

A TIME TO REMEMBER

by
Herbert T. Kurz
June 1990

In reading thru "Grey Geese Calling", a history of the 11th Bomb Group (Heavy), it is interesting to note that the partial source of both aircraft and personnel to make up the four (4) squadrons (98th, 431st, 42nd, 26th) during the transition from B-17's to B-24's, came from the 371st and 372nd Bomber Squadrons of the 307th Bomb Group, 13th AF at Wheeler Field.



371st Bombardment Squadron

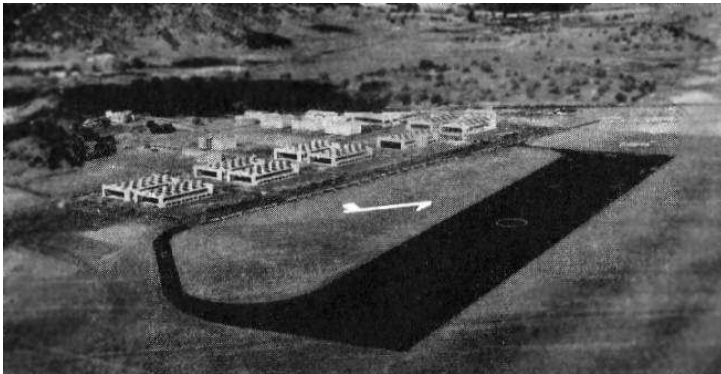
Little is mentioned about this group except for a few words as noted in "Grey Geese" (see page 26 "With the 7th AF, Again", page 257 John P. Bauer; and page 325, personnel of the 371st, etc.). I believe that this

summary will be of interest to the Association members, many of whom will remember "the gathering" at Wheeler Field.

Little did we know at the time what our fate was to be, other than that we were to come out to the Pacific to fight the war against the Japs in our newly acquired B-24's.

In the short space of time between early '43 and when we were assigned to the various squadrons (May 1943) there was considerable activity, not only flying search and training but also combat activity – our baptism of fire with the enemy.

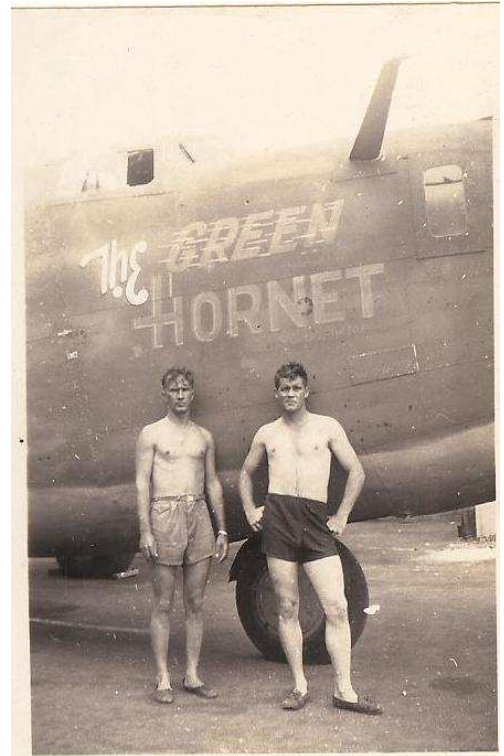
Speaking only from personal experience, our crew was assembled at Topeka, Kansas where we picked up our new B-24D aircraft Serial #42-40101, and flew it to Hamilton Field, California. There the plane was named “The Green Hornet” and the name was painted on at Hamilton Field. (See attached letter and plane assignment document correcting the error in the “The Grey Geese Calling”.)



Hamilton Field 1937



Hamilton Field 1943 (B-24s at right)



After a midnight take off from Hamilton on March 1, 1943, weighing 70,000 pounds, (the B-24 was red lined at 68,000 lbs.) with only 8 crew members and a lot of tools and engine parts (2 crewmen had to go ATC¹ because of the overload) we landed at Hickam Field in Hawaii some 15 hours later. After reporting in, we took off again for Wheeler Field, only a short hop away. There, we were assigned² to the 371st Bomber Squadron (Heavy), 307th Bomb Group.

¹ ATC – Air Transport Command (probably by C-47)

