombs and took the standby plane that was unarmed. They completed their mission and returned the next morning at 1245. Weather was reported every 30 minutes. F/O Stebbins had the northern recco but had to return early due to #4 engine failure. He landed at 0650 on the 22nd of July.

Jul 23, 1945. More strike planes went to Ie Shima, and a mission to Shanghai was scheduled for the 24th. [C-46 transports continued to bring gear to Ie Shima.] The last of the sea lift departed Clark for Subic Bay. They were to load on the 24th but did not do so until the 25th. The LSTs pulled off the beach on the 25th and then waited in the bay until the 27th to sail with a convoy of vessels.

This night and into the 24th the 63rd sent out 2 planes, but again radar malfunction caused Capt. Bancroft to bring his bombs back and had them loaded into the standby. He took off at 2230 and completed his mission, but the bombs fell wide at Gyco-To Islands. Lt. Croft flew the north Pacific route but carried no bombs. Weather was reported and he returned to Clark at 0845 on the 24th.

Jul 24, 1945. Despite the rigors of moving, KEN'S MEN put 26 B-24s in the air for Shanghai. This was the first daytime strike out of Ie Shima and from Japanese soil. The 64th had 9 planes over the target, the Woosung Docks, but it was totally cloud covered. An H2X run was made with the bombs hitting north of the target. Weather en route was very poor. The 65th had 8 planes over the city and also bombed the docks as their primary target as Kaingwan East Drome was closed in, and they could get an H2X on the docks. Results were unobserved due to clouds. One Tony intercepted but caused no damage with its one firing pass. AA was moderate heavy and holed 3 planes. The 403rd found a hole over the drome and dropped in the revetment area, but could not see the results of their handiwork. Some 15 planes were seen on the ground. They were happy to report that the AA went to the other squadrons and only 1 enemy fighter was seen. It didn't come near the 403rd but did make a pass at another squadron. All planes returned to Ie Shima and the mud of the new camp.

The Sea Hawks had the night off to prepare for their move to Ie Shima.

Jul 25, 1945. Twelve Sea Hawks crammed with men and gear began taking off at 0800 heading for their new home. All arrived safely, but they were no sooner there than the call came down from the 308th Wing to have at least 4 planes ready for missions that night. A great groan was heard all the way to Naha.

There was no daylight strike this day.

At 2215 and 2245 on the 25th four old-timers lifted off and headed for the Blind Bombing Zone and the Inland Sea. Lt. Phillips, in #786, found a Fox Tare Dog, 1000 tons, under tow and dispatched it with 2 bombs. Next came a Fox Tare Baker, 6500 tons, and the bombardier, Lt. Greffe, sent it to the bottom with 2 bombs. The long dry spell was over. Lt. Croft, in #969, found a Tare Two Stacks, 6500 tons, in convoy. Sneaking in before the enemy realized it, they made a direct hit. Within a half hour the ship was off the screen. AA was too intense when another pass was attempted so the effort was abandoned. Several other ships including a destroyer were dropped on by Lts. Seaman and Canevari, but no hits were claimed. Still, it was a good night to begin the Ie Shima sojourn. Feelings were upbeat; the move was worth it. The planes returned safely in the early hours of July 26th.

- Jul 26, 1945. At 0001 the 3rd B.G. (H) Major Leonard Nathe opened for business on Ie Shima. There was no daylight strike this day. The crews spent the day getting out of the mud and pitching in building the camp. Again the requirement for the 26th/27th was for four 63rds. They took to the air at 2100. Two planes went after a Sugar Dog, which bore a charmed life. One plane had radar malfunction and returned; the other missed on 2 different runs. Aggressive interceptors then intervened, and the Sugar Dog lived to sail another day. The other 2 planes fared little better as they missed their targets, and #812, piloted by Lt. Fugate, got its hydraulic system shot out and had to make a precarious landing with little brakes. (This was when the up hill runway came in handy.)
- Jul 27, 1945. The first daylight strike was flown against the Japanese Home Island. The target was Kagoshima in the extreme south of Kyushu. Rail yards and freight loading yards were the targets and bombing was good, as was the weather. The load was 1000# demos from 11,000'. AA was meager and there were friendly fighters galore. The 65th had a bad day as they could get only 4 planes in the air due to others being stuck in the soft hardstands. It was a good beginning for KEN'S MEN after the long slog from Australia. One pilot said at the intel briefing that he could see boring through the clouds - those many B-17s and B-24s the 43rd had lost since 1942. They were watching this day as the war went to the enemy homeland. Again on the 27th/28th four 63rd planes were out. Major Butts lead the parade. Near Tsu Shima Straits, a plane making a visual run over a large merchant ship, received AA from several vessels. The tail turret was destroyed and the gunner was injured badly. The bombs were jettisoned and the wounded man was returned to base. Two other planes attacked several targets in the Inland Sea but without results. The AA was a great deal more troublesome than it was around Shanghai. (I can't find this man's name, but it must be Sgt. Samuel E. Bloom of the 63rd. Group lists him as injured on the 29th.) The fourth plane, #127 piloted by Lt. Kerns, never returned from its mission. The last message received was "One Sugar Baker 3332N-13208E sunk." No wreckage or life rafts were found despite wide searches on the 28th and 29th. (This crew is listed in the summary of the 3/9.)
- Jul 28, 1945. This was the day of the aircraft carrier attack. The CV Katsuragi was docked in Kure Harbor undergoing repairs and the Fifth Air Force wanted to sink it. Had this vessel been seaworthy enough to move, it would either have been towed or gone under power to some location more out of harm's way. KEN'S MEN were the most available bomb group and were assigned the task. However, Ie Shima was still a difficult place to operate from due to shortages of test equipment and the loading facilities. The first call said the strike was to be on the battleship Haruna supposedly sunk in 1941, but it was still afloat near Kure. The bomb load was 2000 pounders. To use these bombs different bomb rails had to be installed in the planes. It was found to be too difficult to, due to mud, to get these one-tonners out of the dump even if there were any there. (In the early days of an operation there was always a great deal of confusion as to what or where). So 1000# demos with delay fuses were used. Thirteen B-24s were all that the 3 squadrons could muster, and despite a series of mishaps, they got 4 or 5 direct hits on the bow and stern and a series of bombs strung along each side that were credited as near misses. The ship that probably never would have made it back to sea was seriously damaged. Photos

