

BATS OUT OF HELL

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COMBAT PILOT

THIS NARRATIVE WAS COMPILED AND WRITTEN
FROM THE DIARY OF CAPT. JOHN POZERYCKI
AND RECOLLECTIONS OF SQUADRON MEMBERS
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When a visitor passes through the gates of the air base at Orlando, Fla., these days, with its palm-lined streets and its orderly row of trim, white buildings, he is sure to be directed to one of the base's proudest landmarks — a huge, rock-and-fern fish pool.

This is no ordinary fish pool. Upon closer scrutiny, the visitor observes in the foreground a large stone tablet. On it is inscribed a bat, almost engulfed in flames, and the simple legend, "We'll Keep 'em Flying."

How the 819TH — the famous BATS OUT OF HELL squadron of World War II—kept this proud promise is now a matter of history.

But let us go back a bit. Our story properly begins on January 25, 1941, in the dark period when the most terrible war in history had swept over Europe and into a large part of Asia.

Foreseeing the possible involvement of the United States, Headquarters of the U. S. Army Air Corps ordered the activation of several bombardment groups. One of these was the 13TH Bombardment Group, formed from personnel of the 2ND and 22ND Bombardment Groups at Langley Field, Va.

It is on the 39TH Bombardment Squadron—grand-daddy of the 819TH—that our story centers.

In those early hectic weeks of growing pains, the 39TH had several temporary commanding officers. First permanent CO was a big, red-headed Swede with a sense of humor named Lt. Raymond T. Petersen. "Big Pete" loved to fly, and vowed he would have the finest squadron in the Air Corps.

"Big Pete" began his ambitious project with one other active officer, Lt. Charles Martin, and some forty-odd enlisted men ... a far cry from the potent organization which later blasted the Japs from the Carolines to the Bonins.

On June 4, the 39th began the first of a series of moves which was to take it from America's East Coast to Japan's doorstep. The pioneer handful of men moved from Langley Field to the Orlando Air Base, along with other components of the 13th Group. The Group was placed under the command of the 3rd Bomber, 3rd Air Force, of the Army Air Forces Combat Command.

The 39th's aircraft consisted of two ancient B-18's . . . and it was quite a sweat job for squadron personnel to get in their monthly flying time, let alone get in much transitional training.

Along about this time three events - one of them tragic - occurred.

While on detached service to Patterson Field, Ohio, Lt. George W. Smith, the squadron's communications officer, was killed when a B-25 crashed during a test hop. There was no drama, no heroics attached to "Smitty's" exit, but this—the squadron's first loss—was felt deeply by all.

A second and more happy event occurred in August. The 39th personnel, then numbering about 85, decided it was time they should have an appropriate and distinctive insignie. Ideas were submitted to the squadron draftsman, drawings were made and voted upon. Heavy winner in the balloting was the famous Bats Out of Hell insignie. The War Department approved the selection, and so was born a name that was to go down in World War II annals.

A real milestone was reached in mid-November when the 39th received the first of twelve B-25's. It was love at first sight between 39th personnel and planes . . . after the old B-18's.

There were now thirty-odd flying officers in the squadron and transitional flying was smoothing. Then it happened , . . December 7, 1941.

When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor, hurtling the United States willy-nilly into World War II, one of the first considerations-of the War and Navy Departments was protection of Allied shipping.

The Air Corps was called upon to aid the Navy, which committed to other tasks, could not handle the job alone.

On January 19, 1942, the 13th Bombardment Group left Orlando, Fla., for Westover Field, Mass. It was placed under the 1st Bomber Command of the 1st Air Force. The Group's assigned task was to seek out and destroy enemy submarines.

For the first few months, members of the 39th Bombardment Squadron were novices, playing a new game. It was a new type of warfare, this chasing after subs with airplanes. Procedures had to be worked out; training methods had to be adapted; equipment had to be experimented with, tested, standardized.

In the midst of this activity, the 39th's CO, Captain Petersen (recently promoted), was granted his long-felt wish and sent to combat.

Succeeding him as squadron headman was a Group staff officer the boys of the 39th long had had their eye on— Capt. Alfred E. Bent, soft-spoken, hard-as-flint former Denver real estate man. He was a popular choice immediately, earning the instant respect and admiration of his men.

At Westover, the 39th operated mostly with B-25's, plus, a few B-18's and A-29's. Personnel increased from 85 to 250. Captain Bent was elevated to Major.

On July 18, 1942, the 39th packed up, said goodbye to the 13th Group, and left Westover for a new station just outside Dover, Dela. The job was still the same—hunting submarines.