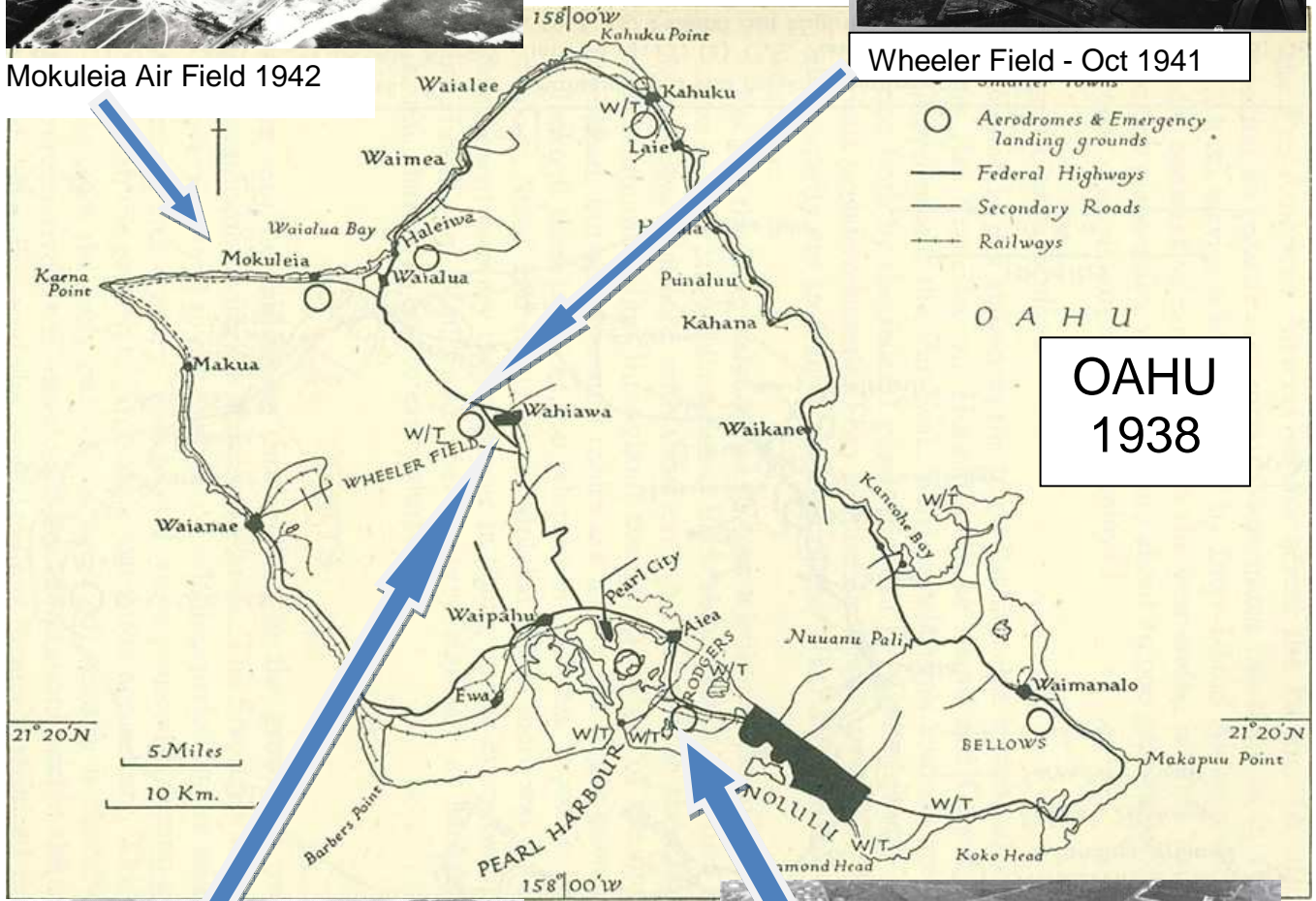
² HQ VII Bomber Command APO #953 SO #34 dated 5 March 1943

OAHU – Various Air Field Assignments



Mokuleia Air Field 1942

Wheeler Field - Oct 1941



Kipippa Gulch (Airfield) 1944



Hickam Field 1940

H. Kurz
00048

5 March 1943.

SPECIAL ORDERS)
:
NUMBER 34)

1. OOCG 2 March 43: Following-named EM having been asgd VII BC per par 1 SO 61 Hq Seventh AF cs are asgd 371st Bomb Sq (H):

T Sgt Dennis S Lodge 13049799 S Sgt John E Harmon 37208117
T Sgt Delbert V Erickson 37167038 S Sgt William E Richards 38179498

2. OOCG 3 March 1943: Pvt Eugene Honican 35131253 having been trfd to VII BC per par 4 SO 61 Hq Seventh AF cs is asgd Hq & Hq Sq VII BC and will rpt to CO thereof for dy.

3. OOCG 2 March 43: Following Os AC having been asgd VII BC per par 9 SO 61 Hq Seventh AF cs are asgd 371st Bomb Sq (H):

→ 1ST LT HERBERT T KURZ 0791122 2D LT WILLIAM R DOXARAS 0662029
2D LT KENSEL E CLUTTER 0733611 2D LT FRANK J WASHBURN 0731433

4. With concurrence of CG Seventh AF Pvt William W Appleton 32208871 Hq & Hq Sq VII BC is atchd Hq Seventh AF (Sig Office) for dy only.

5. 2D LT HARRY F BROWN JR 0567479 AC 371st Bomb Sq (H) is aptd SC to inventory and dispose of the effects of the following-named Os and EM killed as result of Ap accident 27 Feb 43. The Court will be governed by the instructions contained in AW 112, Manual for Courts-Martial, 1928, and Hawaiian Dept Regulations 5-45. WD AGO Form #54, Inventory of Effects, will be accomplished in triplicate and submitted to this headquarters with the least practicable delay:

1ST LT EUGENE STEVENS 0728937 AC (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
2D LT WILLIAM L MORRISETTE 0664336 AC (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
2D LT MURRAY J RITTER 0729501 AC (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
2D LT RODGER S STOGDILL 0728933 AC (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
S Sgt Robert E Alsup 18044391 (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
S Sgt Charles C Foster 36340671 (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
S Sgt Lloyd W Hansen 36237985 (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
T Sgt Isidore R LeBeau 16036047 (Atchd 371st Bomb Sq (H))
Auth: AW 112, MCM 1928.

307th group

By command of Brigadier General LANDON:

OFFICIAL: *J. H. Patterson*
J. H. PATTERSON,
Capt., Air Corps,
Adjutant.

J. H. PATTERSON,
Capt., Air Corps,
Adjutant.

DISTRIBUTION: "B"

We flew 7 search missions in March, and 3 in April, along with formation and other exercises. Then we were sent “down under” via Canton Island on April 17th and on to Funafuti in the Ellice Islands on the 18th.³ From there we were to strike 3 targets for the first time using land based aircraft (Nauru, Tarawa, and Ocean Island in the Gilberts).

