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A Souvenir of Historic Days Spent in the Southwest Pacific

The Marauder

DEDICATED TO OUR FRIENDS WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF  
THEIR COUNTRY

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The



# MARAUDER



TO: THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 22nd BOMBARDMENT GROUP.

This book is dedicated to our comrades who were with us until their last flight. It is to give to their families, wives and sweethearts some tangible picture of their experiences both pleasant and unpleasant while carrying out their various duties with this Group for their country. Those men shared the grueling work and dangers which helped their Group contribute much to halting the Japanese advance in the Pacific and to the subsequent mounting tide of victories leading to peace.

The 22nd Group has a remarkable and somewhat astonishing history as is shown by our accomplishments. Realizing that each man must carry out his assigned duties regardless of personal choice in order to have a successful organization, I would express here my highest esteem of every man who is new in the Group and to those who were with us while making our mark in the winning of the war.

My contribution has been rather small. When we speak of the past the credit must go to the men who were trained and led by Major Mark Lewis, Colonel Millard Haskin, Colonel Dwight Divine, Lt.-Colonel George Anderson, and Lt.-Colonel Roger Phelan, all of whom I am proud to have served under.

We have many new members in our organization now and they will soon be the ones who will be carrying out the work so excellently started in our new role of Heavy Bombardment. My desire is that this Group will continue to be the most outstanding organization in the South-West Pacific.

Richard W. Robinson

Colonel, A.C.,

Commanding Officer.

For the first eight months of its history, the 22nd Bombardment Group was little more than a "paper" organization. Headquarters Squadron had a few B-18's which even then, in the face of the European War, were rapidly becoming obsolete.

A big majority of the pilots were fresh from flying schools. Most of them had to be content at first to fly BT-14's or whatever they could lay their hands on. Gradually they were checked out in the slow clumsy B-18's. A few of them managed to receive some transition time in the two or three B-25's with which the more experienced 18th Reconnaissance Squadron was equipped. Although the pilot requirements for the B-18 were strict and although a constant flying schedule was maintained both day and night, the B-26's when they finally did arrive taxed the new pilots' abilities to the utmost. The 22nd Bombardment Group was the first group to be equipped with the new revolutionary Martin Marauder.

When the B-26 made its first appearance at Langley Field early in '41, its exceptionally powerful motors and stubby wings confirmed the pilots' suspicions that it was as fast and as tricky as rumor had it. At first it was, dubbed ..The Flying Coffin", "The Flying Prostitute" (no visible means means of support), and many other such nicknames. Later these same pilots were to defend hotly the Marauder against all comers.

### **THE 22ND BOMB GROUP in WAR**

Sunday morning, December 7th, was a quiet and peaceful Sunday at Langley Field (Virginia). Most of the ships were parked in hangars and the hangars themselves were quiet. A few "ready" crews were loitering about, laughing and joking. When the startling news came over the radio that afternoon, everybody already not on the Field reported back without waiting to be notified. Squadron Commanders returned from conferences and the hangars began to become filled with men working feverishly. Throughout the night guns and bomb bay tanks were installed, pilots checked their ships for the cross-country flight, and finally the ships were converted from peace-time planes to combat ships.

The 22nd Bombardment Group, first on the list of medium bombardment groups ready for combat, took off in the dawn dusk of December 8th headed for the West Coast and the South-West Pacific. This one fact all personnel of the 22nd can always be proud of-that the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor reached the, scattered members of the Group over the radio in mid-afternoon of a Sunday and yet sixteen hours later 44 planes, ready for combat, took off to strike at the Japanese.

On 15th December 1941 the ground echelons of the Group reached the dry Muroc "Lake" in the Mojave Desert of California. One day its full complement of both officers and men numbered only about eighty-six; the next day several thousand troops were pouring in.

When the air echelon arrived, more serious problems presented themselves. Everything was to be dispersed and in a desert there is no lack of space. B-26's took off with full bomb loads under adverse conditions, and flew over mountain ranges and hundreds of miles out to sea in all kinds of weather - **the first medium bombers to patrol the West Coast after the outbreak of war.**

On 31st January 1942 the ground echelons embarked from San Francisco for the South-West Pacific with the picture of the fading San Francisco Bay Bridge forever etched into their memories. Rumor had it that the destination was to be South America, or Java, or the Philippines, or even Australia. After almost a month on the seas without touching a single port en route, the troops finally disembarked at Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Finally, the ground elements were stationed at Amberley Field outside of Brisbane and Ipswich to await the arrival of the planes.

Meanwhile the air echelons had tarried behind at March Field, California, to see that their Marauders were crated and shipped aboard. On February 6th they left the States and arrived at Hick-am Field, T.H., in mid February. Here the B-26's were reassembled and patrolling began. Then its air echelon flew the planes to Australia. (The 22nd BG flew its first combat mission, an attack on Rabaul which required an intermediate stop at Port Moresby, New Guinea, on 5 April 1942.)