Dover was practically a preview of overseas service: mud two feet deep, leaky tents, one small temporary hangar, and mosquitoes that rivaled in size the B-25's themselves.

On October 17, 1942, there came into being the Army Air Forces Anti-Submarine Command, under the leadership of Brig. Gen. Westside T. Larson, former 13th Group CO. In reality, the Anti-Sub Command was a re-designation of the old 1st Bomber Command, with the same personnel and functions.

However, it was a separate command and not under any Air Force. It was responsible only to the Commanding General of the AAF, but was under the operational control of the Navy. Under this specialized re-organization, it was felt the sub menace could be more effectively brought under control.

In this shuffling, the 13th Group was inactivated, and on November 29 the 39th Bombardment Squadron was redesignated as the 3rd Anti-Submarine Squadron (H). It became a part of the 25th Anti-Submarine Wing.

On February 27, 1943, the squadron moved again, this time to Ft. Dix, N. J. Still they flew their anti-sub missions.

Tragedy struck. Capt. Charles A. ("Bot") Anderson, the squadron's popular flight surgeon, died in the crash of an observation plane near Baton Rouge, La. He had been placed on DS at Tulane University to study tropical medicine.

During May, the entire flying personnel of the squadron, plus a large cadre of maintenance men, were placed on DS at the Anti-Submarine Command OTU at Langley Field to familiarize themselves with a new type of airplane which was to be assigned the outfit—the heavy, four-engine B-24.

It was during this transitional training period that the squadron was dealt another cruel blow. During a practice gunnery mission, the wing of Lt. David Cominole's B-24 caught fire and began to burn fiercely. After ordering his crew to bail out, Cominole attempted to land his flaming craft on the beach, but crashed to his death.

The Westover Field-Dover-Ft. Dix period was something of a golden era for the outfit which later was to gain glory in the Pacific as the 819th Bombardment Squadron (H). It was a period of good times . . . squadron parties . . . high morale. It also was a critical period which, despite the deadly monotony of sub-patrolling, saw the formation of an efficient and hard-working unit as men got to know themselves and their airplanes better.

Ground crews, sweating to Keep 'em Flying, developed a new peak of efficiency, sharing with their air crews an equal pride in a job well done. Here was born, during this spring of 1943, the beginning of a proud tradition . . . the esprit d' corps which was to stand the squadron ill such good stead in the dark days to come.

It was in late May that the B-24's began to arrive and the combat crews had to part with their B-25's in favor of the Big Clunkers. The change was not welcomed at first, but the boys soon developed a real affection for the big babies. Soon the squadron was performing long-range patrol missions, taking part in convoy coverages and searches for survivors.

In early August, rumors spread that the Navy soon would take over all anti-submarine work. It looked as though the 3rd Anti-Submarine Squadron (H) soon might find itself engaged in the work its parent organization—the 39th (M) — originally had been designed for, bombardment.

Impetus to the rumors was given by the arrival of olive drab B-24's and the inauguration of intensive bombardment training.

September 1, 1943, was a big day in the history of the 3rd. On that memorable date the squadron officially ceased its sub patrol operations. Big events were in the making; and the squadron was a-buzz

with excitement. Soon, they knew, the 3rd would move from the side-show where it had labored so many months, to the main tent. At last!

On September 15 the squadron was ordered to March Field, near Riverside, Calif. Members arriving by troop train on the 22nd were greeted by Lt.-Col. Edwin B. Miller, Jr., commanding officer of the 30th Bombardment Group (H). The 3rd Anti-Submarine Squadron was-to become a component of this Group.

It was shortly after the 3rd's arrival at March Field that Lt.-Col. Alfred E. Bent, aggressive, respected and beloved CO, was transferred out of the unit because of his high rank and experience. He was replaced as squadron commander by Capt. Thomas E. Peddy, former "A" Flight Commander.

Soft-spoken, well-liked Captain Peddy, a native of Arcadia, La., was not a stranger to the squadron, having been on the roster 15 months. The new CO, who was to lead the 819th into combat, had received his training at Hicks, Randolph and Kelly Fields. He earned his wings in August 1941, and was assigned to the 40th Bombardment Squadron (M), a sister squadron of the 39th—original forerunner to the 3rd Anti-Submarine Squadron and the 819th. Later, he was transferred to the 39th.

On September 21, the 3rd Anti-Submarine Squadron (H) was re-designated the 819th Bombardment Squadron (H) by General Order No. 149, Hq., 4th Air Force. Then things began to happen!

On October 4, 1943, the 819th left March Field for Camp Stoneman, a staging area for the San Francisco Port of Embarkation.

Nine days later, all hands were aboard the USS President Tyler, bound for somewhere in the Pacific.