taken the next day and the day after showed it low in the water. Later it was seen lying on its side. The AA was heavy and direct. Of the 10 planes that made the run, 7 were holed but none seriously; nor were there any injuries. Bombing altitude was 10,500' - 11,000'. There was no real interception, but several enemy fighters were seen and made half-hearted passes out of range. Gunners replied with tracers to show the attackers they were being tracked. The 65th performed a rescue assist when they spotted 2 life rafts tied together, and the bomber was able to call in a Navy Catalina. The B-24 stayed with the downed fliers until the rescue began. Then it had to head for home as fuel was low and it was alone. All in all, it was a good day. The Fifth Air Force got its carrier, nobody was down or wounded and morale got a good boost. All the ground crews needed now was for the sea lift to arrive. It was not due until August 4th.

Despite the high hopes of ships, the night of the 28th/19th was a bust for 3 Sea Hawks. Though several targets were located, all bombs were well off. The radar men wished for all of their calibration equipment, so the cause of the misses could be ascertained.

Jul 29, 1945. Fifth Bomber Command was not satisfied with the results of the carrier attack of the 28th and gave the same target again for the 29th. No photo recco had been over to see what damage had been done, so the 43rd went back to have another try. Sad to say, this time the weather was very poor and the bombing was the same. Loads were 1000# demos and some 2000 pounders that they managed to get out of the dump. The 65th had 7 planes, the 64th had 5. They bombed together as the 64th H2X did not take off. The target was 9/10 covered, and the H2X run was way off. The 403rd found a hole at the last minute and made 3 runs as the AA was meager. They dropped on 2 of the runs. No bombs were close, but the carrier was observed to be listing and the stern was low in the water. The euphoria of the day before was replaced by frustration. [Jim Cherkauer's diary says that he sighted no AA while leading the second element of the 65th over the target.]

Again this night, 29th/30th, 3 planes were out from the 63rd. Two went to the Inland Sea and one went to the Blind Bombing Zone west of Kyushu and Honshu. Radar malfunction brought one home before midnight, but its companion was able to attack 2 ships missing them both although the bombs were close. No damage was claimed. Lt. Croft, in #984, found a Fox Tare Baker and scored a direct hit amidships on the first run. Three more runs were misses, but the one hit was enough as the ship tipped forward and sank. With one bomb left the plane made a run on a Sugar Charlie Sugar, a 20 foot miss, and the little ship rolled on its side and slowly went under in 20 minutes. Score one Fox Tare Baker, 6500 tons, and one Sugar Charlie Sugar, 500 tons. AA was scattered from the Fox Tare Baker, but a frigate in the vicinity of the Sugar Charlie Sugar was quite active, though inaccurate. One night fighter worried the planes over the Inland Sea but did not fire.

Jul 30, 1945. There was no daylight strike due to the weather, and everybody was glad to have the time to get a little better organized. Still, the sealift was 5 days out. Major Butts took to the air on the night of the 30th/31st; he tried his best but could only damage a Fox Tare Charlie. Despite repeated runs and a near miss or hit, which left the ship listing but afloat, it was not to be claimed even as damaged. Maybe it was listing before his runs. This encounter was in the Blind Bombing Zone. Things were better for Lt. Fugate over the Inland Sea, although his companion, Lt. Redamn, had the old radar jinx and went back early. Fugate thought the ships were small Sugar Able Sugars and

managed to sink one and give several others a good scare. 1100 more tons went to the bottom.