## **MIDWAY**

**Two ships of the 18th Reconnaissance Squadron were detained at Hawaii. They were fated to be the first Army planes to make a torpedo attack. The target was a large Japanese Naval Invasion Force consisting of one battleship, three cruisers, several destroyers, several transports, and the usual auxiliary craft (cats & dogs) that accompany such a formidable force, as well as two carriers packed with Zeros. With Navy PBY's leading to check their course to the target, and accompanied by a score or so of Marine Dive Bombers and many B-17's, four B-26's took off at dawn on 4th June 1942. The four ships were piloted by Flight Leader Captain James Collins, 69th Squadron, 38th Bombardment Group; right wing ship, 1st Lt. William S. Watson, of the same organization; left wing ship, 1st Lt. Herbert C. Mayes, 18th Reconnaissance Squadron, 22nd Bombardment Group; and filling the diamond in No. 4 position was 1st Lt. James P. Muri, also of the 18th.**

**Fifteen (fifty) minutes out, these four ships, flying at 800 feet, spotted two formations of Zekes about twenty miles ahead and 12,000 to 15,000 feet up. Eighteen were counted. The horizon was now dotted with ships of all kinds. The enemy fleet was finally made out to be miles deep, in a very loose box formation, with the hunted carriers ready to squirm and churn in the center. The depressed big guns of the fleet opened fire from long range and threw up deadly water-spouts in front of the formation. All the ships in the convoy suddenly seemed to take fire, they were throwing up that much flak. Six Zeros attacked head-on. The ships dove steeply and most of the bullets passed overhead. Flying about ten or twenty feet above the water, the ships hedge-hopped and weaved back and forth. Zeros pressed in closer. Bullets rattled off the ship's skin like hail on a tin roof.**

**The first bullets struck the turret of Lt. Muri's plane, ripping the plexiglass cover off. The flying splinters made T/Sgt. Gogoj's face a mass of bleeding cuts and gashes and blasted him out of his seat. When he climbed back up, the next burst shot the charging handle off the left gun, blew off the control handle and triggers, shot up the wiring, and burnt out**

the power units. T/Sgt. Gogoj stayed "put" pretending he could still fire. With the next burst, a spent 7.7 slug pierced the skin over his left eye and lodged there. He slumped over and fell to the floor. He dug the slug out with his own fingers, tore at his gun-belt first-aid kit, and after bandaging himself up, he pulled himself once more into his turret and stayed there.

P. F. C. Ashley, the tail gunner, was hit in the hip and knee at the same time the turret was hit. Five bullets had been pumped into his right leg. He clutched his leg and fell back far enough to allow someone else to operate his gun. Sgt. F. Melo, the radio operator who was manning the tunnel guns, saw Ashley keel over. He jumped over the open hatch to prop up Ashley. Another spent 7.7 slug tore through the fuselage and grazed his forehead just over his left eye. A half step farther and another bullet hit him in the right arm near the shoulder. Two more spent bullets pierced his glasses in his right side pocket. Small bits of shrapnel peppered his left leg.

The gun now jammed, but Sgt. Melo cleared the stoppage and continued firing. He suddenly felt something hot and jumped up to find that Jap tracers had set the seat cushions on fire. He threw one out of the tail opening only to see it sucked back in. He saw T/Sgt. Gogoj on his knees trying to get back into his turret. The interphones were shot out so he went forward and told the pilot that everyone had been hit back there and that the plane was on fire. He collapsed and the co-pilot, Lt. P. L. Moore, went back, threw the cushions overboard and manned Ashley's gun.

Over 50 Zeros were in the air by now and six or eight of them were making passes from all over the clock all the time. Lt. Muri, in the excitement, forgot that the plane was supposed to be on fire. Sgt. Melo came to and helped T/Sgt. Gogoj. All this was happening before the plane even reached the target.

The first Rising Sun flag they had ever seen loomed up on the mast of the carrier. Flak from the carrier tore into the prop blades, setting up a terrific vibration that gave the pilot a beating. A bullet went through the navigator's compartment. Gasoline was pouring out of the leak proof tanks, for the shells had made swiss-cheese out of them. The torpedo was launched toward the starboard bow of the carrier which by this time was turning into the plane.

As Lt. Muri swung his plane low over the bow, Lt. R. H. Johnson, the bombardier, strafed 50 to 75 Japanese on the "island" of the carrier. Some started scattering in all directions, some fell squirming, and some didn't move at all. The Zeros that had abandoned the attack while the ship was over the carrier, picked up the fight once more, but good old 1391 (Susie Q) by that time was doing better than 300 m.p.h. herself and drawing over 55 inches! (mercury?) The B-26 was now beginning to outdistance its pursuers.