A new chapter was about to begin.

Somewhere in the Pacific for the 819th Bombardment Squadron turned out to be the Barking Sands Air Base on Kauai, in the Hawaiian Islands. It was on October 22, 1943, that the USS President Tyler dropped anchor at Port Allen, where The Bats debarked and proceeded overland to their new home.

At The Sands all enlisted men of the 819th lived in tents —hardly a new experience as the squadron now was well used to field conditions.

B-24's began to roll in within two days after the unit arrived. There was a mixture of B-24D's, modified D's and J's, most of them old combat planes and most of them shot to hell. There would be plenty of maintenance problems.

The primary role of the 819th soon became evident. It would remain, for some time at least, in the Hawaiian Islands, and would supply the other squadrons of the 30th Bombardment Group and the 7th Bomber Command with airplanes and crews when they went down under. Already, the 819th had 14 combat crews, compared to the usual 12, and within three weeks after landing at Kauai it had more than two dozen aircraft.

The days at Kauai were devoted to bringing the battered B-24's into flying shape and in flight training. Several navigational missions to Johnston Island, at the southwestern extremity of the Hawaiian-chain, were made.

Exactly three weeks after its arrival at Barking Sands, the 819th was ordered to Wheeler Field, Oahu, just a few miles from Honolulu. From here, the squadron continued to make ferrying trips down to such forward zone islands as Canton, Funafuti and Nanomea to replace crews and airplanes.

It was during this period that the 819th suffered its first operational loss. On a ferrying trip to Canton, Lt P.R. Ladd's crew went down, never to be heard from again.

Happy-go-lucky, fun-loving Lieutenant Ladd and his crew would be sorely missed.

The 819th was kept busy at Wheeler Field . . . sea searches, bombing and formation training missions. . . more ferrying trips down under . . . and many another pressing duty. Little time was left for ground training, except for three nights weekly.

There were 20 crews in the squadron now. "D" Flight was created in order to efficiently cope with the large overage. Flight leaders at the end of November included Capt. E. D. Black, "A" Flight; 1st Lt. A. J. Hill, "B" Flight; 1st Lt. C. K. Miller, "C" Flight, and 1st Lt. G. J. Creamer, "D" Flight.

On December 17, the 819th sent its first replacement crews to the advanced echelon of the 7th Bomber Command. They included the crews of 1st Lt. A. L. Larson and 2nd Lts. L. F. Lefler, L. F. Crowell, A. W. Suojanen; following on December 22 were the crews of 2nd Lts. R. A. Feely, W. W. Nixon and D. Chapman.

The war was getting closer!

Meanwhile the crews of the squadron were being sent, at the rate of four crews a week, to the 7th AAF Gunnery School at Hickam Field.

On December 2, Capt. Ralph A. Blakelock, operations officer, who had more than two years' service with the squadron, was transferred to Headquarters of the 30th Bomb Group to become assistant S-3. He was replaced by 1st Lt. Clement K. Miller.

Worthy of mention during this period was the conferring of a commendation upon Sgt. William J. Piccirilli, of the 819th Ordnance Section, by the Air Ordnance Officer, AAF, Washington, D. C., for his development of a testing device for the AN-MK 24 hydrostatic fuse, which, it was predicted, would aid greatly in anti-sub work.

As 1943 drew to a close, the 819th OTU, as it was beginning to be called by the boys in the squadron, had ferried nine B-24's to the squadrons down under and had sent seven replacement crews. At the end of the year there were 19 airplanes and 13 full crews in the squadron.

January 1944, brought important changes to the 819th Bombardment Squadron, but not the one most eagerly sought by all hands—transfer of the unit from its long training grind to combat. Instead, six lucky crews, those of Flight Leaders A. J. Hill, C. J. Creamer and R. B. Kelly, and Lts. H. L. Lurcott, E. C. Jackson and W. J. Schneiderhan were sent down under to the Gilbert Islands and the war. Feeling grew that the old Bats Out of Hell bunch never would see real combat as a team—an ambition since state-side days.

An event on the bright side was the promotion of Capt. Thomas E. Peddy, squadron CO, to Major.

On January 23, the 819th received news of its second operational loss: 1st Lieutenant Lurcott and his crew were killed in a midnight takeoff at Tarawa on January 21. Goodbye to a gallant gang!