Jul 31, 1945. This was to be another tour de force as the Group went to Kammon Tunnel. This tunnel is the main artery, both road and rail, between Honshu and Kyushu. The load was 2000 lb. demos with delayed fuses dropped from an altitude of 12,000' - 13,000'. This target was very small and could be difficult to pick up. An IP would depend on weather in the immediate area. It turned out to be impossible to pick up at all due to 10/10 overcast and large cumulus clouds. Then began a sort of excursion looking for a target. Sasebo Naval Base was the secondary, but it was obscured by a smoke screen from generators. So the Group went back to its first target, Kagoshima, and the rail yards that were still pretty much intact. All the wandering around had lost the group its fighter cover, and AA took pot shots from a number of places, especially from Sasebo, that holed a number of planes. Cumulus towered to 20,000', but a good run was made on the yards and bombing was excellent. The roadhouse was hit as were numerous other buildings, and fires were started in several places. The 403rd with 9 planes over the target put 100% of their one-tonners in the yards. It would be unique to have 9 planes drop 2000 lb. bombs without a problem. They did have 5 hang up and one jammed in a bomb bay door. Other squadrons had difficulty with at least 30% of their bombs; some were jettisoned and some were levered out. The one-tonner was a pain to load, to carry and to drop. The 65th had 2 men wounded by AA, one seriously (Lt. Harry Reedy and S/Sgt. Edward Hilsher were both there, but there is no indication as to who was hurt seriously). In all, a total of 7 planes were holed, as there seemed to be a great deal of flak. One report was made of a shell that ejected steel balls on wires. After losing the fighter cover in the poor weather, a few enemy fighters trailed along and made some half-hearted passes resulting in numerous exchanges of fire. Some 43rd gunners were sure of hits. The Japanese had no hits on the 43rd. The 403rd lead plane still had the one-tonner lodged on the bomb bay door and nothing could get it loose. The door was jammed and would not move; there was no hoist to get the brute back on the shackle, so it was defused and after warning the tower the plane landed on Birch Strip on Ie Shima. At touchdown the bomb fell out, bounced behind the plane and rolled to a stop where it was recovered by the armorers.

All in all it had been a good day, although tiring for the crews who had been to several targets hitting one very well. So far the enemy has not shown the determination to defend its homeland at any cost, or as had been feared the enemy did not try air-to-air ramming. They have not pressed fighter attacks any more than they had in defenses farther from home. At least the expected fierce defense has not materialized to date. July ended with the Group waiting for the sea lift to really hit its stride.

One thing different from the targets that KEN'S MEN had been bombing for years was that the secondaries were nearby; no flying for an hour to find another island or staging area. Over Japan proper there was always another city within 15 minutes flight time, and every one a target that was getting ready to repel the planned and scheduled Olympic invasion.

It was apparent that air opposition over Kyushu was not a real factor. The Kamikaze was a dangerous and fearsome menace for ships, and it was known that the enemy had other suicide boats and mini subs. However, it apparently was not worthwhile to use one plane to knockout one bomber although B-29s had been rammed on numerous occasions. Hundreds of planes roamed at will over Kyushu bombing or strafing everything and

anything. The 43rd was advised, for the next few days, that many targets would be aircraft (or dummies on the ground). One squadron assigned one plane on the ground, but if it was destroyed, it might save a ship.

AUGUST 1945

Aug 1, 1945. Although the weather was not ideal, there was to be a big strike by many planes, heavies, mediums and fighters on the harbor of Nagasaki on this date. The 43rd's main objective was a 10,000 ton tanker moored at the docks. This ship probably was unable to move and was likely used as an AA platform. The squadrons managed to get 18 planes over Nagasaki, that was 8/10 cloud covered. They circled looking for an opening in the clouds but only found that the ship was not at the dock as shown in the photos. It was several hundred yards away, and this coupled with the cloud cover threw the run off; bombing was poor. Only the 64th dropped its load in the dock area but not near the tanker. The 403rd was about to drop when the lead bombardier's bombsight was hit by AA wounding the bombardier. All the other plane's bombs went astray. The 65th was all over the harbor. AA was heavy and accurate; 7 of the 18 planes were holed. The trip home was uneventful, but after landing all planes were tied down as a typhoon was possible. It did not arrive.

The 63rd did not get off this night as hoped. In fact, they made no start at all until August 4th. A typhoon threat kept them grounded.

Aug 2/4, 1945. There were no missions during this time until the night of the 3rd/4th due to the typhoon threat. Although the typhoon missed Ie Shima, the east coast of Okinawa had some very rough weather. Some local flying for maintenance checks, oil consumption, etc., did take place. For the most part the airplanes were worked on and crews tried to get more comfortable and scrounge up lumber, etc. Ie Shima was not a great place for scrounging as there were not many troops there. There were no big dumps as it was not a jumping off place for another move. Most of the troops were Army Air Force and AA, and all were short of engineering supplies. There were no big treasure caves as there were on Luzon where a hoarded bottle of gin could do wonders. Most of the equipment was unloaded on Okinawa as Ie Shima had difficult beaches on which to land and get bulk loads ashore.

On the night of the 3rd/4th the Sea Hawks roared out with 4 planes, all had radar trouble. Very chagrined, they returned at dawn with all 4 having lost their chances to take a big crack at enemy ships. One of these planes bombed Tarumizu Town with a column of smoke being the only result.

Aug 4/5, 1945. There was no daylight strike on the morning of the 4th.

