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A BOMBING MISSION

By

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Composition and Literature I

OUTLINE

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During World War II many people in the United States read accounts of the bombing of enemy cities and installations. Few of them realized what a bombing mission involved. From personal experience I shall explain in detail a combat mission made by heavy bomber crews.

A combat crew consists of four officers: the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, and bombardier, and six enlisted men: the engineer, radio operator, nose gunner, top gunner, ball gunner, and tail gunner. The pilot is in charge of the crew and performs the task of flying the airplane. The co-pilot is second in command and assists the pilot with the flying. The duties of the navigator concern proper routes, location of plane, flying time, and weather conditions. The bombardier operates the bombsight which releases the bombs on the target. The engineer is the mechanic of the plane while it is in the air. He is responsible for the plane's mechanical functioning. The duty of the radio operator consists of carrying on communication from the plane to the headquarters. The four gunners operate gun turrets from their respective positions and protect the plane in case enemy fighter planes attack. Although each member of the combat crew has his particular assignment when in flight, these various duties are so correlated that the ten members function as a team.

A combat mission begins at the time flying crews are awakened. The time at which they are awakened depends upon the length of the mission. It is the duty of the charge of quarters to see that all

men flying on the mission are informed of the briefing time. One member of each crew is required to sign a wake-up slip; it then becomes his duty to see that his crew members are on time to all schedules.

Since breakfast is the only meal that the crew members will get for eight or nine hours, it is a very important meal. It usually consists of fresh eggs, bacon, grapefruit juice, and a cooked cereal.

Briefing is the most important preparation in flying a combat mission. It is the only source of information that the men have to fly the mission. While in the briefing room, the men are on edge and a little nervous. A large map, concealed with a curtain, covers the front wall of the briefing room. The briefing officer pulls the curtain, which concealed the map, and all the men become intensely quiet. The target is then quite obvious--routes to and from the target are marked with a black line. The officer in charge then begins briefing. He stresses the importance of the target and exactly what type it is. He gives the location of target, the time of arrival at home base, and any information he considers important to the men. This information is explained thoroughly and all questions are answered. The security officer then explains the importance of not speaking of the target or anything in regard to it. The engineering officer explains the operation of new equipment, and he explains how to repair it if it should go out of order. The radio operators receive the special codes to be used and instructions concerning their special assignments. The weather conditions are announced. This includes temperature, wind velocity, cloud formations, and any other information relative to the weather.

Divide words only be these syllables

Briefing is climaxed by the chaplain saying a prayer and wishing the men luck and a safe return. Since each individual's safety and the success of the mission depends on the information received in the briefing room, the importance of this phase of the mission can not be exaggerated.

The clothing and equipment that the men wear on their persons are very important. Their clothes are made for warmth in high altitudes where the temperature is approximately forty degrees below zero. Each man wears a suit of woolen underwear, a woolen uniform, an electrically-heated suit, and wool-lined trousers, jacket, and boots. Their personal equipment consists of a parachute and harness, a pistol, an escape kit, and a pair of G.I. shoes. Their parachute and harness are worn on the outside of their clothing. The parachute and harness are worn throughout the mission as a safety precaution. The pistol is carried in a shoulder holster which hangs under the right arm. The escape kit is carried in a knee pocket located on the outside of the wool-lined trousers. It contains forty-eight dollars, maps, vitamin tablets, a small compass, medical supplies, and a small American flag. The contents of the escape kit are kept available in case the crew members are forced to bail out. The pair of G.I. shoes are attached to the parachute harness. They provide the men with something to wear if they are forced to bail out. Most of the men carry some article of their own which they consider as part of their equipment. However, it is not regulation equipment. These articles usually include their girls' pictures, a small Bible, or even a rabbit's foot.

Combine these thoughts

Preflighting is the next phase in the preparations for a

mission. Preflighting means the checking and rechecking of all equipment to make certain that it is in top operating condition. The parachute is preflighted to make certain that it is packed correctly and that it is not torn. The pistol is preflighted to make certain that it is in perfect working condition. The men realize that their lives depend on their equipment and that the small details which seem superfluous may mean life or death.

