

879 BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, VERY HEAVY



MISSION

LINEAGE

879 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy constituted, 19 Nov 1943

Activated, 20 Nov 1943

Inactivated, 16 Feb 1946

STATIONS

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 20 Nov 1943

Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 1 Dec 1943

Clovis AAFld, NM, 11 Feb 1944

Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 8 Apr-2 Jul 1944

Isley Field, Saipan, 22 Sep 1944-Nov 1945

March Field, CA, Nov 1945-16 Feb 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

499 Bombardment Group, 20 Nov 1943-16 Feb 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-17, 1944

B-29, 1944-1946

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan
Western Pacific

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
Nagoya, Japan, 23 Jan 1945
Japan, 22-28 Apr 1945

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Combat in Western Pacific, 24 Nov 1944-14 Aug 1945

Luck persisted in keeping Tokyo intact when the two Wings struck on 19 February. The target was hidden under a dense layer of clouds as one hundred fifty B-29s roared overhead. Unable to be certain of the primary, the urban area was decided upon as the secondary target. Despite the cloud cover, the flak was accurate and effective. The enemy fighters arrived as usual and they too were effective. The bombers did well in fighting their way in and out of the target and accounted for many fighters. Six B-29s were lost in the encounter; two from the 313th Wing crash landed due to battle damage, and four from the 73rd Wing, the 499th B. G. lost one of their aircraft over the target due to a Kamakazi ramming. This was V49-5220, Lt. L. Nickolson and crew of the 877th Sqdn. (The aircraft was from the 879th Sqdn. and on loan to the 877th for the strike.)

This raid was so successful that a second maximum effort was mounted only two days later, 11 March. Nagoya was the target and two square miles of the city were burned out by the 300 bomber force. The 499th lost V45-4753. Lt. L. Thompson and crew of the 879th Sqdn. They were the first from the 499th to be downed in the night fire raids.

Still another Wing mission sallied forth to Tokyo, Target 357, on 12 April with a fighter escort. When it was all over, recon reported 63% of the factory roof was damaged, but it was still in operation amid all the ruins. It seemed the old nemesis was impossible to conquer. Tokyo wasn't through and the next day, 13 April, another mission was scheduled. This was a three Wing fire raid. The results were good, eleven square miles of the city was burned. Tokyo was now a ravaged city. The 499th B. G. paid heavily this time. Two B-29s were hit over the target and went down. V23-4644, Capt. W. Lattimer, 878th Sqdn. and V52-5344, Lt. D. Rubenstein, 879th Sqdn. were the victims. One member of Capt. Lattimer's crew, CFC Gunner Sgt. Vance bailed out and spend the rest of the war as a P.O.W.

The first commander of the Squadron was Lt. Col. Walter E. Chambers, who commanded from activation of the unit until transfer to Group Headquarters as Deputy Group Comdr. on 8 June '45. He was relieved by Maj. Hudson Scheiber from Group Operations. He was promoted to Lt. Col. soon after transfer and in turn was relieved by Sqdn. Operations Officer Maj. Charles Fishburne, Jr., who was originally in the 878th Sqdn.

Maj. Fishburne commanded for the remainder of the war. Other staff officers assigned at the beginning of the operation were: Maj. Claude Simmons-Exec. Officer, Maj. Lewis Riley-Operations Officer, (later Maj. Fishburne), Capt. James Cooper-Supply Officer and Lt. Glenn Bruer-Intelligence Officer.

Combat losses for this squadron were exceptionally low. Only two original crews and no replacement crews were lost, for a loss rate of 8.81%, the lowest in the 73rd Wing or probably any other bomber Wing. This loss rate is phenomenal for bombers flying over water on missions of from twelve to sixteen hours or more duration. The following statement regarding this low loss rate was extracted from the records. "In 139 combat missions, only 19 men were lost; this is equal to one and three quarters crews. This is attributed to efficient maintenance, high experience level of combat crews, and the 'esprit de corps' of the entire organization". The statement regarding the one and three quarters crews lost, is taken to indicate that only eight men were aboard one of the aircraft when it was lost. This is very likely as the Thompson crew was lost on the Nagoya fire raid of 11 March '45 and the loss was recorded as eight crewmembers. It is possible that three of the men could have been recovered, but more likely that three of the gunners were not required for this night fire raid.

The 879th lost one aircraft due to ditching and that was the Capt. Guice Tudor crew flying 48-4679 on the first mission to Tokyo-357 on 24 November '44. On return from this mission the aircraft ran out of fuel and ditched north of Saipan. All members of the crew were recovered by the Navy Destroyer U.S.S. Swanson on 25 November '44. Two other aircraft were lost by the squadron but not charged as a loss to them since they were on loan to other squadrons. The first of these aircraft, V50-3447 "Unbriago-Dats My Boy" was on loan to the 878th Sqdn. and was ditched by the Silvester crew. All crewmembers were also recovered by the Navy. The other aircraft, V49-5222 "Super Wabbit", was on loan to the 877th Sqdn. and was lost on the mission of 19 February '45, when the Nicholson crew went down over Target 357-Tokyo.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

Created: 29 Jul 2020

Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

499 Bombardment Group, Very Heavy. Historical Aviation Album. Temple City, AZ. 1981.