

June 1, 1943 the --- 58th Very Heavy Bombardment Wing--- was activated. On August 20th it issued instructions to the 40th Bomb Group to transfer its 25th and 395th Squadrons, plus necessary headquarters personnel to the, then brand new, 462nd Bomb Group (VH). By September first this new group, under the command of Colonel Richard H. Carmichael, was ready to start training for combat. Then followed long months of training in B-26 and B-17 type aircraft at Walker, Kansas.

During January, 1944, maintenance and Air Service Groups were assembled and shipped to India. The first Hellbird sat down in India on April 15th and transfer of our air echelon was complete by the 15th of May. Our Hellbird airdrome at Piaradoba buzzed with activity and less than a month after completion of the air movement, the sky was filled with roaring B-29's, off for a shakedown mission to the Marshaling yards of Bangkok, Thailand.

Thousands of Chinese laborers made ready the advanced Hellbird base at Kuiang Lai, China in the Chengtu Valley. Rocks were broken by hand; earth was moved in wicker baskets and runways were packed by giant stone rollers pulled by hundreds of coolies.

Back at Piaradoba, Superforts were converted to "tankers" to haul gasoline and materials to Kuiang Lai. We Hellbirds have two records here again: Lt. Thomas transported more than 4100 gallons over the "Hump" in a converted B-29 (tanker); Captain (now Major) Karl L. Briel holds the record of 3285 gallons hauled in a combat type B-29. An average of twelve trips across the Himalayas were required to carry enough gasoline and supplies for one "Dreamboat" to visit Nippon.

First Bombs to fall on the "sacred" Japanese Homelands, since the Doolittle raid of April 18, 1942, were from B-29's of our Hellbird Group and other members of the 58th Wing as they attacked the Yawata Steel Works on June 15, 1944. Our 462nd suffered the loss of Colonel Richard Carmichael on the first daylight raid on Yawata, August 20, 1944, advancing Colonel Alfred F. Kalberer from Deputy Group Commander to his present position as Chief Hellbird. This raid of August 20th, brought us our first Unit citation. In the months that followed, Hellbird bomb bays opened and emptied over Manchuria, Kyushu, Burma, Formosa, Sumatra and Korea. Singapore, in the record-breaking flight of November 5, 1944 took the 29's of our Hellbird group on a jaunt of approximately 4000 miles.

One mission in every ten days limited the effectiveness of our attacks against Japan, but it proved valuable in "ironing out" the operations of this largest of bombers. Crews gained confidence as they saw their aerial dreadnaughts wade through skies full of Japanese fighters again and again.

In August, 1944, Major General Curtis E. LeMay, of the 8th Air Force took the 58th Wing in India and began his streamlining and preparations for the 800 plane raids in which we participated from Tinian. Training missions, ground school, and combat critiques improved the technique of crews striking Japan.

Previous practices of one group per airdrome, as had been the case in India, were abandoned. For the purpose of expediting service, whole wings and supporting organizations of maintenance were concentrated on one airdrome, eliminating time-consuming Army channels. This put above 12,000 men and over 190 aircraft at the immediate disposal of Wing Commanders. May, 1945, saw the completion of the movement of our 462nd from India to Tinian, the largest air movement to date and completed without incident to any Hellbird personnel.

Old Man Weather gave the 21st Bomber Command another headache. 200 Knot winds drove B-29's across Japan at speeds up to 500 miles per hour, greatly reducing bombing accuracy. Operational troubles caused over half the losses suffered by the groups. Because of adverse weather conditions and mechanical failures, planes were running out of fuel on their return trips and cripples were sitting ducks for Japanese fighters based on Iwo Jima. General LeMay decided to pull his "monsters" down to lower altitudes in night raids against urban areas, thus saving engines and using weight saved in gasoline for larger bomb loads. His gamble, of sending his entire aerial strength into the teeth of the best Japanese defenses worked, and the major industrial cities of Japan were wiped from the lists of "priority" targets. Cities of paper and wood stood one day only to be burned the next. Railheads such as Takamatsu, ports like Kobe and Osaka all were leveled to the brick red ash which seemed to say "the Hellbirds have been here". The element of weather, although it would make trips to the Empire a bit rough at times, would drive the flames across cities with such force as to make attempts to fight the blaze impossible.

The Japanese jammed the ether, from their high-powered propaganda station in Tokyo, with lengthy tirades against the American Air Forces for dropping bombs on "innocent women and children". For the planes of the 20th Air Force to drop on the urban areas of these Nip cities was for them to be dropping on the industry of Japan. The ruins of these residential districts after the war was strewn with evidence of Japanese home industry. Many of our own aircrews, for a time, questioned whether it was right for us, with our criticism of brutality, to fly missions to the "Urban Area" of first one city and then another. Any questioning of these tactics were lost when on July 27, 1945, General LeMay started his "Fair Warning System". Grumbings were heard all over the Hellbird Area as loudspeakers on the PX and the enlisted men's mess hall blared forth with Uwa Jima, Ogaki, Iohinomiya, and others including Aomori. "Aomori? That's our target, wot the hell they goin' to do, give 'em airspeed and altitude, too?"