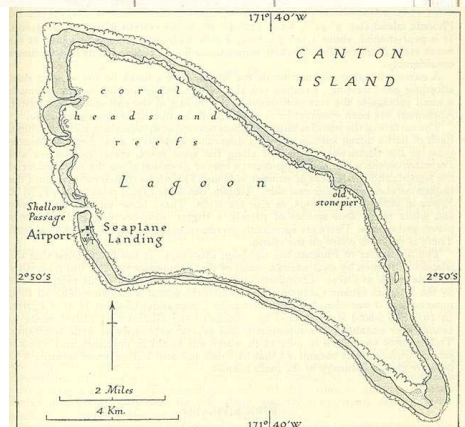
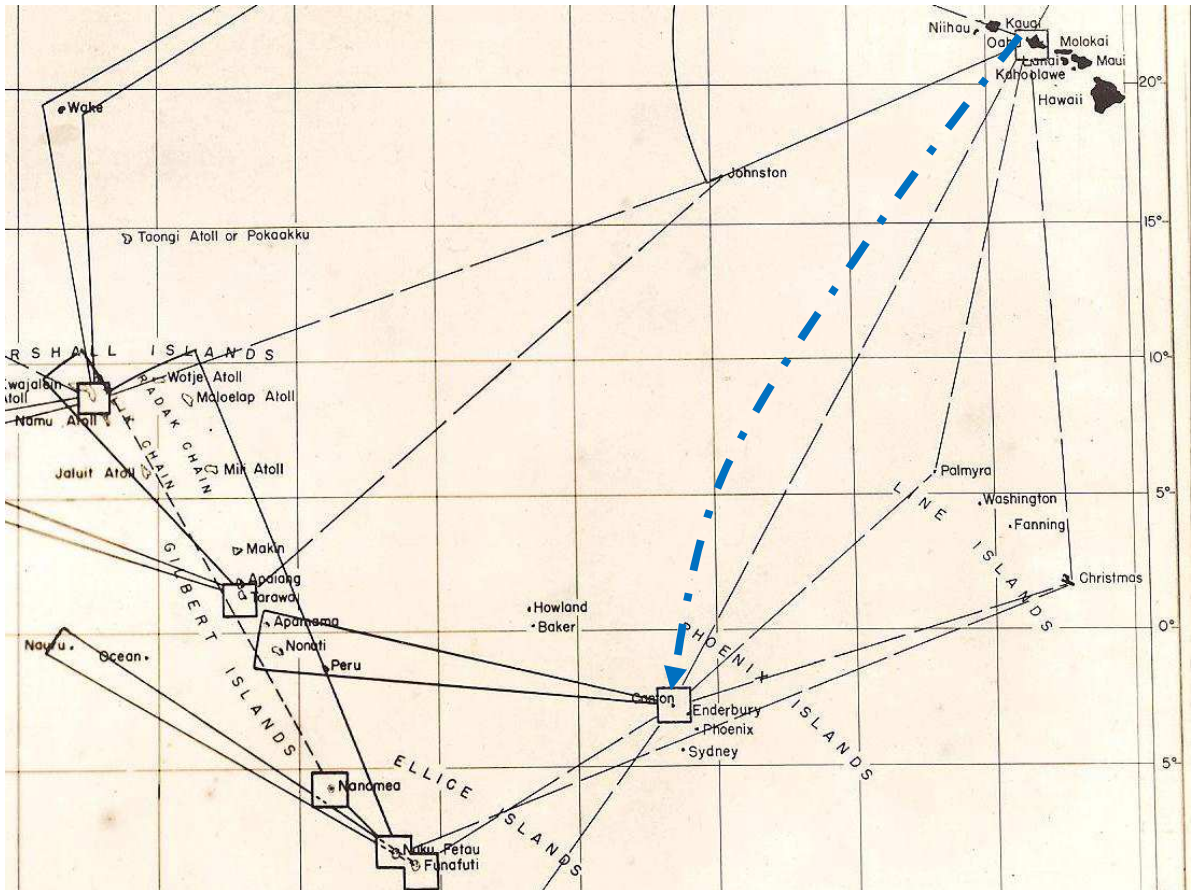


Fig. 154. Canton
 Much of the southern part of the lagoon is also cumbered by coral. Based on: (1) Admiralty chart no. 184; (2) E. H. Bryan Jr., *American Polynesia*, p. 52 (Honolulu, 1941).

³ Departure and Arrival Report, dated 18 April 1943

Our crew at that time consisted of me, Kurz (P), Clutter (CP), Doxaras (N), Washburn (B), Lodge (E), Harmon (AE), Erickson (R), Richards (AR), MacFarlane (Arm G.), and Wilson (G).

WAR DEPARTMENT
AAF
Form No. 23
(Revised Jan. 27, 1941)

Flight Identification
No. 107952

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL REPORT

(Pilot will complete necessary data on solid lines only)

OPERATIONS OFFICE A. T. C. Operations DATE 4/18/43

ADDRESS A. P. O. 914
(Communications channels—Circuit numbers)

B-24D 101
(Airplane model) (Serial number) (Home station)

NAME AND RANK OF CREW AND OTHER OCCUPANTS

1. Kurz, P.

2. Clutter, CP.

3. Lodge, E.

4. Erickson, R.

To Funafuti via Direct at 8000
(Route) (Altitude)

To _____ via _____ at _____
(Route) (Altitude)

To Funafuti via _____ at _____
(Destination) (Route) (Altitude)

17:30 10 hrs. 165
(Proposed take-off time) (Estimated time en route) (Hours of fuel aboard)

Walls - 11000
(Alternate airport—for instrument flight only)

kc 4595 kc 6200 6500 Voice kc _____
(Transmitting frequencies)

Receiver only No radio

REMARKS: Cleared from Canton to Funafuti

I have read PIF

Thorough consideration has been given by the pilot to the NECESSARY MAPS, EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT, NOTICES TO AIRMEN, and WEATHER CONDITIONS affecting the proposed flight. The pilot is familiar with local flight rules and regulations and those of the Civil Aeronautics Administration.

