

# BEER BOTTLE BLITZ

By  
S/Sgt. BILL ELROD

as told to

Cpl. R. Z. SIMMONS

*Even camp garbage comes in handy on Jap-harassing raids.*



Sergeant Elrod (extreme right, rear) and other crew members on wing of their Flying Fortress.

**I**F THE kitchen sink had been in our plane we would have tossed that at them too. Our bomber was loaded with every type of unrelated object imaginable. Anything we got our hands on, from beer bottles to wooden cartons, we piled into the *Flying Fortress* to throw at the Japs on Rabaul that night.

The assignment was officially called a "harassing raid." Only one plane went out. The idea was to keep the Nips awake so that when the big show came off the next night they would be too drowsy to function properly. At least that's what we hoped.

We also had to put on a big front for the enemy. It was in the early days of the war and we had only a few planes. The only replacements available to us were a few condemned planes used by the 19th Bombardment Group in the Philippines which had been hastily repaired at Australian bases.

Staging these one-plane raids, we gave the Japs an exaggerated idea of our offensive power—and, incidentally, lessened the chance of losing many of our bombers on a single strike.

To show how it works, let's get back to this particular raid. Things started buzzing when a reconnaissance plane landed on our crude runway to tell of a concentration of Jap shipping in Simpson Harbor, Rabaul. Pictures taken by the aerial photographer showed an assortment of 60 vessels.

After examining the film, our S-2 officer decided it would be a good idea to risk a 40-plane raid on the objective. But first a "harassing raid" would have to be made that night.

Crew pilots were called into the old man's office to receive instructions. In those days the Japs were on the offensive and usually we were the target. Every crew was spoiling to get into any action it could. Capt. Bill Thompson from Canton, O., the skipper of our plane, was a little bigger than the rest of the pilots. Maybe that's the reason we got the job.

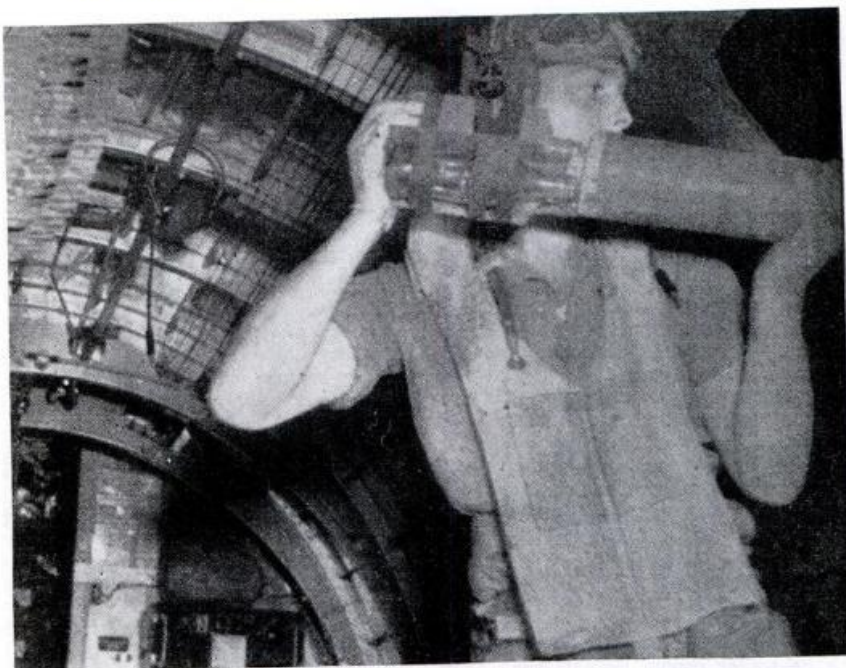
That afternoon our crew went down to outfit the plane. We checked the guns carefully. Then we filled a large additional tank of gas which we placed in the bomb bay. We knew we'd be above the target for quite awhile.

The ground crew—and anyone else who volunteered to help—scoured the area for scrap metal, shrapnel and bottles to toss out the waist window. Bottles were our favorite because they whistle when they fall through the air. Even lump garbage was welcome for our ammunition.

Don't get the idea we didn't use bombs. We loaded plenty of those into the plane too. It was just that we'd be above that  
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Anything to keep the enemy awake.



As bombardier signals "over target," crewman tosses fragmentation bomb without aid of aiming devices. Weird whistle of bottles taped to bomb adds to raid's psychological effect.