Succeeding months were one weary round of strike alerts, sea searches, training missions and the whipping into shape of incoming men and planes for replacement in the forward zone. In May, the squadron had the grand total of 36 combat crews and 48 airplanes to try to handle with only a normal T. O. It posed an especially tough maintenance problem for the hard-pressed Engineering Section. To the weary permanent staff of the self-styled 819th OTU, or College of Pacific Knowledge, the routine was getting a bit old. Determined as they were to make the best of a discouraging situation, they looked forward—almost with passion—to the day when they would enjoy the relative relief and diversion of combat. Would they never get into the game!

In April, Captains Creamer and Hill and Lieutenants Kelly, Schneiderhan and Jackson brought their crews back from down under and, after a 10-day rest, reported to the squadron for duty. All had from 7 to 17 missions under their belts and were considered old hands who would help train the numerous incoming crews for combat.

Tragedy struck several times during the spring of 1944. On the night of April 12, 2nd Lt. Homer D. ("Red") Slawson's plane exploded as it approached Wheeler Field for a landing. All aboard were killed. Two weeks and one day later 2nd Lt. Vincent K. McInerney and his crew were lost on their first sea search mission. On the night of May 12, while on a searchlight mission, Lt. S. R. Rule and his crew crashed into a mountain near Wheeler Field. There were no survivors.

The last days of May brought promise of new things. Orders were issued for packing, and by June 3 all organizational equipment had been boxed for movement. All attached crews were relieved and all B-24's but the 15 the squadron was to fly into combat were taken away. It looked as though the years of training and of sweating it out were about to pay off at last.

The big guns were roaring now in the Marianas, and the United States flag had moved many hundreds of miles closer to Japan. In support of the invasion, the heavy bomb crews of the 7th Bomber Command in the forward area were working day and night to keep all enemy bases within their range neutralized. It was a tough grind and relief soon was needed. The 819th was called upon to furnish five combat crews and airplanes for the emergency.

Back into combat went the crews of Captains Hill and Creamer and Lieutenants Kelly and Schneiderhan, plus Lieutenant Stewart. They were to be based at Kwajalein. At the end of June, with the ground echelon still awaiting orders to embark, the training-happy 819th had seven crews on DS in the forward area and eight crews at Wheeler Field.

At last, on July 9, *the day* arrived. The ground echelon boarded the USS Azelea City and started the long overwater journey to their ultimate destination—newly captured Aslito (Isley) Field on Saipan, in the Marianas. They entered Garapan Harbor on the morning of July 25. Home proved to be a mud-soaked cane field on a high area overlooking Magicienne Bay. It was littered with unexploded hand grenades and shells. In the midst of this mess the men had their evening meal of C-rations and water. Pup tents were pitched, the men waded into them and bedded down for the night. The water in the tents, plus the stench of dead Japs and the continuous firing in the hills beyond were far from being conducive to restful slumber. The 819th had found the war.

BLOODY Saipan, key Marianas base, only 1,300 miles from the Japanese homeland, is about 15 miles long and shaped something like an inverted crescent wrench. It is a land of green hills and valleys, of cane fields and small farms, of breadfruit trees and palms . . . dominated from the center of the island by

1200-foot Mt. Topatchau. Humidity hovers around 70 to 80 per cent and the annual rainfall is about 120 inches.

To the 819TH and to the Army and Marine troops still battling held-out Japs in the northern hills, Saipan was hardly a thing of beauty. The stench of death was everywhere, and heat, mud, flies and dengue fever seemed the island's outstanding characteristics.

In its smashed cane field, amid the debris of war, the 819th's ground echelon began the monumental job of building a new home. Two captured oxen were pressed into service. Pyramidal tents were pitched, latrines dug, showers installed, roads built and tent offices set up for the various sections. When the combat crews arrived from Wheeler Field on August 8, everything was in readiness. America's early-day pioneers, carving their communities out of the wilderness, had never labored under more trying conditions nor accomplished more prodigious feats.

The entire 819TH was reunited for combat at last!

Shortly after the arrival of the air echelon, it was announced that Maj. George B. Dobbins, squadron executive officer, had been assigned to the same job with the 30TH Group. He was succeeded by Capt. Charles J. Dulin, former Squadron S-2. First Lt. Frederick C. Williams took over the intelligence job, with 2nd Lt. E. T. Brehm, formerly of A-2, 7TH Bomber Command, as his assistant.

The 819TH began its combat history as a unit on August 10 when it flew its first mission . . . against Jap-held Iwo Jima, some 650 miles to the north in the Volcanoes (also known as the Kazan Group). The daylight assault was carried out with eleven planes, in conjunction with the 38TH Bomb Squadron. No damage or casualties were sustained by THE BATS and all planes returned to base safely.