WEATHER: C N FORECAST FOR ROUTE (E. T. E. plus two hours): Forecast in separate folder

WINDS ALOFT: _____ at _____; _____ at _____; _____ at _____
(Best altitude+2,000 feet) (Best altitude) (Best altitude-2,000 feet)

(Signature of weatherman) _____ (Signature of pilot) _____ Command pilot Senior pilot Pilot

Flight plan submitted to: A. T. C. Operations (Control station) _____ (Time) _____ Clearance authority (not required for command and senior pilots)

Approval received: _____ (Time) _____ (Signature) _____

Take-off reported by: Cpl. Edwards To Crypto.
(Crewman) (Operations)

Take-off _____ Message sent by: Crypto _____
(Time) (Time)

ARRIVAL RECORD: _____ (Time and date of arrival) _____ (Line crewman's signature)

_____ (Stations to be notified) _____ (Desired time and date of departure)

_____ (Next intended stop) Gasoline Oil _____
(Services required)

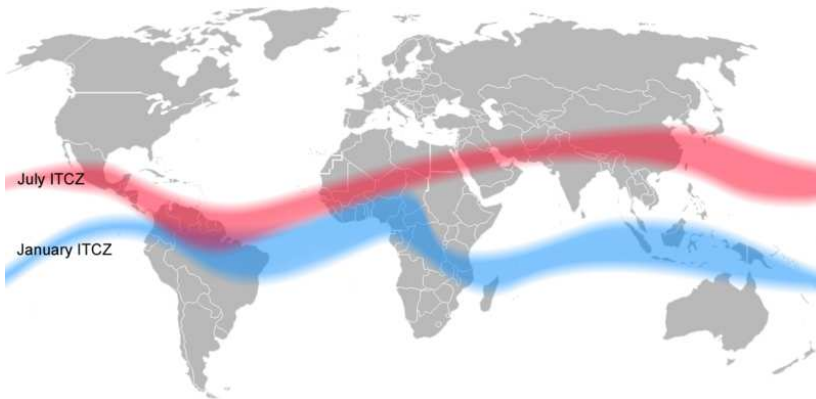
_____ (Where pilot can be reached at this station)

THIS COPY TO BE GIVEN TO PILOT. Pilot will complete "Arrival Record" and present to line crewman meeting the arriving airplane, for his information. Line crewman will then forward immediately to the operations office. Home station will be notified in the event of an overnight stop.

16-25388-1 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

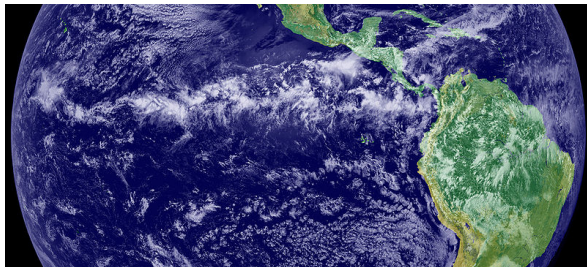
The morning of April 17, 1943, on the island of Oahu, I woke to a typical blue sky and lots of sunshine. We had only been overseas a month and a half and now we were to be introduced to combat. Twenty-four planes in all (ten planes from Wheeler Field) would fly to Canton Island in the Phoenix group (some 1800 miles) and then fly to Funafuti in the Ellice group (700 miles) from where we would make our strikes.

We took off in the morning with a beautiful, clear sky heading south. As the hours passed and we approached the equator we could see a wall of weather ahead. It was dark and uninviting and towering to perhaps 40,000 feet. It is a bad weather zone



called the "doldrums"⁴ and remains there to varying degrees, moving north of the equator during our summer and then south in winter.

We had been flying at 8,500 feet and knew that we



had to get thru this to make our stop at Canton. Flying became a bit rough as we penetrated the wall and after some time our air speed started to drop. I put the nose of the plane down and dropped 10° of flaps. Air speed continued to drop nearing stall.

Our rate of climb indicator finally pegged out at the bottom showing we were going down over 1,500 feet/minute. Our altimeter however indicated we were climbing at a high rate. In what seemed like a long time we finally broke out of this pattern at over 12,000 feet into a broken scud cloud formation and in a nose down attitude. Apparently

⁴ The Doldrums, also called the "equatorial calms", is a nautical term for the ITCZ (intertropical convergence zone), with special reference to the light and variable nature of the winds. It affects areas of the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean that are within the Intertropical Convergence Zone, a low-pressure area around the equator, where the prevailing winds are calm. The low pressure is caused by the heat at the equator, which makes the air rise and travel north and south high in the atmosphere, until it subsides again in the horse latitudes. Some of that air returns to the Doldrums through the trade winds. This process can lead to light or variable winds and more severe weather, in the form of heavy squalls, thunderstorms and hurricanes.

we had gotten into a violent updraft. It is hard to imagine a plane of that size and weight (about 30 tons) being pushed up by the weather.

While going thru training we were constantly advised to “believe your instruments” rather than believe how it feels to you “by the seat of your pants”. In this case however it is more like “which instrument are you to believe?”

After getting the plane straightened out, the rest of the trip to Canton was un-eventful.

I spoke to some of the other pilots if they had experienced anything like that and none had. I guess it was “just my day”.

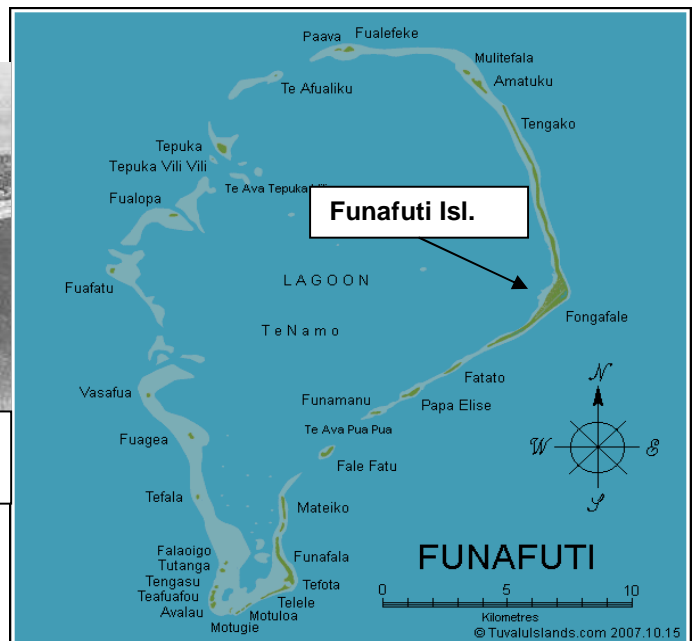
After an overnight stay on Canton, we proceeded the next day to Funafuti where we would set up shop in preparation for the up coming missions.