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The list is topped off with this blunt observation: "Except in the earliest flights, the development of airsickness in the student during dual instruction is a reflection on the ability of the instructor. If the instructor were required to clean up the ship after making his student airsick, much less airsickness would occur."

As for the student, he is advised among other things to try to eliminate all known causes for worry, anxiety and fear, consult his flight surgeon, get plenty of sleep before flying; and to avoid overeating before flying—particularly fatty foods—and alcoholic hangovers.

There has been considerable talk about so-called airsickness pills, but it is generally conceded that no sure-cure drug remedy has yet been found. Experiments have been conducted by the AAF, the Canadians and the British with "remedies" whose common ingredient is hyoscine. It is estimated that drugs are effective in scarcely 50 per cent of the cases, depending upon the individual's reaction, but they are not guaranteed to prevent or cure airsickness.

A Naval aviation medical officer, telling of an experiment with student navigators, said hyoscine was found to be "very effective" as a remedy, but he qualified this by saying that "it depends largely on the nature of the individual and the weather."

At any rate, the services have made great strides in reducing the incidence of airsickness through accurate prognosis and diagnosis; through training selection and constantly improved training techniques. They have developed a hardy, healthy race of airmen who will play an important role in post-war aviation. And, with the common usage of pressurized cabins, greater perfection in airplane design and more frequent plane travel—flying experience—the post-war air traveler can stop worrying about airsickness. **END**

### Beer Bottle Blitz

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target for some time and when we ran out of bombs we'd also have all this other stuff with which to annoy the Japanese on the ground.

Seven 300-pound demolition bombs were loaded in the bomb bay and we took on about 75 20-pound fragmentation bombs plus three cases of small four-pound incendiaries. We planned to toss the fragmentation bombs and the incendiaries out the waist windows, together with the junk.

You should have seen the catwalk! It was so jammed that the crew had to crawl over the stuff on hands and knees to get to any forward position.

We went back to our tents to get some shut-eye before take-off time, which was to be around 1030 hours. Crewmen always claimed they couldn't sleep before a raid. But invariably when the operations clerk came around and said, "Okay, fellows, briefing in 15 minutes," the whole bunch of us were completely dead to the world.

I rubbed my eyes and glanced at my watch. It was 1010 hours. I pulled back the mosquito bar and sat on the edge of the bunk a couple of minutes to give the cobwebs a chance to clear. The boys started dressing. There wasn't much to that as each of us only wore Australian khaki shorts and a light-weight flight jacket.

Sometimes we each took along a box of K-rations to eat, but usually we just filled our canteens for a quick drink. Our engineer, T/Sgt. Bob Greenfield, of New York, was the water boy. We had a system for keeping the water cold. Greenfield simply stacked the canteens in the ball turret and the constant slipstream of air coming through did the trick in almost no time at all.

Briefings for such missions were short. Most of us knew the area around Rabaul as well as we knew our own backyards. Personally, I had been on 21 night missions and two daytime missions over this Jap target. Besides the crew, the squadron CO and Intelligence Officer were the only two persons who were present.

Jeeps took us down to the dispersal area, by this time humming with activity. The ground crew and mechanics were scurrying about, performing their various chores by flashlight with amazing efficiency.

Before signalling us into our waiting plane on the airstrip, the

skipper and engineer started the engines. Because of the excess weight in the plane's tail, crew members crowded as far up front as possible when we did climb aboard for the take-off.

The New Guinea runway we flew from followed a narrow valley between two steeply inclined hills. There were no stars visible that night and all we had to guide us was a searchlight beam on a little island dead ahead which pointed straight up into the sky. We noted from the short range of the light beams that there was a low thick overcast. It looked pretty foreboding.

But we went ahead nevertheless. When the Fort reached the beam of light it banked, for the light also served as a marker to tell us when it was safe to turn. We climbed to 18,000 feet to get above the soup, but it was no use. It was worse than a London fog.

At this height we flew across the Owen Stanley Range on instruments. When the navigator decided we were over water and there was no danger of crashing into mountain tops, Captain Thompson, anxious to get out of the fog, dropped down to 2,000 feet.

We thought the weather was bad upstairs but it was twice as rough at lower levels. In disgust, the skipper decided to go lower. We dropped to 500 but it was just as bad.

Of all altitudes, 9,000 feet seemed to be the least stormy. So we stayed at that level. It was by far the worst weather I had experienced on a raid up until then.

An epidemic of airsickness swept the crew. S/Sgt. Les McCormack, who was fusing "frags," turned as green as a clover leaf. From time to time he reached for his oxygen mask and held it over his face, figuring the fresh air would help. It seemed to have some good effect.