It was a different story four days later, when the 819TH carried out its second mission, also against Iwo. Two planes were lost to aggressive enemy fighters . . . those of 1st Lt. John W. Rank and 2nd Lt. James R. Mosher. All of Rank's crew were lost. Three men survived the crash water landing of Lieutenant Mosher's plane, 16 miles from Saipan: Captain Stone, Lieutenant Mosher and Private First-Class Harbin.

Other raids on Iwo and Yap followed, with no losses.

August 26, was another rugged day for THE BATS. AA over Iwo was both intense and accurate and interception was effected by 12 enemy aircraft. In a running battle lasting 40 minutes, the squadron's gunners shot down two Nips, with one probable. Some 819TH planes were damaged, but all managed to get home.

The 819TH received a thorough initiation into combat during August, flying eight missions and dispatching 76 sorties.

To its new home the 819TH introduced certain refinements and innovations. Coral was spread to form streets. Strips of runway matting were laid for walks. Screened mess tents and latrines were constructed and a movie screen erected. Movies were shown every night and attendance was practically 100 per cent. Morale received another boost when it was announced that a beer ration soon would be available, with each man getting two bottles daily. The war began to take on a rosier aspect.

Also during August, 2nd Lt. Ben C. Turski and his crew, were assigned to the squadron. At the close of the month there were 12 combat crews and 13 airplanes in the squadron.

THE BATS had now been in combat for nearly a month and had proved themselves capable of carrying out any task assigned. In coming months they would have ample opportunity to further prove this point. After seemingly endless training and frustration, they now were in the war in earnest!

SEPTEMBER, 1944, was an eventful month in the history of the 819TH Bomb Squadron.

During those fateful 30 days THE BATS flew 27 missions and dispatched 120 sorties, pasting targets at Iwo Jima, Marcus, Woleai, Yap, Pagan, Chichi Jima and Haha Jima. Many of those missions were night snoopers and it became a rare night when the Japs on Iwo got much sleep.

Also during September, the 819TH participated in the first 30TH Group mission in history. On the third day of the month the four squadrons joined to wallop air installations north of No. 2 airfield on Iwo Jima. THE BATS contributed eleven planes to the operation, dropping 500-pound GP bombs. Some 80 per cent hit in the assigned target area and the rest burst on the airfield. AA was moderate and accurate, and three 819TH planes were damaged by flak. The mission was regarded as very successful.

But September would be remembered as much as anything by THE BATS as the month of the ending of the Great Drouth. (Of which more will be written later.)

On September 11 in a mission over Iwo, which was becoming as familiar to the 819TH as its own bivouac area, six enemy fighters intercepted the squadron. Two were shot down by S-Sgt. William J. York, top-turret gunner in A-P No. 681 and S-Sgt. Elson B. Hood, top-turret gunner in A-P No. 661. All planes returned to base without damage or casualty.

Ten 819TH planes took off September 24 on a strike against a convoy which was reported to be headed toward Chichi Jima. Unable to locate the convoy, nine planes dropped bombs on shipping facilities at Chichi and one plane attacked an AK at Haha Jima. Five-hundred-pound GP bombs were dropped with unobserved results, due to almost complete cloud coverage over the target. One airplane was hit by flak while in a cloud at 3,000 feet over Chichi Jima. One rudder cable and one elevator trim tab were shot away and the rudder servo motor was shot out. The engineer, S-Sgt. Raymond C. Harding, performed a miracle and managed to splice the cables so that Lieutenant Newcomb, the pilot, could set the plane down at home base. Two of the crew, S-Sgt. Harold V. Humber and Sgt. Ernest Z. Huptz, suffered from flak wounds received over the target.

The squadron's popular first sergeant, Henry Medlock, was transferred to the 30TH Group HQ in a change which brought Daniel J. Hanley as ...the new topkick. Another departure was recorded when 1st Lt. Frederick W. Wiese, assistant operations officer, was placed on DS to attend gunnery school at Hickam Field, and eventually, Laredo, Texas.

Although THE BATS had been in combat for little more than a month, most of the crews had already flown at least 14 missions against the Japs and were ready for a well-deserved rest. On September 22, Lieutenant Hewitt and his crew took off for a 10-day rest period in Hawaii, there to do nothing but loll on the beach at Waikiki or to visit one of the many ranches scattered throughout the islands. Lieutenant Lester and his crew followed on September 28.

Evidence of the ability of the men of the 819TH to make the best of prevailing conditions manifested itself during September. THE BATS constructed an excellent volleyball court and brought forth baseballs, gloves, and footballs. Plans were also laid for a boxing ring and a softball diamond. An excellent beach, not far from the area, was discovered and put to good use. Officers erected a handsome club in their area.

