

22d Bomb Group



In February 1944 the 22nd was designated Bombardment Group (Heavy) and was assigned to fly B-24 Liberators, the aircraft selected for use in the Pacific for its excellent long range capabilities. The B-24 could fly farther and deliver a heavier bomb load faster than her sister heavy, the much publicized B-17 Fortress. Dubbed by its detractors a flying coffin, the tally at war's end indicated that the Liberator had had a lower loss rate than the Fortress. The 19th and 33rd Squadrons received their transition training at Charters Tower, Australia. After their return, the 2nd and 408 trained in New Guinea.

While still involved in the transition, the Group's commanding officer, Col. Richard W. Robinson received this message, dated 19 March 1944, from Brig. Gen. Jarred V. Crabb, commander of the Fifth Bomber Command:

I wish to congratulate you, your officers, and men for superior performance today. The manner in which you serviced and reloaded your airplanes for a second strike this date, even though your orders were received just as your planes were landing from the first mission, indicates a high degree of training within your unit. We can all feel justly proud of the organization which can perform as you did.

Please express to your ground personnel my special appreciation for their demonstration of remarkable organization and efficiency of operation. Your air crews also deserve highest commendation for their efficient operation and display of fine discipline which is so necessary when called upon for an emergency mission.

Signed: Crabb COMBOMCOM FIVE

Once the Group was in full operation again, the B-24s were used against Japanese installations, oil refineries, and airfields in Borneo, Ceram, Halmahera and, in September, began neutralizing enemy bases in the Philippines. From the Schouten Islands the outstanding targets for the 22nd were the oil refineries at Balikpapan, a nominal 17 1/2 hour, 2610 mile mission. From December 1944 to August 1945, The **Red Raiders** struck air fields and installations on Luzon, supported Australian ground forces on Borneo, bombed shipping, airfields, railroads and installations in China and Formosa. The 22nd Bomb Group was the only bombardment group in the entire United States Air Force to fly the B-26s, the B-25s and the B-24s successively in combat.



One of the best four-engine heavy bombers, this plane is powered by 1200 hp. Pratt and Whitney radial engines. It mounts guns in turrets in the nose, on top of the fuselage, in the belly, and in the tail, and can carry a bomb load of 7500 lbs. more than 3000 miles. Armament consists of from 8 to 14 .50 calibre machine guns.

- Wings are shoulder-high, slender, and tapered to small round tips.
- Engines are underslung beneath wings, and set in a straight ' line.
- Fuselage is deep and flat-sided. Landing gear is

tricycle type with single retractable wheel forward and main landing wheels retracting into win-9 wells.

- Tail is compound with large oval fins and rudders.

Specifications: Span I 10 ft.; length 66 ft. 4 in.; height 17 ft. II in.; gross weight over 56,000 lb.; maximum speed over 300 m.p.h.; cruising range over 4000L mi.

EXTREMELY LONG SLENDER WINGS. PROTRUDING REAR TURRET. TWIN OVAL FINS AND RUDDERS. STUBBY FUSELAGE. Illustration and specifications from

AERONAUTICS AIRCRAFT SPOTTERS HANDBOOK (1943)

RED RAIDERS in the Battle of Leyte Gulf

The date was 26 October 1944, the place a newly established beach head on Leyte in the Philippines. At 1000 hours, following a tremendous bombardment since day break by Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. Admiral Daniel Barbey's VII Amphibious Force had simultaneously landed four United States divisions. General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the southwest Pacific forces, watched the action from the bridge of the cruiser Nashville. At 1300 hours, with fighting still raging, he ruined the sharp crease in his khakis as, sans a protective helmet, he waded ashore, fulfilling a promise he had made to the Philippine people two years, seven months and 28 days earlier.

At sea, the massive fleets of the United States and Japan were preparing to engage each other. Shortly after midnight on 23 October, U.S. submarines Darter and Dace, reported sighting one of the enemy fleets, then promptly torpedoed the heavy cruisers Atigo, Maya and Takao, sinking the first two and damaging the latter. The battle was joined. The Battle of Leyte, acclaimed by historians the greatest naval battle of

all time, ended four days later. Enemy vessels destroyed numbered one large aircraft carrier, three light carriers, three battleships, six heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and eleven destroyers. U.S. losses were three small carriers, two destroyers, and one destroyer escort.

Omitted from most accounts is mention of the part played by land based aircraft of the Far East Air Forces, notably bombers from the 5th and 13th Air Forces based on Owi, Biak and Noemfoor. At day-break on the 26th, two B-24 s of the 13th AF night-flying Snoopers, reported sighting 15 enemy warships. Waiting for just such a message, Liberators of the 5th and 307th Groups in the 13th AF and the 22nd, 43rd, and 90th Groups in the 5th AF. FEAF reported that attacks were made on two battleships, five carriers and five destroyers west of Panay Island.. Hits were claimed on a battleship and two carriers.

The strike earned each of the bombardiers and pilots of the two Liberators a Distinguished Flying Cross. Rest of the crew were each awarded an Air medal. North of Dalipan, Mindanao, 22nd BG crews spotted what they identified as two cruisers of the Kuna- Natori class and a destroyer of the Shigura class in the target area. All were engaged in vigorous evasive action. It was not exactly a target that heavy bombers were designed for. The 33rd Sqd's flight of three bombers, each carrying 2 x 1000 and 1 x 500 pound demolition bombs, zeroed in on a light cruiser which was identified later as the Abukuma. Two days earlier, at 0325 hours, she had taken a torpedo from a PT boat. After undergoing temporary repairs at Dalipan, she was retiring from battle. At 1012 hours, 1st Lt. Carmine J. Coppola, bombardier in the lead plane, #M366 piloted by 1st Lt. Ulich Bell Jr., released his messages to Tojo. On his left, 1st Lt. Edwin M. Cummings Jr., the bombardier of aircraft #M402 piloted by 1st Lt. Bernard F. Alubowicz, followed suit. Three direct hits and a number of near misses took out the anti aircraft guns and caused the cruiser's four

torpedoes to explode and tear out the midsection. Photos taken a few minutes later by 319th and 400th Sqds of the 90th BG, show the warship exploding and sinking. A Japanese source indicates that the Abukuma sank 37 nautical miles off Dapitan at 1242 hours, taking 250 crewmen down with her. 283 were picked up the Japanese destroyer Shio.

In part, Lt. Bell's citation reads: "Despite the thoroughly alerted anti-aircraft defense and strong evasive action taken by the enemy ships during the attack and in the face of strong enemy firepower which was probable and expected, Lt. Bell exhibited a professional skill and an inspiring leadership which contributed materially to a decisive defeat of the enemy in that engagement. His extraordinary achievement and sound judgement is in keeping with the finest traditions of the service."