Canton Island's lone palm tree



Fongafale Isl.-Funafuti Atoll view to West, late 1943.



The April 1943 Mission Illustrations



Landing approach view of Funafuti airfield on Fongafale (Funafuti Atoll, Tuvalu) from northeast. 1944 Life Magazine collection.

Planes landing at Funafuti from Canton Island on 18 April 1943. B-24D #42-40072 pilot James R. Irby taxis after arrival. (USAAF)



Planes closely parked together at Funafuti due to limited space. B-24D #42-40072 (Irby) on right. THE GREEN HORNET (#42-40101 (Kurz) is possibly the plane in the middle. (USAAF)





Crew arrived on plane # 42-40073 (no name) 18 April 1943. (#9 USAAF)

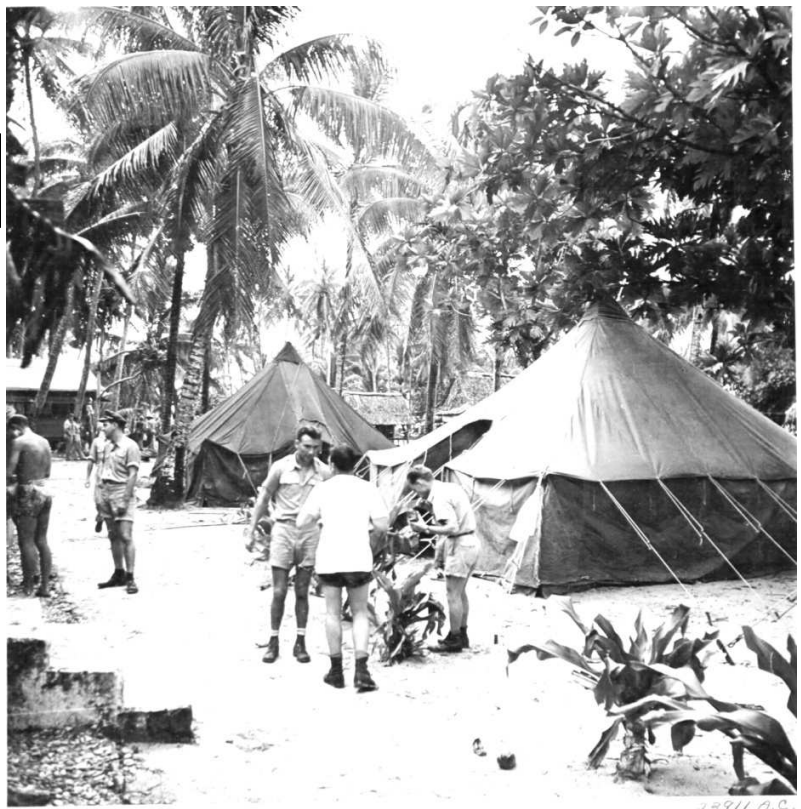


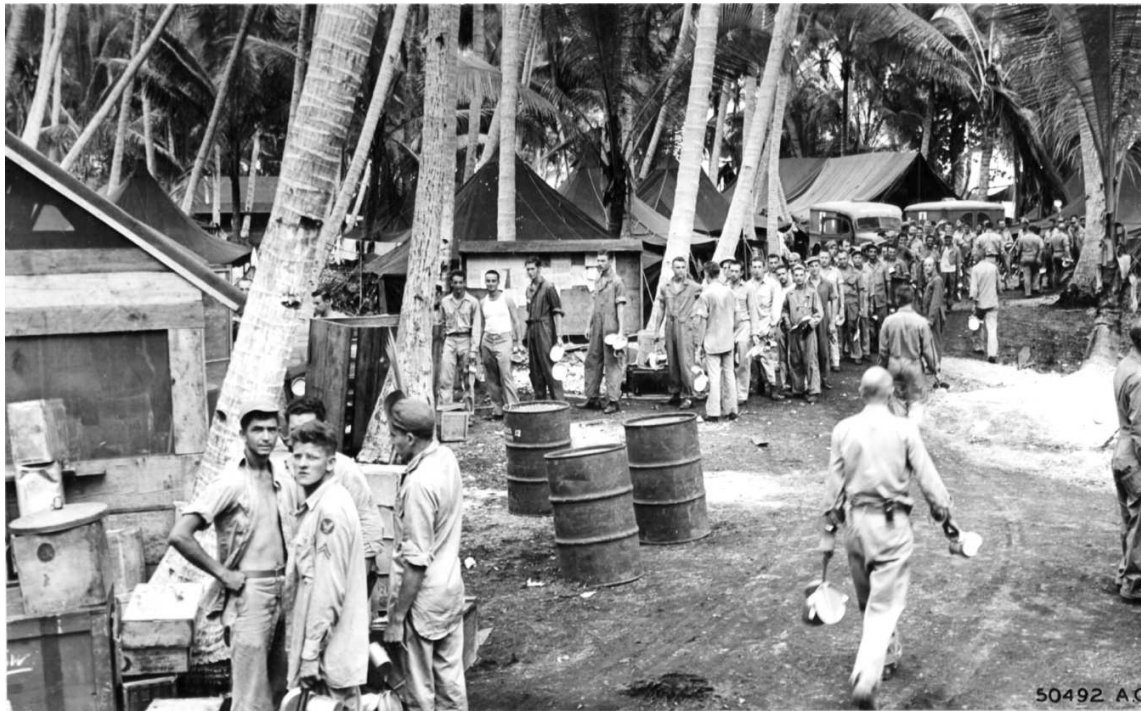
Crew from #42-40073 taken to quarters area in native village on Funafuti. (#10 USAAF)