This night three 63rd planes took off with an intent to really get at the enemy. Lt. Fugate, in #126, crossed into the Blind Bombing Zone and soon found 2 Fox Tare Charlies. One of these was sent to the bottom on the second run with a direct hit amidships. The second Fox Tare Charlie escaped when the B-24 had bomb rack failure. The remaining bombs had to be levered out. Lt. Redomon, in #984, found a 10,000 ton Tare Able and made a run that missed by 50' astern. On the second run his bombs hung up and 2 night fighters interfered. #984 then retreated to find the radar problem and to shake off the night fighters. An hour later they found the Tare Able and a naval escort at anchor. They made another run dropping 6 bombs, but the AA was fierce so they racked their plane

around to get out of the fire. The plane suffered 13 holes but no one was injured. After a half hour the ship had disappeared from the scope, so they revisited the area and claimed it as "probably sunk." So 3500 tons were added to the scoreboard. The third plane flying off the coast of Korea found nothing and dropped its bombs on Gunzan City. The crew was rewarded with a large explosion. The city lights stayed on even after the bombs were dropped.

Aug 5, 1945. V Bomber Command had discerned that the Japanese had an underground factory at a place named Tatumizu located on Kyushu. This small city was on a hillside, and the factory that made some kind of suicide weapons was dug into the hills. The target for the strike squadrons covered the area where the entrance was thought to be. Also, the bomb patterns would do the workers who lived in the environs no good. Fifteen planes made it off the ground after 3 changes of bomb load and much cursing by the armorers. The load was mixed demos and incendiaries with bombing to be from 12,500'. The target was easy to pick up as there was a big road that ran to it from a breakwater; also a hospital was well marked and avoided. Bombing was very good with fires and explosions giving the crews the certainty that this peaceful looking town was really an evil place. As the planes turned towards Ie Shima, they were delighted to see the smoke had risen to 13,000'. AA holed only 2 planes and these from a squadron that did not use RCM. The taxiways and hardstands on Birch Strip were a problem as parked planes would sink into the surface and would be difficult or impossible to move. Taxiways were slippery with mud, and there was a rash of ground accidents. One 65th plane chewed the tail turret off the 65th plane ahead of it; fortunately the gunner was not in his position. [Here is a confusion of dates according to this editor's, Jim Cherkauer's diary. Lt. Sullivan in #547 skidded that plane and chewed off the tail of #042. Number 4 engine on #547 was badly damaged. This took place on August 6, 1945. I was following them in #024 but lost a mag and did not get off that day. One more example of dates being confused due to the fact that Ie Shima and Japan proper were one day ahead of the time in the U.S.A. and records kept in this country would reflect America's dates and not Japanese dates. Col. Pettus in this manuscript relied quite heavily on official records kept here in the States.]

On August 5th Col. Pettus received an order to report to Gen. Whitehead personally rpt personally - there was no other explanation except a time. Having no transport other than a B-24, one was cranked up and he headed to Kadena to report to 5th Air Force Headquarters. There he was given another copy of the frag order for the 6th which had already been transmitted to 43rd Operations. Outside the General's office were several of the Colonel's colleagues - none of whom knew what the summons was about. Each was called into the office separately and was only asked by Gen. Whitehead if he had and understood the strike order for the 6th and told that under NO circumstances could there be any deviation from that order. If bombing was impossible, return via the same route up. NO TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY. The final instruction was that each Commanding Officer would personally rpt personally brief the crews before the mission. There was no small talk as was the general's usual manner - all business - the interview lasted less than a minute. One suggestion was that there had been problem with the Navy in regard to bomb lines, strikes not following given routes, etc., and of course, due to Kamikazes, ships were very concerned at any plane that seemed headed in their direction. Marine fighters had made passes at B-25s that were off course - no damage done. Still, it

was back to work and nobody had any idea of the real reason, which of course was the dropping of the atomic bomb on the 6th of August.

This night August 5th/6th the Sea Hawks sent out 4 planes to search for shipping. One of the newer pilots, Lt. Moore, in #694, crossed in the Blind Bombing Zone and spotted a 3500 ton Fox Tare Charlie. On the second run he made a direct hit and was rewarded with a terrific explosion that violently rocked the B-24. The Fox Tare Charlie disappeared from the scope and was claimed as sunk. One hour later, with their last 2 bombs, the bombardier Greenberg got a hit and/or a near miss on another Fox Tare Charlie. This ship was claimed as damaged. Plane #2, finding no ships, bombed Fusan Metal Plant with unobserved results. Plane #3 also bombed a land target at Hamada Town, dropping 8 X 500 pounders and getting a huge red flash and explosion in return. Plane #4 found some Fox Tare Dogs and a Fox Tare Charlie, but they bore charmed lives and escaped.

Aug 6, 1945. The target for this day's strike was Miyakonojo on Kyushu's eastern shore, about 180 miles south of Hiroshima. It was to be a major strike, one of the announced cities to be destroyed. Heavy, medium, light bombers and strafers were to take the city out. The 43rd bomb load was 12 X 500 lb. incendiaries; other groups would carry demos. The announcing of names of cities was part of the psych-war ops. Each day a number of cities were named for destruction, but how and when the attack would take place was left to the recipient to worry about. Sometimes it was not that day due to weather or the war of nerves. In this case, it was the weather and all planes beat it to their secondary -AND AS ORDERED, NO PLACE ELSE. The secondary was Kaoshima, but others had been there before KEN'S MEN. The whole city seemed to be on fire and smoke added to the clouds and undercast. An H2X run was made by the 16 planes that made it to the target. No evaluation was possible due to the undercast and smoke, but all units were credited with bombs in the city. Bombs were away at 1330. Unknown to all was that at 0815, before the 43rd had taken off at 0855, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. No announcement was made of the dropping of the A bomb for some 16 hours as President Truman was returning from the Potsdam Conference.

