



SPECIAL REPORT - WEEKEND IN SUICHAN
By 1ST LT. WM. W. HOLDERBY
793rd BOMB SQUADRON

On the Formosa mission of October 14th 1944, Capt. Hal Meints and Crew in "Lassie" developed engine trouble on the return trip over the China coast. Two bombs were hung up in the bomb bay, which "subtle as an avalanche" Schultz and Lt. McCann tried to release as #1 engine gulped and swallowed a valve. Hal immediately pressed his calloused feathering finger to the button, but nothing happened. The ship began to vibrate like a trip hammer. Capt. Hal turned to Schultz, who by this time was back in his Engineer's seat, but no longer reading the "Case of the Lucky Legs" and asked how much gas was left. Henry casually replied, as he calmly bit his cigarette in two, "we would have to set down someplace quick or bail out."



**The Story of The "General Billy Mitchell Group"
468th Bomb Group (VH) – From the CBI to the Marianas**



Crew of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress "LASSIE" of the 793rd Bomb Squadron, 468th Bomb Group, beside the plane at an XX Bomber Command base in China. Back row, left to right:
Lt. Francis McCann of Maplewood, New Jersey, bombardier
Lt. William C. Shirer of Lehighton, Pennsylvania, co-pilot
Capt. Harold L. Heints of Grand Mound, Iowa, pilot
Lt. Willard W. Holderby of Byron, Oklahoma, navigator
F/O Henry F. Schultz of New Haven, Connecticut, engineer
Front row, left to right:
M/Sgt. Edward H. Lehman of Eagle Bend, Minnesota, crew chief
T/Sgt. William Egan of Bridgeport, Connecticut, senior gunner
S/Sgt. Glenn R. Muir of Union, New York, radio operator
S/Sgt. Thomas J. Murray of Newburg, New York, left gunner
Sgt. Edwin L. Sullins of West Red Rock, Oklahoma, right gunner
S/Sgt. William M. Foley of Ridge Spring, South Carolina, tail gunner

(Source: National Archives)

We were just now about abeam of Suichan Air Field in eastern China and took a heading for it. The charts showed the field to have a very long runway, but we didn't want to land unless we had to, as the field was about 120 miles behind the Jap lines running down to Kweilin. Over the soupy undercast at 15,000 feet we made radio contact. The field had homing but no beam and mountains on all sides of it, towering to 7,000 feet.

The Suichan tower gave us the instrument landing procedure, including a letdown at 120 MPH, so Bill figured out their own letdown procedure and told the tower we were coming in as soon as we had gotten rid of two bombs. S/Sgt. Bill Egan and FO Schultz had fastened 3 seat belts together and were lying on the catwalk freezing while Mac kept the doors open at their request. They pulled the bombs loose and allowed both belts and bombs to fall harmlessly. We made the "Sweatblood" let-down through those mountains on the radio compass and at about 1,000 feet came out in the clear over a river bed which adjoins the field. We landed on three engines after being warned by the tower not to fire at fighter protection, which would cover our approach. No fighters followed us through the soup and we landed safe and sound.

The CO and Hal decided to camouflage the ship, so the 3 Officers and 10 Enlisted Men on the airfield and our complete Crew, with the help of 100 coolies furnished by the resident engineer, painted the ship from tip to stern with mud: covered the wings with rice straw and broke up the lines of the ship with poles and bamboo webbing. The CO later told us that the Japs would get the ship anyway if it cleared up. Our Crew accounted for almost as many white men as the permanent Field Personnel, who treated us graciously and wined and dined us as best they could for the next 6 days. That evening, as the Officers were opening their grape wine for us and apologizing for not having flight whiskey, we heard over the radio from Frisco by short-wave that two B-29s of the Formosa raid were "down and safe in eastern China Air Fields". We were a little perturbed at this for the Japs would surely be looking now. For the next 6 days we worked on the ship, ran like hell or rode 17 miles in a Jeep (as we did one day) when the "Jingbow" Chinese air raid alarm was sounded. Fighters from nearby fields were here to cover us and took off about the time we were manning the Lewis guns.

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(From the collection of Kay Lyn Beauchamp – granddaughter of W. W. Holderby)



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The field with barracks, hot and cold showers, fine food and flush toilets (which Bill Shirer and S/Sgt. Tom Murray preflighted right from the start) gave us a new slant on the airfields in China after the conditions at A-7. Under all the runways were 500 lb.

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demolition bombs ready to be blown at any moment, and our ship was parked directly over one of these bombs.

We repaired our ship, with the aid of Crew Chief M/Sgt. Eddie Lehman, who was brought in along with parts by a C-46, and were back in A-7 after 6 fine days spent in a “bit of Chinese heaven” after what could have been a very terrible calamity for us.