Crews being assigned to quarters near the native village. (#11 USAAF)

Typical tent quarters for air crews. (#12 USAAF)



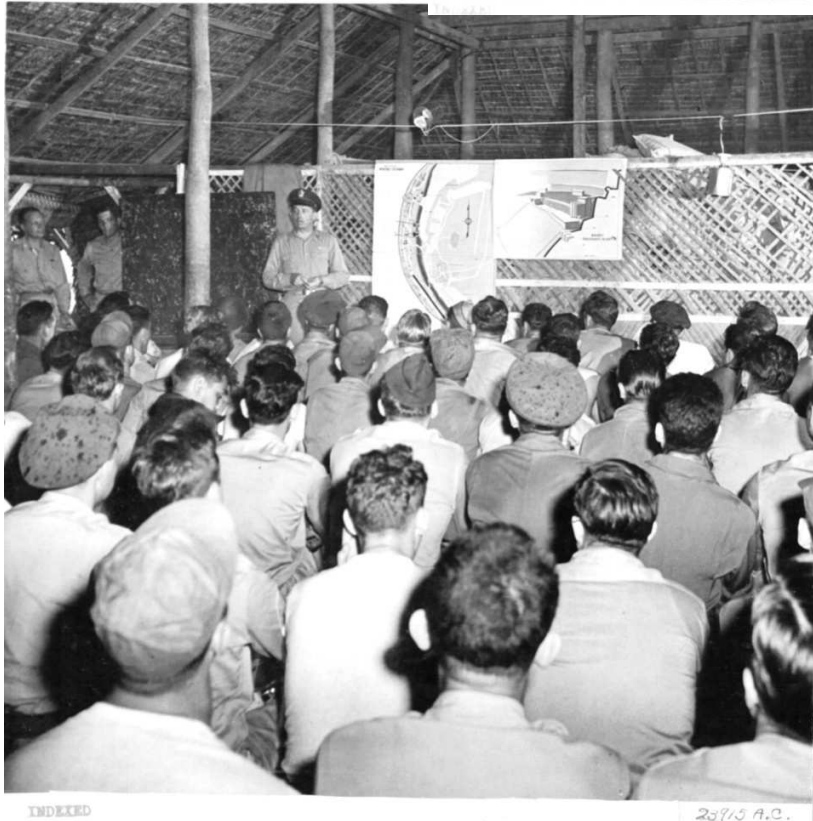


Chow line on Funafuti. (This picture could have been from a later mission.) (USAAF)

AF officers ate from mess kits. Meals were prepared by Marines. The native village is visible in the background. (#17 USAAF)



Briefing Hut. (#73 USAAF)



General Hale giving briefing before Nauru raid. Plan and topographic view in background. (USAAF)



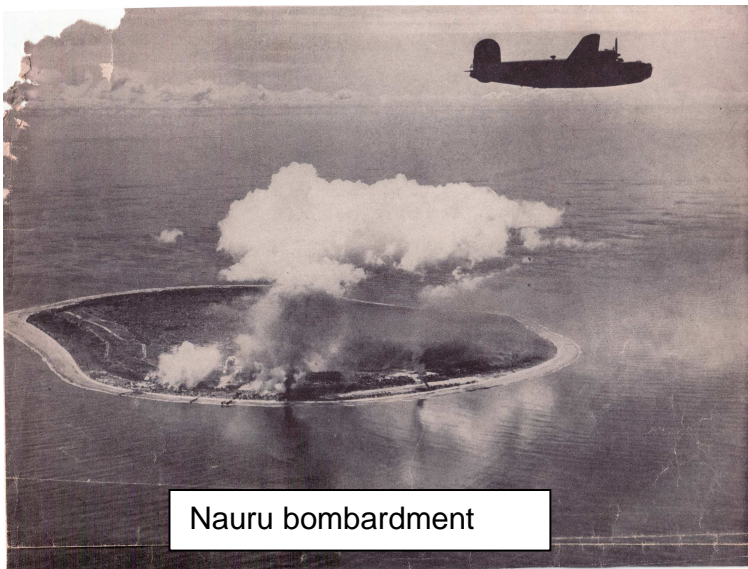
Showing the lights of several B-24s taking off in early morning for the raid on Nauru Island (used in the June 1943 issue of "Impact". Labeled as 21 April 1943. (USAAF)

Notes:

1. Most of these images are from the USAAF archives and displayed on www.footnote.com. The number shown refers to the Nauru bombing raid series.
2. Dates and times are shown local. GCT (Greenwich time) is 12 hours earlier. Thus, the Nauru bombing was shown on the photos as 20 April 43 23:00 GCT which was 21 April.
3. Life magazine published an article and photos of this raid in its 5 July 1943 issue.