But that aforementioned Drouth and how it ended in September! To slake the long thirst endured by enlisted personnel, sufficient beer finally was secured to allow the boys to have a real suds party. The memory of that party will live a long, long time. Besides the ice-cold beer, there also were great quantities of chicken, pickles, crackers and other luxuries which had been missing from the 819TH's diet since its arrival on Saipan.

THE BATS kept pounding the Japs in October 1944, paying particular attention to battered Iwo Jima and the shipping which seemed always to collect around Chichi Jima, to the north; also, Marcus Island and Yap came in for "the treatment."

Five new crews, those of Capt. Boris Y. Kutner and Lts. Stanley C. Lewis, Lee R. Moorhead, Douglas W. Manning and Richard M. Bullock, joined the squadron. They replaced the crews of Capts. Alvin J. Hill and Robert B. Kelly and Lt. David L. Stewart, who had completed their mission quotas and were being re-assigned to the States. Captain Kutner was appointed assistant operations officer.

The squadron's total of enemy aircraft shot down was increased to six on October 9 when nine fighters intercepted the formation over Iwo. S-Sgt. J. E. Boggs, and T-Sgt. George E. Peters, gunners on Lieutenant Painter's crew, were credited with one apiece.

On October 12, while enroute to attack shipping in Chichi Jima harbor, "C" Flight, led by Lieutenant Hadsall, and "D" Flight, led by Lieutenant Knudsen, attacked an AK in the open seas, 30 miles south of Haha Jima. To Lieutenant Lewis and his bombardier, Lieutenant Westlake, went credit for sinking the first Jap surface craft since B-24's began to operate from Saipan.

History was made again October 21 when THE BATS got their first fighter escort—P-47's—on a mission over Iwo. The "peashooters" downed one twin-engined Jap.

A bit of Hollywood came to Saipan when Betty Hutton and her troupe entertained with the first USO show to visit the Marianas.

GOING MY WAY, Lieutenant Schneiderhan's plane, was officially sponsored by Bing Crosby, due principally to the efforts by Sam Korn, radio operator on the crew, a friend of the crooner's. Crosby sent to each member of the crew a letter expressing his appreciation and wishes for the continued success of the plane and the men who flew it. He also presented each member with a handsome autographed pipe and promised to entertain the men at a party when they returned to the States.

A vast improvement in the food was noted when crews, returning from rest leave in Oahu, brought back fresh meat, eggs, butter, fruit and other foodstuffs unobtainable through regular sources. Lieutenant Spellum made one special trip to Oahu to purchase a refrigerator for the enlisted men's club.

Toward the end of the month it became apparent that the 30TH Group with its four squadrons was to have a new area on the other side of the island. A new landing strip had been constructed there and the

Group was vacating Isley Field and leaving it to the B-29's which had been arriving in large numbers all month. All the squadrons were called upon to aid in the work and the 819TH furnished details for hauling lumber and constructing mess halls and quonset huts.

November was notable for two events. THE BATS received their second fighter escort in history—this time P-38's J - and the Japs struck back at Saipan's airfields, with particular emphasis upon the B-29's. Steel helmets and gas masks made their appearance and fox holes sprang up like magic around the tent areas as the Jap bombers made their unwelcome presence felt, usually at night in the full of the moon. Many was the weary heavy-lidded combat crews, kept up most of the night in fox holes, would fly their mission of 9 to 12 hours against the Japs, wondering when they would be able to get a good night's rest again. They had been "dishing it out" for some time, and now they had to "take it."

On November 2, two small AK's were sunk in Futami Ko harbor, Chichi Jima, by the crews of Lieutenants Scheiderhan and Rogers. On November 10, on a daylight strike over Iwo, S-Sgt. Frank W. Wedell, ball-turret gunner on WONDROUS WANDA (Lieutenant Turski), shot down one of four Zekes which attacked the formation. Fourteen combat missions were flown during November, with 102 sorties dispatched and 1,325 bombs dropped.

Iwo JIMA received the full fury of the BATS OUT OF HELL striking power during December 1944. Because of the stepped up bombing attacks directed against Saipan by the Japs, especially during the time of the month when the moon was full, a program of interdiction bombing designed to prevent the Nips from using the air installations on Iwo was begun.

The 819TH was called upon to fly a total of 18 missions during the month. Six of these were squadron strikes, two were directed against Pagan Island and ten were night snoopers to Iwo Jima. Thrice during December the squadron furnished spotter planes to direct shell fire for a naval force attacking Iwo. Navy pilots were loud and sincere in singing the praises of the personnel of the 819TH who participated in the unusual assignment.