It was after midnight when news of the very powerful bomb having been dropped was received. However, since nobody knew what the bomb was, and the day's strikes were being readied, the news was greeted with some skepticism. The Sea Hawks were out sinking ships and there was work to be done - big bomb or no big bomb.

The water echelon arrived, but unloading was slow as beach space was limited and tides made it difficult. It was not until the 11th that all equipment was transported and in place. The sighting of the night before made the 63rd crews eager to get on the roster on the 6th/7th, and 4 planes went out this night. Each carried 3100 gallons of fuel and 8 X 500 lb. Torpex, or by the technical name, composition "B" bombs. Lt. Phillips, in #807, found 2 Fox Tare Charlies around the Tsu Shima Straits and sank one after several runs. The plane circled and the ship sank in about half an hour; 3500 tons added to the score. The second Fox Tare Charlie got away. Two other planes found no ships and hit the secondary land target at Kumamoto on Kyushu. Bombs were dropped in the center of the city with only 2 small fires resulting. The fourth B-24 tried for a Sugar Charlie Sugar but missed and attacked a reef. One night fighter paid this plane a visit and fired a rocket but did not score a hit.

Aug 7, 1945. The target for the strike squadrons was Kamikazes on the ground - the right place to destroy them. Nineteen planes made it to hit Tsuiki Drome on Kyushu. The load was 240 X 20 lb. frag clusters. Some 40 or 50 aircraft had been seen on the ground at this Drome but some may have been dummies. Several fires were started and 14 or 15 planes were either destroyed or damaged. AA was meager; only 2 planes were holed. Other bomb groups were hitting similar targets. One 403rd plane did not find his formation and tacked onto the 494th Group and bombed.

A near tragedy occurred on the beach unloading when a truck skipped back and rolled over one of the 43rd men. Medics and Doctor Austin were nearby, and he was quickly extracted from the mud and taken to the hospital where he was found to have no broken bones. He was plenty sore. KEN'S MEN are tough.

Four Sea Hawks were out again this night and into the next morning. Lt. Croft, in #126, found a Fox Tare Dog and made a direct hit on this run. The ship sank in 10 minutes. With only one bomb left, he searched on and found several merchant ships and damaged a Fox Tare Charlie with a near miss. One Fox Tate Dog and its 1000 tons went to the bottom and one Fox Tare Charlie of 3500 tons was damaged. A lone night fighter fired 4 rockets at this B-24 just after midnight. Plane #130 had LAB failure and proceeded to hit the Kushikino City, the secondary. The city lights were on so the target was easy to find. There was neither AA nor fires. The plane returned to base at 0645. Capt. Bancroft, in #128, found several ships and sank a Sugar Dog, 150 tons, and damaged a Sugar Charlie Love, 2300 tons, with 2 near misses. The fourth Sea Hawk returned early due to total radar malfunction.

Aug 8, 1945. The USA Drome was the target for the strike squadrons on the 8th. This is the city that used to manufacture "Made in USA" toys and other items to sell in the U.S. The weather was perfect for a change, and bombing was very good. There were numerous fires and a number of planes were destroyed or damaged on the ground. These aircraft were all potential Kamikazes. They were hidden along roads, were well camouflaged and yet might even be dummies. Fires were a good sign as the Japanese were known to be so short of fuel so they were unlikely to use it to allow a dummy to burn as a trick to appear to show destroyed planes. There was little AA although 2 planes were holed. Smoke was seen to 5000'. The 7th Air Force had visited the drome before the 43rd, and because of this smoke it was difficult to assess the damage done. The B-29s had been to Shimoneseki, only 5 miles from USA, and the smoke there rose to 20,000'.

This night, 8th/9th, the 63rd went back to the Tsu Shima Straits and the coast of Korea. One returned early due to radar out, but the other 3 continued their attacks on the enemy. A Fox Baker of 4000 tons was attacked and damaged. Several attacks by the bomber silenced the guns firing at the B-24, and a column of black smoke was seen rising from the ship. The crew did not see it sink, so 4000 tons went into the "damaged" column. The plane that went to the Yellow Sea found no ships and hit the rail yards at Jinsen, Korea. Bombs hit the yards, but no fires were observed.

The last plane found no ships and made an unproductive run on Kushinkino on Kyushu.

Aug 9, 1945. Aircraft on the ground at Iwakuni Drome and seaplane base located about 30 miles from Hiroshima were the targets this day. The bombing was good with the 64th doing the best of the 3 squadrons. Bombs were strung through areas where planes or dummies were parked, but there were no fires. From the patterns of the bursts, planes must have been damaged. Either due to the fuel shortage and not having any of the planes fueled to

make them less vulnerable or to the possibility that these were dummy planes no fires were seen. (The same prohibitions that applied to the missions on the 6th of August were in place that effected routes to and from targets, so no targets of opportunity were to be sought. If bombs happened to go out on the route back, that did not count.)