After all equipment is preflighted and all information concerning the mission is thoroughly understood, the men are then ready for departure. The planes are taxied to one end of the runway, and the plane which is to lead the formation takes off first. It is followed by the others at one minute intervals and in respect to the position they are to fly in the formation. The planes meet at a designated point, form a formation, and begin the climb for altitude. At the altitude of ten thousand feet the men put on their oxygen masks. The formation, still climbing for altitude, starts on the proper route designated to reach the target. Within a few hours the planes are near enemy territory. The gunners test their guns by firing a few rounds. At this point the men become more tense, and the alert for enemy fighter planes becomes more thorough. It seems, as the target becomes closer, the men are more alert, more tense, and more quiet. Over the interphone one can hear the pilot and navigator discussing the route, time of arrival at target, air speed, and the like. Everyone listens, holding his breath and hoping everything is all right.

The crew members of each plane are informed when to put on their flak suits. This is done when they are approximately thirty minutes away from the target. The members of the crew help each

other to put on their flak suits and helmets. The men seem to become more and more tense as they listen on the interphone for the pilot to make the announcement, "Bomb run started." The engineer opens the bomb-bay doors, the bombardier crouches over his bomb sight, and the pilot holds the plane as steady as possible. Flak seems to fill the sky and one can feel the plane vibrate when the explosions are near. A person isn't afraid, but he becomes very tense. His flak suit just doesn't seem large enough.

It seems like ages, but at last "bombs away" is heard over the interphone. As the bombs leave the plane, the plane makes an upward lurch. The planes break formation and start dodging flak. The men are hoping that the pilot will take them out of the flak area quickly. After the planes are clear of the flak area, they resume their positions in the formation. The co-pilot immediately calls each man of the crew to determine whether or not anyone has been injured and whether or not the plane has been damaged. If anyone is injured first-aid is administered immediately. Any damage to the plane is repaired in the best possible manner.

While the flight is still over enemy territory no one relaxes. The alert for enemy fighter planes is continued until the planes leave enemy territory. The formation starts descending, and the remaining flight home is flown at an altitude of eight or nine thousand feet. During the latter part of the flight everyone relaxes as much as possible. The men take off their oxygen masks, light cigarettes, and start sweating out the gas supply.

When the formation reaches the field all planes with wounded aboard are given priority to land first. They are followed by planes in distress; the remaining planes in the formation land according to their positions in the formation. An ambulance is

always present at the runway to be used in case some plane is forced to make a belly landing, or to remove the wounded to a hospital.

The planes are taxied to their hardstands and the men jump out happily. The engineering crews immediately start servicing the planes. They also check the planes for any damages which may have occurred. Armament crews clean the guns and start loading the planes with bombs for the next mission.

The combat crews put their flying equipment and clothes away and then hasten to interrogation. A Red Cross girl is waiting to give them coffee and doughnuts. The men explain the results of the mission to an officer of the intelligence service. The following information is furnished to him: whether or not the target was hit, the number of enemy fighter planes seen, the intensity of the flak, the condition of plane and equipment, the weather conditions, personnel wounded, and everything that was observed. The information received from the different crews is combined, and all conclusions are made on a percentage basis. This information keeps the intelligence service informed of the latest activities of the enemy. The interrogation process takes approximately thirty minutes. During this time the mission is discussed quite thoroughly.

After interrogation the men dash to the mess hall and eat anything available. Everyone discusses the mission--some with laughter and others with seriousness. After they finish eating, they go to their quarters to relax or write letters. Since their letters are censored they can not write any details of the mission. However, they are permitted to write that they flew a mission and the number of missions that they must complete to finish their tour of duty.

After writing a few letters most of the men go to the dispensary for the two short drinks of American whiskey which are allotted to them for the completion of each combat mission. When this has been done they return to their quarters and go to bed with the feeling of having accomplished a task that was worthwhile.