The first of these history-making spotting missions was flown on December 8 (December 7 back home), third anniversary of Pearl Harbor. B-24's, B-29's and fighters plastered Iwo through a heavy cloud coverage, dropping, perhaps, the greatest bomb tonnage ever devoted up to then to a Pacific target. After bombs away, the six 819TH planes chosen to act as spotters left their formation and descended to do their special and dangerous job. Here is the report of one crew member:

"While our Liberator bore down through the gloom, we wondered what lay ahead. Heretofore we had seen Iwo only from high altitude—from many thousands of feet above the earthy. From that great height it had looked like a miniature relief map of South America, and details were not too distinct. Now we were to go down and take, a closer look and stay longer than any bomber crew had before.

"Fifteen hundred feet above the water we broke through the overcast. A beautiful sight met our eyes. "There, just below us, was the task force, its sleek ships wheeling and turning through the water as their guns belched fire. Pending our arrival, they had already begun the bombardment, a sort of preliminary softening-up until we could get there to pin-point the targets.

"Out of the smoke which obscured many sections of the island, shore batteries gave answering fire. Here and there geysers rose near our warships. But these enemy guns soon were silenced and that was all the opposition the Japs were able to offer the rest of the afternoon.

“No planes rose to meet us. Not a puff of ack-ack appeared in the sky. Whatever Japs weren’t dead were hugging their fox holes.

“For over an hour our Liberator and other spotting planes circled Iwo, oftentimes as low as 800 feet. We drew close enough to shore to strafe and drew answering fire from small arms. As the navy spotters aboard our planes radioed their information to the fleet, salvos hit selected areas and Iwo underwent a thorough face-lifting. A blazing oil dump sent a whirling column of black smoke hundreds of feet into the air. Somewhere else an ammunition dump exploded, producing a huge Fourth-of-July effect. Other fires raged here and there. Hangars and portions of runways disintegrated as navy gunners, aided by their aerial cues, enjoyed a field day.

“Finally it was all over. The warships fired a last parting salvo and headed for home. Each of Iwo’s 30 square miles had absorbed tons of bombs and shells. It was the biggest turnover in Jap real estate since the earthquake.

“To many, I suppose, this was a resounding victory—a whopping reminder to the Japs of the awful mistake they made on another December 7. But to me and other red-eyed, sack-hounds, this sea and air pulverization of Iwo Jima was simply an insomnia cure on a grand scale. Now maybe the Jap bombers would leave us alone for awhile and we could get some shut-eye. Sleep, it’s wonderful!”

THE less fortunate events of war must happen in the best of squadrons, and so it was that, on December 27, 1944, the 819TH lost Lt. Jack Iso and his crew. On the regular squadron mission of that day, Lieutenant Iso approached the target (Iwo Jima) with No. 3 engine smoking. He went over the target and then feathered the smoking engine after bombs away. A serious gas leak was discovered in the left wing which eventually forced Lieutenant Iso to ditch his B-24. It was a good job of ditching and the plane remained afloat for 12 minutes. Eight men were picked up, but the pilot, co-pilot and bombardier were lost.

During December the food situation showed a definite improvement over previous months, despite a rather steady diet of C-rations. On several occasions there was ground beef, fresh liver and pork. The grand treat came about three weeks after Thanksgiving Day when THE BATS were treated to a turkey dinner. The gang couldn’t quite figure out whether it was meant to be their Thanksgiving dinner arriving late or their Christmas turkey arriving early. Anyway, it was good and was appreciated by all. As one mess hall worker put it in an official report: “No matter how poor the food may get, we know that this war can’t last forever. With this thought in mind, even corned-beef hash tastes good!”

Although the lack of liquor had been a source of constant griping in the squadron since coming to Saipan, there seemed to be no shortage during the holidays. An extra ration of beer was issued, and bottles of bourbon mysteriously appeared. Far be it from the writer to attempt to state whence came the “holiday spirits.” One can only guess and congratulate. Suffice it to say that parties were in progress throughout Christmas in both the enlisted men’s and officers’ areas.

The longest movie to be shown on Saipan was presented on Christmas night. The hilarious “Up In Arms” was on and off the screen intermittingly from 18:00 to 23:30 that night. No, it was not due to any malfunction in the projector. There were guests from Nippon who persisted in hovering over the area for several hours. Courtesy prohibited the squadron from dividing its attention; also it was most difficult to enjoy a movie from a fox hole.

The constant pounding of Iwo Jima which was begun in December was continued with telling effect during January 1945. Only on the first and second nights of the month did the Japs attempt to bomb Saipan, although bright, moonlit nights, which in preceding months always brought the Nips scrooping down on Saipan, were plentiful in number. Twenty-one missions were flown during January by the squadron and 123 sorties dispatched. A total of 2,789 bombs were dropped. Twice more (making a total of five) the 819TH acted as spotters for naval gunfire against Iwo.

