

MOS 1091 – Pilot: 1LT Guy W Shine

I read in the Spring, 2012 Newsletter about the B-29 that toured Australia, “The City of Patterson” that had been re-named, “Waltzing With Matilda”, that was identified by Stephen Smisek. That very B-29 was K-54 of the 459th Squadron and it’s A/C was Major Lawrence Kohane. I knew his crew as I was also in the 459th Squadron. I was pilot of K-51, “The City of Columbus”. My A/C was Major John Parr. Later Major Kohane became Squadron Commander and Major John Parr became Operations Manager of the 459th. They both gave me my check ride and signed my Unlimited Certificate in the B-29, qualifying me to be an A/C. I had flown 26 missions to Japan by wars’ end. K-51 was a “Lead” crew. We led several daylight missions requiring formation flying. On one of these missions, K-57, a B-29 replacement crew in our lower element, was shot down by fighters coming at them from out of the sun. The A/C was 1st Lt. Donald J Schiltz. It was reported that all were lost. However, I did personally see several of the crew bail out.

[Editor’s Note: K-57 (42-69766) , "City of Burbank" aka "Old Soldier's Home" was shot down over Kobe Japan on 5 June 1945. The incident as witnessed by 2LT W. A. Cameron who was the Bombardier on K-9. According to Cameron, there was an enemy fighter near the formation and it attacked K-57. At that time K-57 dropped out of formation and seemed out of control (perhaps the cockpit had taken a hit). Two chutes were seen at that time at about 14,000 feet. At times the airplane seemed to be partially under control. During this time an additional three enemy fighters strafed K-57. Six additional chutes were seen to open at 5,000 feet. The aircraft then leveled out at 1,500 feet or so and then nose dived in to a dry riverbed and exploded. The Navigator, Reed, and A/C, Schiltz, did survive the initial ordeal. Reed was executed after he parachuted and Schiltz was executed on the 15th of August at the Sandayama Military Cemetery in Osaka. AFTER THE WAR WAS OVER! MACR #14602].

There was an ironic twist to this story. Prior to this mission, the pilot Richard W. Foster left this crew and was replaced by FO Kenneth W. Rich in a swap with another crew. My crew had a similar situation. As we were preparing to leave Kerney, Nebraska for Guam, one of our gunners, Sgt. Harry Hardy had to have surgery and was replaced by Ed Caw who flew over seas with us on several missions. When Harry finally caught up with us several weeks later on Guam, he returned to our crew and Ed was re-assigned back to his original crew. Ed was killed later while on a mission with his crew. **[Editor’s Note: This would have been K-63, which ditched after dropping bombs on the secondary target, 24 APRIL 1945].** I remember him as a great kid, and still think about him to this day.

Another memorable occasion was on a night mission to Kobe. We were headed for the coast when our tail gunner, Sgt. Norman Folser, reported seeing a Bacca Bomb drop off of a Japanese plane. He could plainly see it in the ground fire’s reflection. Our Radar Operator, 1st Lt. Kermit Wheeler confirmed this and said the object was closing fast from our rear. We went into a fairly steep dive from about 12,000 feet and pulled out of the dive around 500 feet. The Bacca, running out of rocket fuel, and unable to pull up with us exploded beneath us. Norman Fosler saved the entire crew that night.

On another night mission, our Bombardier, 1st Lt. John Schafer, spotted—in the glow from the ground fires—a Japanese plane pacing us for speed and altitude. John shot it down and was officially credited with a “kill”. On a later mission, John was officially credited with his second and final “kill” while leaving the coast of Japan, a Japanese fighter made a head on attack and Schafer shot him down as well.

Another time we were hit from above by a chunk of flack or an unexploded shell, but whatever it was, it went right through the Radar Operator’s compartment, clipping Kermit Wheeler’s throat mic cord and grazing his flight suit, and exiting on through the plane, depressurizing us. We got on oxygen until we reached the coast and let down to 10,000 feet.

