



THE FLIGHT OF B-29 42-6235
The story of the Boyce C. Anderson Crew
By Dr. Yates C. Smith

Nine B-29's in the 795th Bomb Squadron 468th Bomb Group had left Smoky Hill Army Air Field for overseas. There was one B-29 that had not arrived from the factory. It was 42-6235 belonging to Capt. Boyce C. Anderson, Crew commander. His crew consisted of the following men:

- 2nd Lt. Frederick N. Corvinus, Co-Pilot
- 2nd Lt. Richard H. Stillons, Bombardier-Navigator
- 2nd Lt. Robert G. Feldmann, Flight Engineer
- 2nd Lt. Charles E. Moresi, Navigator-Bombardier
- Sgt. Eugene S. Sommerville, Radio Operator
- Sgt. Paul R. Hunt, Left Gunner
- Sgt. William C. Hubbard, Right Gunner
- Sgt. John N. Pletcher, Tail Gunner
- Sgt. Alexander D. Coan, CFC Gunner
- Master Sgt. Edward F. Hilbert, Crew Chief

The reason I am listing the entire crew is that there is a story to be told, and it should be recorded.

The crew received the plane at the Marietta, GA assembly plant. It was reported they had problems with mysterious smoke coming from the engineer's panel at Marietta before they could take off from Salina. When the problem was solved, the crew returned to Smoky Hill Army Air Field for a shakedown flight and to load equipment. They left Salina, Kansas on April 16th 1944 (Sunday) at 14:30, one week after Easter, and headed for Presque Isle, Maine.



Flight Engineer's panel in a B-29
Photo from the National Archives



After take-off, the main landing gear on the right side did not retract all the way, and Bill Hubbard advised the Flight Engineer of this. Lt. Feldmann, the flight engineer, advised Capt. Anderson of the problem. After a couple of tries, all of the landing gear came up although the warning lights stayed on.

They were then directed to fly to Wright-Patterson Air Field (Dayton, Ohio) to have the problem checked. They arrived, and made a successful landing at 19:50, where they remained overnight. A retraction test and inspection were performed by the Base ground crew mechanics. The crew was admonished by the Base officials that the plane had no problems with the landing gear system, and the crew did not want to fly combat. Base officials told the crew that they were searching for excuses not to continue on their overseas flight.



Wright Air Field, Dayton OH – 1930
From the ASC History Office, Wright Patterson Air Force Base

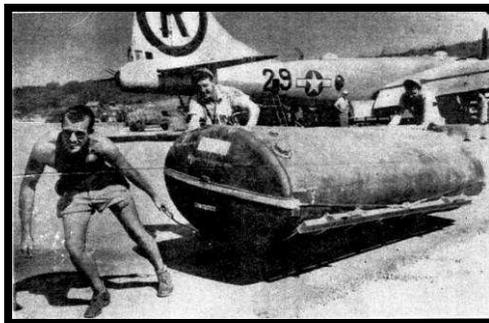
The crew departed Wright-Patterson Army Air Field on Tuesday April 18th at 10:06, and arrived over Presque Isle, Maine at 16:42. On the final approach for landing, Paul Hunt called the Flight Engineer, and said, “We aren’t going to land, are we Lieutenant? The left gear isn’t down.” Lt. Feldmann advised Capt. Anderson, who immediately indicated a “pull up, and go around”. Capt. Anderson retracted the landing gear. The right main and nose gear came up, and they began circling the field, making numerous attempts to lower the landing gear by both the regular and emergency procedures.

The crew was in constant contact with the tower, a Colonel in Washington, D.C., and the Engineering staff at Boeing Plant in Wichita, KS. A number of suggestions were made, but it was obvious to Lt. Feldmann the sequence switch was locked in the “up” position. When the emergency system was used, the right main gear came down, followed by the nose gear, but bypassing the left main gear. The left main gear should have followed the right main gear down in the sequence, but the switches indicated it was already down.



This shut off the power to both the regular and emergency motors to the left main gear.