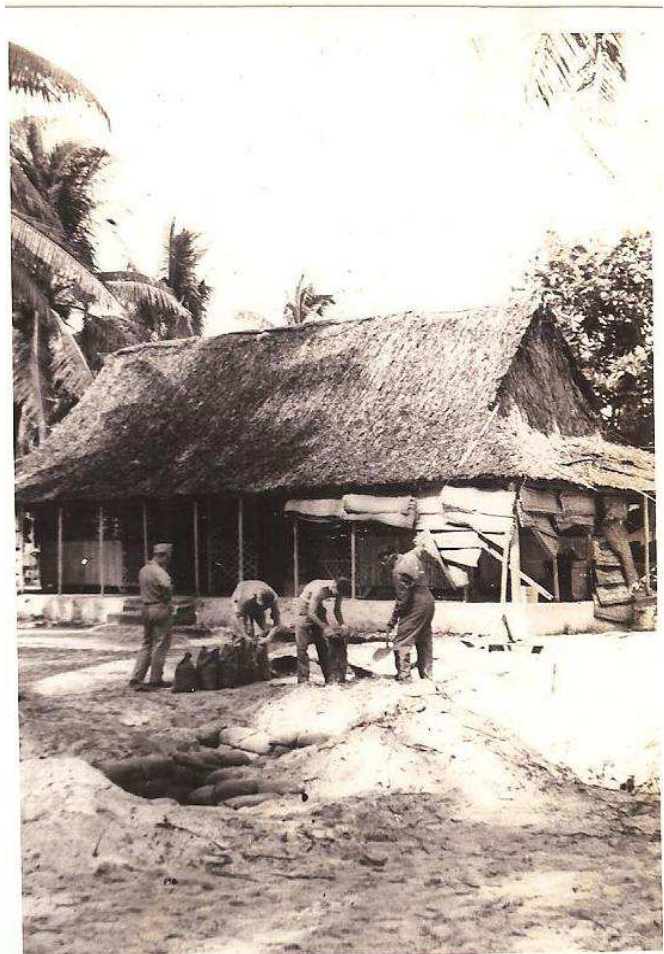


Nauru 20 April 1943 (GMT) Mission – explosions at North end of airfield and phosphate plant #1 (US Air Force Archives) 21 April 1943 local time.



The Nauru Mission was a daylight one, one with some difficulty over the target but also “one by the books”. The bombing evidentially stirred up a hornets nest so that the next AM around 3:20 the Japs came down in twin engine “Betty” bombers and exacted quite a toll. Under a bright full moon they hit us and hit us hard. First of all we had little or no defense. There were no fighters and perhaps one or two AA guns further up the island.

We were billeted in tents and sleeping on cots with mosquito nets covering. The area was close to a white coral native church (a good aiming point for bombing) and a thatched roof, open air enclosure that we used for our briefing. As I recall, I was asleep not far from the briefing area with my clothes draped over the netting. No alarm was given other than the noise of the Jap planes. Someone yelled “Japs” and I got up wearing only my under shorts and taking enough time to put on my shoes and grab my helmet and gas mask went looking for shelter. The natives had been digging holes to plant palm trees so I landed in one only to find several guys already in the hole. I managed to get in not worrying about any rats or crabs that might be there. Soon the hole filled with P. P. Turner (the executive officer) and others and finally an old S-2 (Major Marsalek) who could not get completely in and was lying on the top of the pile.



Digging foxholes

A string of bombs was dropped further up the island but they were walking down closer to our area near the runway. After that, another string went down the runway catching several of our planes, one of which took a direct hit, fully loaded with 12-500 lb. bombs and a full load of gas. There was a gas truck close by and when it all went up, tore quite a hole in the coral. I can remember looking up out of the hole and seeing the truck



Wreckage of B-24 SN 42-40089 W. Schmidt Pilot(USAAF photo)

burning and tumbling end over end what looked like several hundred feet in the air.



The natives, being aware that we were under attack, went into the church. When our Armorer gunner “Packy” MacFarlane saw this, he got out of his foxhole and ran into the church to disperse the natives. (The church being white would make a good point of aim for the Jap bombardiers). He got them out none too soon, for the next string of bombs hit the church! It was completely

destroyed. A bomb also hit a truck under which our radio operator (Erickson) was hiding. He was killed outright. I don't know where our tail gunner (O. T. Wilson) was hiding, but found out later that morning that he had been killed also. To make matters worse, our engineer and assistant engineer (Lodge and Harmon) were severely injured during the attack and were flown to Samoa on a medivac



plane that morning when it got to be daylight. One of the strings of bombs that hit the church hit about 30 feet from our foxhole. Major Marselek was killed outright with most of his face blown away. Additionally, everyone else in our hole had some sort of injury (mostly due to concussion).

Before taking off for the raid on Tarawa (23 Apr.), an unexploded "daisy cutter" bomb was found directly behind our plane, so that we could not start the engines in that location for fear that the vibration would set off the bomb. Instead we were pulled out of our parking area to another that would be safe. I don't know what was done about that bomb!

The aftermath of the bombing was utter carnage and confusion that I cannot describe. On going over to my cot to get my clothes on, I found that my cot, tent, netting, and clothes were torn to shreds by shrapnel and completely unusable. You cannot image the mess. I walked around much of that morning in just shoes and under shorts, and I have no recollection of how I became dressed in order to fly the mission to Tarawa.



With the loss of 4 of the crew I do not know who made up the crew for the Tarawa mission. However, in recent years I was contacted by a Mike Beaty calling from Australia, whose father (Walter C. Beaty S# 36071091 full name and SN from:

<http://www.missingaircrew.com/307/beaty.asp>), in another squadron was on the 2nd mission in June '43 and was killed. His father was also down with us on the April '43 mission. He was a radio operator, and the plane he was assigned to was blown up during the attack. He (Mike) found out that his father replaced our RO (Erickson) on the Tarawa mission. Others I cannot account for.



Tarawa – Betio Island (detail right) during a daylight raid – not the night raid described on 23 April 1943. The detail photo shows the heavy fortifications on land and in the water. (HTK collection)



The mission to Tarawa was scheduled for the next day – originally intended as a daylight raid. General Hale decided that we had better shorten the time at Funafuti, in case of another Jap raid, and fly the raid that night. What I specifically recall is that in taking off for a formation flight I started following a star thinking it to be a plane ahead. The co-pilot (Clutter) said, “What are you doing?” While watching instruments, etc. I had lost track of where the last plane was.

Flying night formation is a bit scary since there is a timed procedure for take off and getting into formation. Flying is by staying below the plane ahead and watching the hot exhaust of the 4 superchargers. Going thru clouds and losing sight becomes hectic; you hope the plane ahead holds altitude and course.