Flight crews showed interest regarding Kure near Hiroshima where the attack on the carrier had been made. Photos were taken from afar, but there was no mention of Hiroshima in the debriefs. The 65th reported smoke rising to 25,000' toward the west in the direction of Nagasaki. The second A bomb was dropped on Nagasaki at 1115 local time of August 9th. The announcement of this use of the A bomb was made later that afternoon. By now it was accepted that this bomb was really supernatural. There were no physicists of sufficient knowledge in the 43rd to explain it. The news releases did little to explain it or enlighten the average soldier. All understood that it was an awesome weapon that would shorten the war. As far as KEN'S MEN were concerned it was business as usual.

Four Sea Hawks were out again on the 9th/10th. The search area for 2 was the Tsu Shima Straits. The load was 12 X 500 lb. Torpex and 2700 gallons of fuel. For the other 2 going to the Sea of Japan and Korea, the load was the usual 3100 gallons of fuel and 6 X 500 lb. Torpex. One of these latter planes had a complete engine failure soon after takeoff and had to jettison the bombs and return to base. The other found no ships and strung it bombs through the Fusan Docks in Korea. No fires were sighted and the AA was slight.

The Tsu Shim Straits gang had better luck. Both found ships. Number 126 gave the Japanese a scary night, but it failed to connect despite dropping 12 bombs from many angles. In addition to the ships attacked, the crew sighted on the scope other ships. The crew was very chagrined, but would have to wait another 4 or 5 days for another crack at them.

Lt. Little, in #130, found a Sugar Charlie Love and began a systematic attack. The first run was a near miss, but fragments ignited something flammable on the stern of the ship. This fire was put out, but on the next go around they dropped 3 X 500 lb. and made 2 direct hits. The 2300 ton ship exploded and sank. Further search produced no more ships so they proceeded to the secondary, Makurasaki, on the southern tip of Kyushu. 7 X 500 lb. bombs were strung through the town, but no fires or explosions were observed.

Aug 10, 1945. Steps towards ending the war were being taken this day, but for KEN'S MEN it was another day of bombing the enemy. Before takeoff there was news that three million leaflets had been dropped on Japan telling the people what the future was if they did not surrender. During the day a message was sent to the Swedish and Swiss governments by the Japanese stating that the Imperial Government accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, and Japanese radio announced Japan's desire for peace.

From Birch strip on Ie Shima twenty-two 43rd heavies took off for Kumamoto on Kyushu for another big combined strike with the 7th AAF. As they approached the target at 12,000', it was apparent that the 7th had gotten up earlier than the 5th as the city was already in flames. Smoke obscured exact targets, so the leader decided to go to the secondary at Oita, some 65 miles to the northeast. Several planes, having set up for release, saw the target at Kumamoto and dropped. At Oita it was clear and the bomb run was made at 12,000'. The coverage was excellent. The load was incendiary clusters or 6 lb. bombs bundled to break apart 22 seconds after leaving the planes thus being spread over a considerable area. Many fires resulted and smoke billowed upwards s the

formation headed south. The AA was moderate to heavy and 7 planes were holed but with no injuries.

The night of the 10/11th six Sea Hawks went out on missions. One was an unarmed weather recco that went to northern Luzon and the Pacific Ocean. Three planes were sent to the Sea of Japan and Korea. These hunters found no ships and hit the docks and rail yards at Fusan, Korea. Two medium fires were started and several explosions were seen later. AA holed one of the B-24s. Several night fighters were about with one firing 3 rockets. Searchlights were active and held one bomber for 3 minutes.

Two planes went to the Inland Sea and found ships. These crews also had land targets, but small shipping was plentiful. Lt. Wilson and crew were on their last mission, but they were not able to add to a very fine record. They attacked 2 ships and made the crew of a Sugar Charlie Sugar grey-haired with near misses. Lt. Canovari found 2 ships and worried them until a Sugar Charlie Sugar of 500 tons was finally sunk after his crew repeatedly missed the larger of the 2 vessels. Both crews were not pleased with their night's work.

Aug 11, 1945. While negotiations for the ending of hostilities were going on the only results seen by the fighting forces was the announced suspension of B-29 raids as of the 11th. Far East Air Forces would continue operations until the terms of surrender were fully accepted.

Again the 7th AAF seemed to have been out earlier than the 5th as the target at Kurume was already in flames when the 43rd arrived. The secondary at Miyazaki was also alight. It seemed that cities all over Kyushu were on fire. The 64th and 403rd bombed Yamakawa Town resulting in smoke rising to 10,000'. The 65th hit Isusuki Town nearby. All are small cities on Kagoshima Bay. As usual the load was incendiaries and the altitude was 11,000'. Meager AA and fighter cover were everywhere.

On the night of the 11th/12th the frag order was the same. Two Sea Hawks went to the Sea of Japan and another 2 headed to the Tsu Shima Straits. One plane on the Sea of Japan circuit before finding the target returned due to mechanical problems. The companion plane had to settle for the docks and yards at Fusan, Korea. The 8 X 500 lb. bombs were dropped but only bomb flashes were sighted.