Aomori was a credit to the Hellbirds, it was the longest combat mission flown by the group from their Tinian base, (staging from Iwo) crews returning from the raid reported smoke clouds up to an altitude of 22,000 feet and fire visible over 150 miles from the target.

From Aomori on, the raids against the Nips went virtually unopposed. An exception was the raid against Hachioji on August 1st. The Hellbirds lost one aircraft and crew (later found in a POW camp). Then followed the days of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No - we didn't drop those two, but they were from 29's! Remember the Hellbirds on the night of August 11th?

Funny thing someone didn't get killed in the fracas in the S-2 Quonset. We spent three days on alert for the raid against Hikari Naval Arsenal. The target was on our briefing hall board for 4 days. On the 14th, we ran that raid - Colonel "Kal" was in the lead plane of our group. We all had our ears glued to the phones just waiting for the code word "Utah", which would mean the end of the war. We didn't hear it. At "Bombs Away" you could hear Colonel "Kal" say, "There they go, Boys," ending the Hellbirds part in the air war against Japan.

If combat had been half as nerve wracking as the period just following the Japanese Surrender, it is doubtful that we Hellbirds would have made as good a record as we did. All kinds of orders were given, then counter-orders until the Hellbirds didn't know a thing about when they'd get home. Morale would be at it's peak in the forenoon and then shattered by the news of evening. All uncertainty ended, when around October 3rd we were alerted for return to the States. "Hi-point" men from the other groups replaced bombardiers and gunners on the crews. All went smoothly, and the evening of October 5th our first large group was to take off for the States.

October 5th, we were ready to come home. What happens? Oh, nothing much, just a Pacific typhoon. At the crack of dawn that Hellbird area looked like a small-sized atomic bomb had hit it. All tents and some Quonsets were down, and every one of us had our clothes so soaked we thought we were swimming all the time. As the 462nd meets every emergency, it met this one. Bomber Command delayed departure twenty-four hours, our operations had the ships checked and the first Hellbird in our movement home left runway "Able" and staggered across the Marines' Camp for the last time on the evening of October 6th.

Now the 462nd Bomb Group is "Stateside". We've had our 45 day "fling" at home and now we're standing by at MacDill Field, Florida. There are the old faces you know overseas and plenty of new ones too. The old spirit is still here, the motto still stands "With Malice Toward Some" for any man or country with designs on our right to gripe or strike.

We expect to remain here at MacDill until July 1st at least; we've been "atomized" and will be associated with "Operations Crossroads" scheduled for May. By this fall we should have our strength and assume an active part in the post war Air Force.

Colonel "Kal" is still our CO, and says he "intends remaining a Hellbird until the Air Force and the world becomes more stable".

We've received two more Unit Citations, Hellbird, so we're sending you copies of the orders.

It looks as if we HELLBIRDS are going to have some interesting experiences ahead of us in the next few years, somewhat like those we have been reading about here in the War Book, except we won't be getting shot at anymore; not legally anyway. Washington says our overseas duty is over for several years, and we will remain stateside. That sounds good to us. For a change we will be setting up housekeeping in a place that is already established and have permanent living quarters. Under the new peace time set up, we will be able to take our families with us, no matter where we go. At times this peacetime Air Corps seems like a dream and we expect to wake up and find ourselves back at A-5 in the middle of a Tinian Typhoon. And to think we are getting that good old green stuff for this.

Maybe some of you old HELLBIRDS still have that army spirit at heart and would like to get back into your old outfit. Quite a few of the old gang have come back and we are always mighty glad to see them and talk about old times. Colonel Kalberer has been able to get everyone who wants to come, back into the HELLBIRD Group.

Just in case you are interested here is the present set up. You can reenlist at your rating the time of your separation, that is, if you don't wait more than 90 days. Besides that you will get a 30-90 day furlough before reporting to duty. If you just can't make up your mind what to do and things look a little rough in the "outside world", there's a provision to take care of that too. Enlistments of 1½, 2 or 3 years are offered, a short term enlistment gives you time to think things over a little more. No matter how long you stay in the Army you still have all the benefits of the GI Bill of Rights and when you get out the Government will pay your way through one year of college for each year you have served in the Army.

Some of us HELLBIRDS already have so much time in the service we have decided to stay with it for a few more years and finish out the 20 needed for retirement. That's half pay for life after 20 years service which isn't hard to take. Thirty years service really sets you up in the chips though with three-quarters pay for life. Who wouldn't be a master sergeant after 30 years! Let's see -- that would be \$155.25 a month for life.

Think it over and if you decide you would like to get back in the outfit drop use line here at HELLBIRD Headquarters, MacDill Field, Tampa, Florida. We will be glad to welcome you back to the flock.