It was our orders to return to the Marianas by way of Iwo, no matter if we had to fly out of our way to get there. That was so the air/sea rescue submarines wouldn't have such a large area to patrol. On our 18th mission we were scheduled to go to Shimonoseki in western Japan. This was to be a 3,450-mile trip, and K-51 was to carry 13,400 pounds of firebombs. It was to be another night mission on July 2. It had been sometime since Shimonoseki had been hit, so 127 B-29s from the 314th Wing were to hit, then 28 B-29s from the 313th Wing were to hit it with a one-two punch. The mission went off pretty much as expected. Twenty- four had to land at Iwo, mostly because they were low on gas. It was a long trip for that much of a bomb-load, so it was going to be pretty close. On the way back to the coast, Charlie (N) suggested we cut across and head straight for Guam instead of flying east to Iwo, then south. John agreed, so Charlie charted a course for home. We knew this would save gas, and since we were at 20,00 feet, decided to lean out the gas mixture and stay at this altitude for about five hours. Cowley (FE) moved some men around and transferred some gas around to get old K-51 on the step and settled down. What we were doing was contrary to the rules and probably wasn't the smartest thing to do. It would mean that we would have 1,700 miles of open sea with no rescue submarines, in case of trouble.

When we were about two hours out, it was my turn to take a nap. By this time, everyone was getting pretty tired, including me. I had no trouble going to sleep. About one hour and a half later, I woke up on my own and looked over at John, who was sound asleep. Schafer (B) was asleep, so I looked back and Charlie, Cowley, and Perren (RO) were all asleep. I knew all the guys in the back were asleep, because there was no reason to be awake. I checked our course and altitude, both of which had drifted off slightly, because gyros do that, and made the corrections. I then looked out my window and got the shock of my life. There, not over 50 feet away, looking in my window was a navy pilot in a F4U Corsair Fighter. He was parked just outside the radius of our number four propellers. I grinned at him and gave him a wave. He waved back and pointed to his earphone. I couldn't figure what he meant, because I knew he was on radio silence, that close to the Japanese coast. Also, I couldn't figure out why he was up there, since we were transmitting our IFF (identification friend or foe) signal, so I checked the IFF switch and sure enough, we had forgotten to switch it back on. I flipped the switch on, pronto. In the meantime, I woke John up and noticed another F4U sitting on our left wing. I yelled in the intercom at the guys in the back to wake up (everyone kept headsets on). Normann (CFC) said there was another one up there, so those guys had us surrounded. When I switched the IFF back on, both F4Us slid out past our wingtips and split "s" straight down. They didn't report us, though, because no one ever mentioned this episode to us, and we didn't bring it up either. The IFF is a code that is transmitted on a certain frequency and is changed on a regular basis, I think about weekly, in combat. Before you get to the target area, you turn it off, and then as you leave the coast, you turn it back on. The reason you have to turn it off over the target is so enemy can't track in on the signal and tell what our altitude is. With the knowledge of our speed and altitude, it is pretty easy to score hits with anti-aircraft guns. One wonders how many B-29s were lost because some tired pilot forgot to turn off his IFF.

After Japan's surrender, sometime in last October 1945, a second attempt by the Army Air Force was made to set a non-stop distance record with a flight from Japan to Washington D.C. by way of the great circle route. The distance was 6,500 miles. The first attempt made earlier in the month flew as far as Chicago. For the second attempt, I was selected to fly as one of three pilots on one of the four modified B-29s. The flight was named, "The Armstrong Project". General Frank Armstrong was our commander on this mission, piloting the number one aircraft. All four B-29s made it safely to Washington D.C. The flight took 27 hours and 15 minutes...a record that held for a time. I was a 1st Lt. at the time and stayed in the Air Force Reserves until 1969 and retired as a Lt. Col.

My son, Carl, and I made a car trip to Colorado from Indiana in September 2011. On the way home we visited the old, now abandoned Walker Field, near Walker, Kansas. We also found the small basement apartment that my wife, Eva, and I lived in—just after we arrived in Walker in 1944, my wife just happened to hear about this small basement apartment near to the base. We felt very fortunate as accommodations in Walker were nearly impossible to come by.

What few buildings that are left at the air base are rotting away; the runways are grown over with vegetation. One of the runways had even been used for bombing practice sometime after the base closed. It brought back many memories of that cold winter, the two flights to Cuba and the problems we had of getting flying time. Through the later years, I attended several 330th reunions and remember them fondly.

Today, there are only two of us left from the crew of K-51, "The City of Columbus", myself and T/Sgt. Carl G Normann, our CFC Gunner.