Debrief of crews returning from Tarawa on Funafuti. The outline of Betio Island is visible on the map. (USAAF photo)

At the target I recall having some “flak” but do not think anyone was hit. On getting back to Funafuti in AM daylight we were told that the mission to Ocean Island was cancelled and that we were to get out of there as soon as possible back to Canton.

In August 1987 at a 11th BG(H) reunion at Green Bay, Michigan I decided to look up “Packy” MacFarlane after the reunion. He was from Houghton, MI. MacFarlane (*awarded Air Medal*) was never given any (*other*) recognition for his actions in saving the natives who were in the church. He was the oldest of the crew (35) and handled the ball turret, and loading of bombs and ammo. I looked up his sister from an old passenger list that I kept listing next of kin from when we went down into the forward area. We found her and were told that he passed away around 1950. I just had to tell her the story of “Mac” and his concern for the natives.

I don’t recall how many Navy, Seabees or Marines were killed but I do know that of the approximately 300 men from the 307th Bomb Group, 7th AF, and from Bomber Command that took part in this operation, 6 were killed (2 of our crew) and 25 were injured (3 of our crew, including myself). At least one plane was destroyed; however, I don’t recall how many other planes were damaged. (*one plane in previous photo S#42-40089*



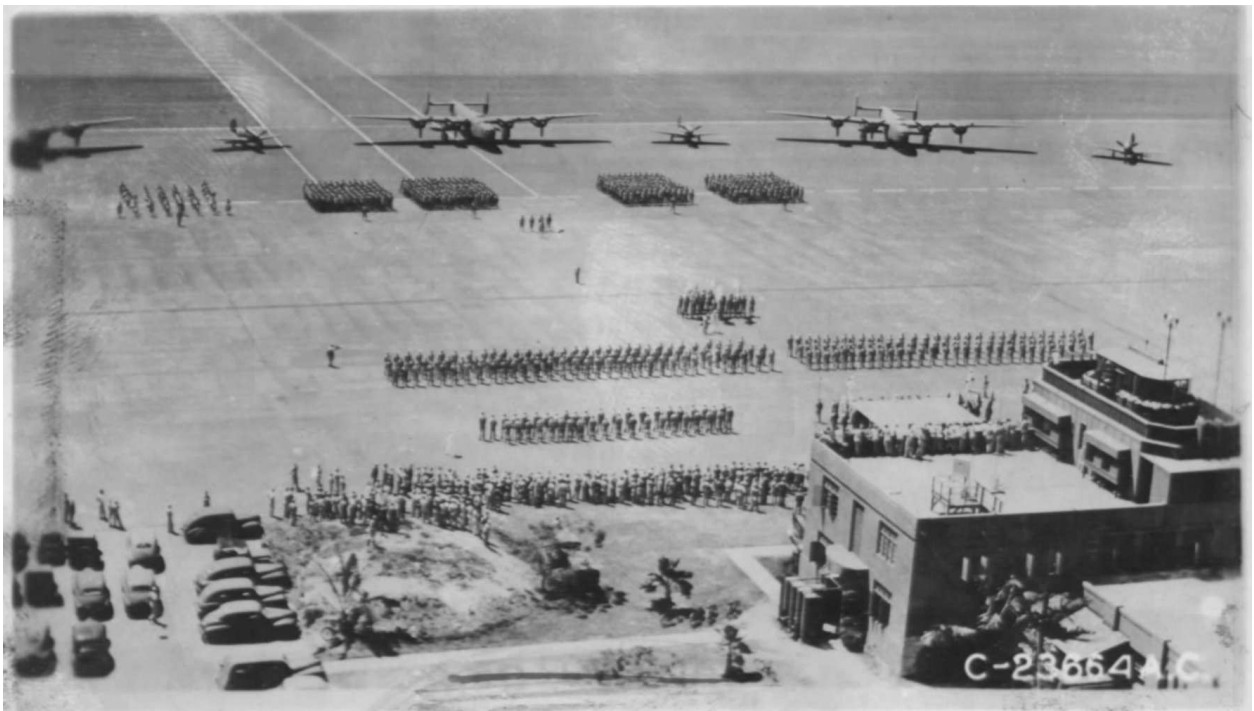
Sexy Sue The Mother of Ten SN 42-40078 destroyed on Funafuti by bombing 22 April 1943. (USAAF photo)

condemned for salvage 5-24-43, also destroyed S#42-40078 “Sexy Sue Mother of Ten” Hopkins’ crew – this was the first of four planes with that name.) The mission to Ocean Island was cancelled and when we got back from Tarawa, we gassed

up and took off for Canton Island, landing there at night. I remember the landing at Canton was really a good one because the crew didn't even know we were on the ground. The next day, we flew back to Wheeler Field.

About a week after getting back to base, a ceremony was held at Hickam Field recognizing our mission down under.

Commendations and medals were handed out and the name of the day was Admiral Nimitz who first congratulated Gen. Hale and Gen. Landon, and from there on down the line.



Formation at Hickam Field for commendations related to the attacks on Nauru and Tarawa. (USAAF photo)

I was restricted in flying during May till the injury healed, after which, I resumed flying. The total distance flown from start to finish was in excess of 8,000 miles.

Of the total of 24 planes that went down under 22 hit Nauru. After the Japs hit us 17 were ready but only 12 hit Tarawa.

On page 26 of "Grey Geese Calling" with 7th AF, again, the sentence reads, "Direct hits were scored on fuel tanks and barracks areas, Jap retaliation was stiff, and Funafuti came in for a strong workout." It hardly scratches the surface of what really took place!

Rohwer, Jurgen; Chronology of the War at Sea 1939-1945 The Naval History of World War II, 2005 (6th) edition. London. p. 246, 22 April 1943. Japanese land-based aircraft from 755 Kokutai attack Funafuti and destroy 2 B-24s and damage 5 others.