Lt. William Croft, whose crew had one of the best records in the 63rd, went to the blind bombing zone. A Fox Tare Charlie was attacked, but was missed so the crew pulled off the target to check the radar calibrations. As they did so they picked up several radar sightings - one very large. Wisely deciding that any vessel that large would be heavily defended, they made the first pass a bomb run. A flare lighted up a heavy cruiser of the Nachi Class (14,000 tons) and a destroyer. The bombs hit between the two missing the DD by only 50' but the cruiser by more. Throwing caution to the wind and having no real AA on the first run, another attack was made and both ships came alive with AA that fortunately was inaccurate. Two 500 pounders were laid within 10' along side the cruiser and the ship came to a stop. Croft remained out of range of the AA, that was still being fired, presumably to tell them to stay away, but the cruiser did not move. Leaving the cruiser, they found a Fox Tare Dog and dispatched it to the bottom with two 500 lb. bombs. Add 1000 tons more to the score. There were still 2 bombs in the racks. A Sugar Charlie Sugar was found and after several passes, the bombs straddled it. A few minutes later the stern was awash. They claimed the ship sunk and another 500 tons went to the bottom.

The squadron C.O. Butts took out a pilotless crew for its first mission. The new crew was nervous enough, but to have the C.O. in the left seat made them all sweat. They did not have long to wait as a Sugar Baker Sugar with 2 small ships were found. The new bombardier took a deep breath and prepared to drop his first 3 bombs in anger. He made a direct hit on a 2000 ton tanker sending up a great cloud of black smoke. The ship sank within 10 minutes before the anxious eyes of an eager bomber crew. They were not through yet and soon polished off a Sugar Dog adding another 150 tons for the record books. Nearing the end of their search mission they spotted and attacked two 1100 ton Sugar Able Sugars with their last 3 bombs and scored a very near miss or a hit on one. Due to AA from the ship and from the shore, they could not stay around any longer, so the ship was only claimed as "damaged." The new bombardier had done himself proud.

Aug 12, 1945. Despite rumors and word from people who were supposed to be in the know, there had been not a word from Tokyo. Many ears were glued to every radio while the ops section watched the teletypes for news or cancellations of the strike this day. No word came - so Japan was to receive its daily ration of 7000 tons of bombs. KEN'S MEN loaded the planes with 260 lb. frag clusters.

Aircraft on the ground at Matsuyama Drome were the objective. Twenty planes took to the air on this mission that many felt would be the last of the war. Smoke and haze made the target a little difficult to pick up, but bombing was good with about 85% in the target; fires were started that could well have been planes burning. AA was sporadic holing 3 planes and slightly wounding one 65th gunner. (Pettus can't find the man's name. He could be the last casualty in the 43rd. The 65th records say, "One nose gunner being grazed by a fragment tearing through 2 pairs of gloves on his hands.") Some planes made second runs due to smoke. All squadrons were careful getting back to Ie Shima to avoid known AA positions. There was no sightseeing, but the crews did get a look at Nagasaki. About all they could see was smoke and haze. It was forbidden to go within 20 miles of the stricken city.

There was no stand down yet, so 4 of the black Sea Hawks took to the air on the 12th/13th. Two went to the Sea of Japan, that had been a poor hunting area, but this night proved to be different. The first plane, piloted by F/O Stebbins, found a Tare Two Stacker and a DE. He dropped 4 bombs on 3 runs and got one near miss on the bow. The ship was stationary when first attacked and seemed to have its back broken. It appeared to be fully afloat on the first run, but within half an hour the forward hatches were awash. The ship of 5500 tons was claimed as sunk. The crew now turned to deal with the DE that was throwing up inaccurate but very worrying flak. The DE took violent evasive maneuvers and all bombs missed by a wide margin. Another DE joined the fray with its AA. This proved to be too plentiful and Stebbins pulled away. At this time the operator had radar problems so they returned to base with the recco not quite 100% completed.

In the other plane Capt. Bancroft put 4 bombs on a reef. Then finding no shipping he bombed the docks at Fusan with no observable results.

The other two Sea Hawks went to the Tsu Shima Straits. As soon as they arrived at the blind bombing zone, they found targets, but the haze made visuals difficult. Two patrol craft dodged 2 X 500 pounders from Lt. Hovland and crew in #812. These ships were hard to hit as they were very maneuverable. Looking for bigger game they found a Fox Tare Charlie at 0230 hours and dropped 3 X 500 lb. bombs scoring 2 hits near the stern. The ship rolled on its side emitting white smoke or steam and sank in a few minutes. The rest of the patrol produced no good targets, but the crew was happy with a 3500 ton Fox