The squadron lost one crew and one airplane when Lt. Donald E. Painter and crew, flying their thirty-seventh mission, were forced to ditch their plane after being hit by flak over Iwo on January 17. The plane also was damaged by enemy fighters and even while on the way down to the forced landing at sea all gun positions were manned and one of the attacking Nips shot down.

During January, also, the squadron moved to its new area of tents and quonset huts on Saipan's coast. A white, sandy beach furnished fine swimming, boating and squid hunting. Work was started on elaborate club houses for both officers and enlisted men. A new mess hall was built which accommodated the entire squadron comfortably. An improvised grille made from the bottom of a Jap flatcar provided piping hot meals.

There was a great turnover of combat personnel during January. The last of the crews who were with the squadron when it arrived on Saipan in August 1944, completed their "40" and were relieved for reassignment to the States. These included the crews of Lts. Eugene R. Kelly, James E. Hewett, Raymond N. Lester, Robert S. Hadsall, Arthur M. Knudsen and Eugene Bala. They were replaced by nine new crews from the States. This introduced many new training problems.

FEBRUARY, 1945, was a fateful month, both in the annals of World War II and in the history of the 819TH Bombardment Squadron (H). It was in February, that Iwo Jima was invaded, paving the way for the capture of Okinawa and the eventual surrender of Japan. It was in February, also, that the 819TH ceased to exist as a combat unit. Both February events—the invasion of Iwo, THE BATS' favorite target, and the "death" of the 819TH—were closely linked together,

Early in the month the tempo of the Pacific war was stepped up and the chain of events started which brought to an end the 819TH and its sister squadrons in the 30TH Bombardment Group. Iwo Jima was blasted day and night with all types of bombs and from various altitudes. In addition, the 819TH reverted to its familiar role as eyes for the Navy. Its B-24's, with Naval observers aboard, hovered at low altitude over Iwo, directing the fire power of the bombarding cruisers in the customary softening-up process which precedes invasion.

From February 9 to D-Day, February 19, THE BATS dropped bombs on the battered volcanic island every other day. The feat of the Engineering Section in being able to send every airplane in the squadron on each and every raid during this critical period defies mere words. To them goes credit for enabling the 819TH to be the only unit which was able to muster full strength over the target throughout the period. This, despite the fact that it was necessary to change five engines in a six-day period when combat activities had reached a new high.

It was indeed fitting that the man who had led THE BATS on their first combat mission should be in the No. 1 slot when the final blow was struck. For D-Day, February 19, 1945, was the last day in which the 819TH took an active part in World War II. Maj. Thomas E. Peddy, the squadron's popular commanding

officer, led the outfit in a low altitude attack against enemy installations on Mt. Suribachi, at the southern tip of Iwo Jima, dropping fire bombs from 5,000 feet. The attack was carried out minutes before the invasion forces hit the beach. It is worthy of note here that, although this final attack against Iwo was an all-out mission for the four squadrons of the 30TH, the 819TH was the only squadron to put every plane under its command over the target.

Less than a week later the blow fell. The 819TH as a combat unit was no more. "Boys," said Major Peddy in making the heart-breaking announcement to the assembled squadron, "we've been dealt one from the bottom of the deck." The personnel of the 819TH was to be scattered throughout Pacific Ocean Areas, mostly to the 11TH Bomb Group at Gaum. The 11TH, oldest Group in this theater of war, contained a large number of men who were veterans of at least two years of Pacific duty. These men were to be sent to squadrons of the 30TH Group in exchange for replacements with less overseas time. Almost the entire personnel of the 819TH was affected and orders transferring men and officers to various squadrons of the 11TH, as well as to Group Headquarters, were soon forthcoming. The new 819TH—and the remainder of the new 30TH Group—were left on Saipan, soon to sail for Oahu and eventual disbanding. The old 819TH and 30TH were gone . . . just a memory.

Back on Gaum, the 819TH AIR FORCE, as the outfit had been dubbed by other units (perhaps in derision, but most probably in envy), made its spirit and force felt in all the units to which its men were assigned. And when Japan finally was forced to surrender, most of THE BATS, as members of other outfits, were in on the "kill," stationed at Okinawa.

It was a long, rugged war . . . and former BATS everywhere are deeply grateful that the past tense can now be used. And who isn't? In closing, we can pay no higher tribute to the old 819TH than to say to it—as has been so often and justly said in the past—
Well done, Gentlemen, well done.