Lt. Johnson climbed into the co-pilot's seat and stayed there. Sgt. Melo went to the radio and tried to pick up M.O.'s to home on, but the antenna had been shot away. The plane was lost but the navigator, Lt. W. W. Moore, picked tip bearings via "sun shots". T/Sgt.

Gogoj came up front, looking like a blood-soaked rag, and transferred gas. The cylinder head temperature began to climb. Lt. Muri noticed that he was losing hydraulic fluid from the left nacelle and decided, rightly, to land on the right wheel. The brakes were gone completely. The violent bumps on landing tore out the instrument panel.

After the crash-landing, the ship was inspected. The left tire had been riddled, each prop blade had at least one hole, the top edge of the wing was completely shot up, the antenna was shot off, the turret was beyond repair, and the fuselage in the rear section had been riddled. After counting more than 500 bullet and shrapnel holes in the plane, everybody called it a day. The 22nd Bombardment Group had done its share in the Midway Battle.

## **History of the 69th Bombardment Squadron (M)**

The story of the 69th Bombardment Squadron (M) really begins with the acquisition of B-26 aircraft in November 1941, by the 38th Bomb. Group, of which this squadron was a part. On January 29th the ground echelon of the 38th Group boarded the Army Transport Bliss, formerly the President Cleveland. The Bliss left in convoy from San Francisco on the 31st and arrived at Brisbane, Australia on February 25th, 1942. In the meantime the air echelon of the 38th Group stayed at Fort McDowell, California (also flying sea patrols off the West Coast) until March 8th, when the air officers and crew chiefs departed for Patterson Field near Dayton, Ohio. At Patterson Field the pilots, crew, and ground men received further instruction on B-26 airplanes, and it was in May 1942, that the 38th Group was equipped with this B-26B ships.

During this period the first officers' promotions came through. Lincoln E. Behling and James F. Collins were promoted to captain, dated March 20, 1942. On May 19th the 69th Bomb. Sqdn. (M) received War Department S.O. #128 to proceed overseas, and the first flight of three planes piloted by Capt. James Collins, 1st Lt. Long, and 2nd Lt. William Watson left immediately for Hamilton Field, California and Hawaii.

At the Sacramento Air Depot, the planes were stripped of armor plate, machine guns, and unnecessary equipment, while extra gas tanks were fitted in the bomb bays (and provisions for carrying aerial torpedoes). They proceeded to Hamilton Field, where the planes were given a final checkup by the crew chiefs. They were then refueled, and the first flight of B-26s left for Hickam Field, Oahu, T.H., on May 22, 1942. The flight lasted 13 hours, and it was the first time that the 2200 mile hop had been negotiated by a medium bomber. Capt. Collins, 1st Lt. Long, and 2nd Lt. Watson piloted the planes.

During the last ten days of May at Hickam Field, Captain Collins' flight had practiced torpedo bombing with their B-26s, and it was not long after that their ability was tested. Having arrived at Midway Island two days before, Captain Collins and Lt. Watson with their planes and crews were ordered to participate in the Midway Battle, while Lt. Long and his navigator, Lt. Weems, who had gone along ( on a B-17) as spare crews, were ordered to stand by.

Each plane carrying one torpedo took off from Midway (Eastern) Island at 0630 on the morning of June 4th, and in 60 minutes contact was made with the enemy. With Japanese planes of four carriers around them, Captain James Collins and Lt. William Watson, following a flight of six Navy pilots, made their runs on a carrier. As Captain Collins drew close he dropped his "fish" and zoomed into the clouds for protection, while Lt. Watson's plane crashed into the sea with no survivors. With 2nd Lt. Watson the squadron lost 2nd Lts. Whittington and Schuman, co-pilot and navigator respectively; Corp. Owen, radio operator; Sgt. Decker, engineer, and Cpl. Sietz, tail gunner. Lt. Watson and his crew were all awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart, posthumously.

Captain Collins' plane returned with more than 100 bullet holes in it, and a crash landing was necessary, for the hydraulic system had been completely shot away. None of crew was seriously injured, though the radio operator sustained facial lacerations from the flying glass.

Capt. James Collins, his co-pilot 2nd Lt. Colin O. Villines, navigator 2nd Lt. Thomas H. Weems, Jr., engineer Sgt Jack D. Dunn, radio operator T/Sgt Raymond S. White all subsequently received the Distinguished Service Cross.

That was the first time land based aircraft had been used for torpedo attack against surface vessels.

(A couple other notables associated with the 69th were 2nd Lts. Paul E. Tibbetts and James H. Doolittle, Jr.)