Tare Charlie. The second plane to the area was #130, piloted by Lt. Seaman, and at 0005 he picked up a Fox Tare Baker, 6500 tons, making 3-4 knots and heading westerly. On the first run the 3 bombs dropped were near misses, but on the second try 2 bombs made direct hits on the stern. As #130 circled they saw lifeboats and survivors in the water. The next target was a Tare Two Stack, but it was missed and got away. Due to sea scatter on radar, they did not look further for the Two Stack and went back to see what had happened to the Fox Tare Baker. They then found a Fox Tare Dog that was probably looking for survivors from the destroyed ship and dropped 2 X 500 pounders towards the ship. They spun it around but did not sink it, so it was only claimed as "damaged." With only 3 bombs left they continued to look for another target, realizing this was probably the last chance they would get in the war, and found a Sugar Able Item and a smaller ship going north at 7 knots. The larger ship put up a screen of flak holing #130, but it dropped its remaining 3 bombs. One made a direct hit aft on the ship. The ship blew up creating secondary explosions with such force as to break windows in #130. The crew suffered no injuries and continued to circle the wreckage as the ship split in two and sank. Green distress flares were fired from the floating debris. Out of bombs and content with their work, the crew headed for home and landed at 0620. The bombardier, Lt. Bergh, received congratulations from all.

It turned out that the strike on Sunday the 12th would be the last armed mission of the war for the daytime strike squadrons. Preparations had been made for a strike on the 13th, but they were canceled the night of the 12th.

Aug 13th/14th. The Sea Hawks did not have orders to stand down, so they were active this night. Three Sea Hawks flew what was to be the last offensive action of the 43rd B.G. These crews were eager to get ships and to reach the magic one million ton mark for ships sunk, probably sunk and damaged. Two of the hunters carried 12 X 500 lb. Torpex and 2700 gallons of fuel while the third headed towards Korea carried 9 X 500 lb. bombs and 3100 gallons of fuel. After 2 hours the plane with the shortest recco had to turn back due to a gas leak. They jettisoned their 12 X 500 lb. load safely. Lt. Fugate, at the controls of #025, with Lt. Fletcher over the bombsight, soon found a Sugar Dog and missed him with 2 bombs. Spending 2 hours looking for bigger game they picked up a small convoy with a Sugar Able Item being the largest of the vessels. After missing on the first 2 bomb runs, they hit on the third blowing up the ship with such force that the waist windows in the black B-24 were shattered. The ship was undoubtedly carrying ammunition that kept exploding for the next 5 minutes. The ship soon sank more a victim of its own cargo than the bombs that had hit it. Another 5000 tons were now added to the total score. They dropped their last bombs on a convoy lugger that had hung around to see if there were survivors, but they missed and continued on their recco although unarmed. They would of course report any major ship in their search area. The last plane out was a new crew on its first mission. Great credit must be given to that old master, Major Butts, for not flying what was known to probably be the last mission of the war. As a good C.O. he allowed the crew, whose place on the roster had come up, to fly the mission. They acquitted themselves like veterans. 2/Lt. P.B. Cressor and the bombardier, 2/Lt. Voda, along with their comrades, joined a long list of gallant men who had gone into combat with the 63rd B.S. The area assigned to Cressor, flying in #969, was off the coast of Korea, not the most fruitful of reccos. After doing his rounds for over 2 hours, he headed NE towards Tsu Shima Straits. Here at 0210 he found a Fox Baker under way at 10 knots, and he made 2 runs on the ship. On the second, a diagonal

run, he dropped 3 bombs and a sheet of flames erupted, probably from ruptured fuel tanks. It sank within 15 minutes sending 4000 tons to the bottom on their first encounter. With 3 bombs left and the proscribed course not completed, they searched on, and at 0230 they found another Fox Baker. An attack with their last 3 lethal weapons scored a hit amidships. Fire followed and as the B-24 circled and watched a large explosion shook the vessel and it listed 20 degrees. Within 15 minutes it joined its sister in the deep. This ship had put up a defense and #969 was holed in the tail. Two night fighters poked around blinking their lights and came within 100 yards or so of the B-24 without firing. The B-24 remained silent, looked for a cloud and returned safely to Birch Strip landing at 0700. This was the last of KEN'S MENS combat operations.

Aug 14, 1945. The strike squadrons were again standing down, but there had been no declaration of a cessation of hostilities. Some Far East Air Forces were carrying out limited reccos. The 43rd was on alert and ready to resume operations at a moment's notice. On August 15th the Japanese Emperor read his statement of surrender over the radio to the Japanese people, and on that same day President Truman ordered all hostilities to cease ... **PANDAMONIUM THEN HIT OKINAWA AND ALL ISLANDS.** Word came in before noon on the 15th that it was over, and Col. Pettus called in all the staff and squadron commanders. He announced that what must be avoided at all costs was men getting killed and injured while celebrating and ordered that **ALL WEAPONS IN THE HANDS OF INDIVIDUALS WOULD BE COLLECTED. IF ANY MAN FIRED A SHOT, HE WOULD BE COURT MARSHALLED BY A GENERAL COURT IMMEDIATELY.** The Colonel was not sure if he had this authority (and probably did not), but he sure made everybody think that he did. He said he did not care what they did, how drunk they got, even if they burned the latrines down, but no guns and that was that. Most of the weapons were collected by nightfall and though there was plenty of celebrating, there was no shooting. On Okinawa 6 men were killed and 30 wounded by gunshot and falling fragments. [This order did not reach some of those in the 65th Squadron, including this editor Jim Cherkauer, but no guns were fired in our area as far as he knows.]

Thus ends the manuscript of Col. James Pettus and edited by Jim Cherkauer.