Over the interphone system I heard the pilot ask the navigator for a bearing. The navigator said, "I'm so sick, I don't

give a damn where we are. Just keep flying straight until I feel better." Thompson replied weakly that the navigator couldn't feel any worse than he did.

About 15 minutes away from the target we ran into clear weather.

Soon the dark shadow of Rabaul appeared below us, silhouetted against the somewhat lighter shade of the surrounding water. The few lights blinking in the enemy village were being rapidly extinguished. We had been spotted!

Then the evening's activity really started. First one finger of light pointed into the sky, then another and another. Soon there were about 50 searchlight beams probing for us. We decided to make our first run without further delay.

We held fragmentation bombs and incendiaries, ready to toss them out the windows. The incendiaries were tied together in clusters of three. When the plane was over the village the bombardier gave us the signal to heave away.

But scarcely had he given us the signal when a searchlight beam caught us. It flicked across the wing and fuselage in a blinding glow. It passed by us and then came back to hold the plane in focus. More searchlights followed suit. We were caught in the glare of some 30 rays. The light was so bright it blinded us for a moment.

When our eyes became adjusted we saw the inside of the craft plenty.

Tracers from 40-mm. automatic guns whizzed past the ship looking very much like strings of red beans. They were accompanied by heavier stuff. The tracers came closer—right by the waist window where I was standing. Every time one passed I felt myself tighten up involuntarily.

We got off 10 "frags" and a few incendiaries before the plane finally flew out of range of the guns. The run took only a few minutes but it seemed like hours.

But this was just the first of 26 bombing runs. We weren't getting away with anything. Our ship reached the target at 0150. We were supposed to stay above it until 0530—and that's just what we intended to do.

The next three bombing runs were much the same as the first. We got off plenty of "frags," scrap, pop bottles and incendiaries. Those Nips knew there was something cooking.

On the fourth bomb run we came in with our bay doors open, ready to drop the 300-pounders. The Japs saw this in the glare of their lights and increased their barrage. Heavy artillery broke so close to us it shook the plane. I could hear pellets rip through the skin of the wings and fuselage. It made a peculiar sound when it burst.

Our demolition bombs started a big fire in the town which rapidly spread to an area about a block wide. The glow from the flames helped us considerably as it served as a bearing point to guide us in the following runs.

The enemy barrage was very heavy up through our 15th run. After that it subsided. On the 14th time around, the waist gunner, a newcomer with the crew was wounded slightly.

McCormack took particular glee in throwing garbage out the window. He yelled over the interphone system, "Lordy, look at them Japs run out after our leavings. You'd think they hadn't eaten in days. Well, our garbage is a darn sight better'n them fishheads for sure."

But after the 15th bomb run the curtain of artillery fire quieted considerably so we daringly went down to 200 feet, masthead level, to buzz the harbor. Thompson turned on the landing lights so we could see some of the area under us. The boys were quick to take a hint. We cut loose with machine gun fire at everything in sight, particularly the searchlight installations which we wanted to disable for the following night's raid.

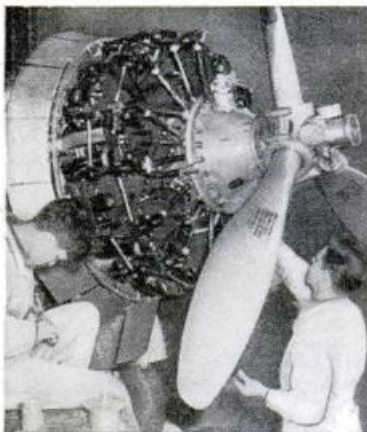
Lights which had been put out were turned on again. Once more bullets flew around us, so we started to climb. As we passed directly parallel to a searchlight emplacement, T/Sgt. Wes Chadwicke of Los Angeles yanked out his pistol and fired a full clip at it.

We made a few more bomb runs, hanging around the target until it was daylight. Our purpose had been achieved. We had successfully kept those little devils on the run for a whole night. We caused a certain amount of damage but it was nothing compared with the pounding they were going to get from the rest of our gang the next evening.

On the way back to our base we found the weather almost as nasty as it had been when we started out. But we were safer because, minus all the garbage and the bombs, our plane could maneuver with considerably greater ease.

One might think we had enough to last a little while on this raid. But not our gang. Any member of the crew would have been mad as a hornet if someone told him he couldn't go on the 40-plane foray that evening.

So we all made the trip. It was a very successful raid. We practically sank the island—but that's another story. **END**



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