A decision was made by a Colonel in Washington that a landing should be attempted with the nose and the right main gear down after dropping the auxiliary fuel tanks from the front bomb bay. They were curious how the aircraft would behave under those conditions since at that time, no one had experienced a similar set of circumstances. It was during the circling period that an attempt was made to salvo the gas tanks in the front bomb bay. ("Salvo" means to use a lever at the bombardier's station to immediately open the bomb bay doors, and release all the bomb shackles.)



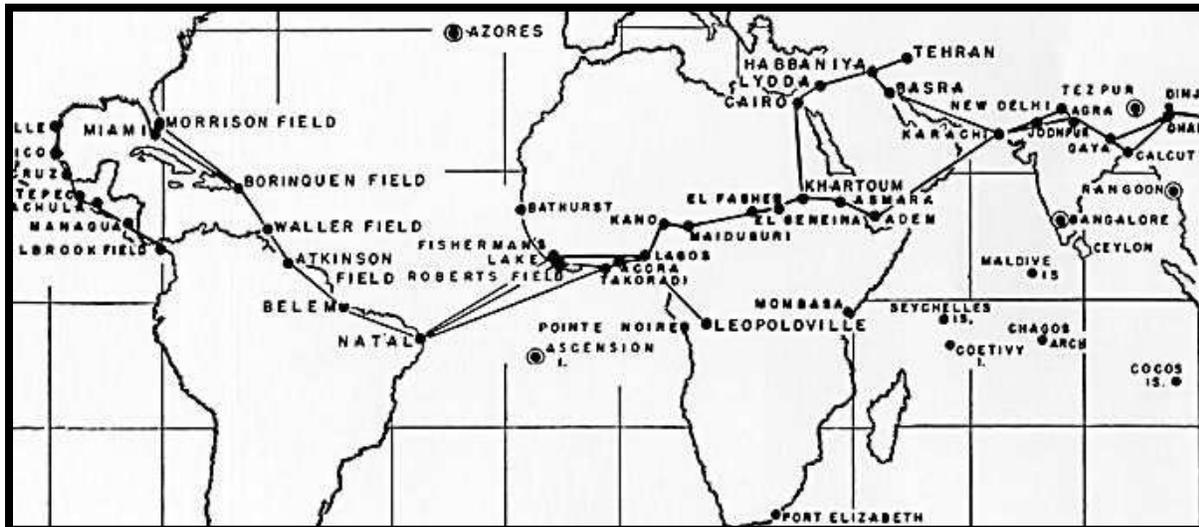
B-29 Auxiliary tank – 600+ gallons
Courtesy of Phil Crowther and the 6th Bomb Group

Due to a slight misunderstanding between the ground control advice and the flight crew, the rear bomb bay was salvoed over one of the passes to the field. It caused the platform in the rear bomb bay to be dropped right through the bomb bay doors, rather than the front bomb bay with the gas tanks. The rear bomb bay contained a spare engine, crew chief's tools, crew luggage, and the squadron supply of condoms. At that time, it was against Maine state laws for condoms to be sold or distributed. Now they had them all over the field!

At 19:48, 42-6235 made an approach to Presque Isle with the right main and nose gear down and the left main gear up. No one was injured, but considerable damage was done to the airplane. Left wing and flaps, both left engines and propellers (#1 and #2), radar dome and radar transmitter, and receiver parts housed in the radar dome, tail skid, which was planed down to nothing while emitting a 40 foot shower of sparks as it slid down the runway. There was also a general twisting and flexing of the entire aircraft frame which was to manifest itself later in leaking fuel tanks.

Repairs were made, and after 31 days, 42-6235 departed Presque Isle on May 19, 1944 (Friday) for Morrison Field, West Palm, Beach, Fla. They arrived at 20:51. Prior to every takeoff on the way overseas from West Palm Beach, across South America, Africa, and India, it was necessary to have some of the crew standing under the wings with wipe cloths to remove the oozing fuel from the joints in the lower panels, which had come out of the neoprene tanks inside. Actually, the wings were jacked up and supported. The lower panels were removed, and the rubber fuel tanks taken out, and checked at West Palm Beach, and Natal, Brazil, which naturally slowed the trip down considerably.

The Story of The "Billy Mitchell Group"
468 H-Bomb Group – From the C.B.I. to the Marianas



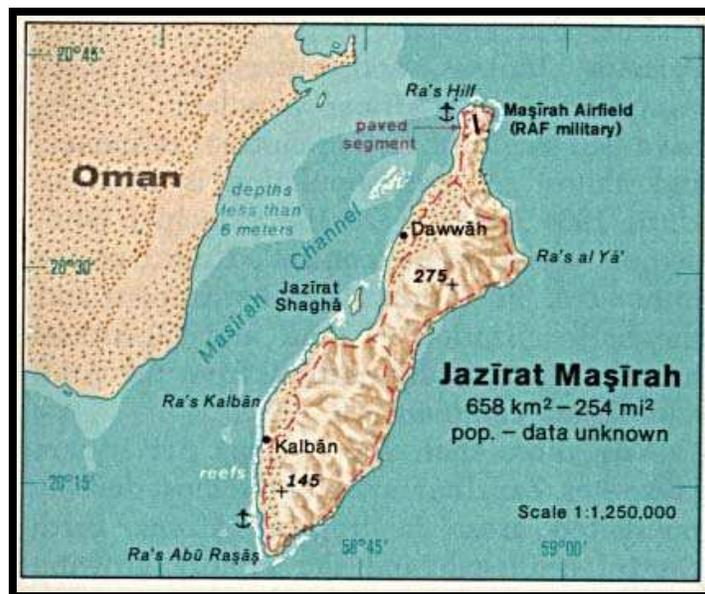
May 24th 1944 (Wednesday) - 42-6235 left Morrison Field at 10:16, and arrived at Atkinson Field, Georgetown, British Guyana. It was during this leg of the overseas flight that the front lower turret cover was lost to either lightening or static discharge.

May 25th 1944 (Thursday) - They departed Atkinson Field at 10:51, and arrived at Natal, Brazil at 19:08. That made them the first crew to cross the Equator in a B-29. It was during their four day stay at Natal that all wing tanks were again removed, and checked for leaks.

May 30th 1944 (Tuesday), 42-6235 Departed Natal, Brazil at 21:03, and arrived at Accra, Gold Coast, Africa at 09:25 on May 31st 1944 (Wednesday). They were now the first crew to cross the South Atlantic. As this was a night navigation trip, it gave Moresi, the navigator, a chance to do some night celestial navigation.

June 2nd 1944 (Friday) - Anderson and crew left Accra, Gold Coast at 18:03 for Khartoum, Sudan. They arrived at 05:25 on June 3rd 1944 (Saturday). I am sure those night flights were to take advantage of the cooler temperatures at takeoff time.

June 5th 1944 (Monday) - They left Khartoum, Sudan at 15:57 for Karachi, India. Because of the extreme heat at Khartoum, it was decided to remove the extra engine, and some of the supplies from the rear bomb bay, and ship them via the Air Transport Command to lighten the takeoff weight. Even with this load reduction, because of the extreme heat (115 degrees at 05:00) at takeoff time, it was necessary to run the engines at full power for a longer period of time, resulting in overheating. Fifteen miles from the end of the runway, they had only obtained an altitude of 50 to 100 feet over the sand dunes. Over Aden, the #3 engine swallowed a valve on the #5 cylinder, and it became necessary to feather the #3 propeller. They made a forced landing at Masirah Island, below the entrance to the Persian Gulf, at 0115 on June 6th 1944 (Tuesday).



It was not their destination, but it was where they went. This meant a night landing on 3 engines on a very short runway. Since the extra engine and spare parts had been left at Khartoum, they were somewhere en route. The Air Transport Command "Red Ball Express" transported a new replacement cylinder parts, and personnel from the depot in the United States. Flying continuously, and using 3 and 4 crews, they were there in approximately 2 days. That must have been some sort of record. Due to short runway on the Isle, it was necessary for 42-6235 to take off with less than a full load of fuel.

June 9th 1944 (Friday) - Anderson and crew departed Masirah Isle at 11:21, and arrived at Karachi at 14:12.

June 10th 1944 (Saturday) - They left Karachi at 03:27, and took the normal detour over the Taj Mahal. After viewing the Taj Mahal, they initiated a climbing power setting, when another engine was lost. This meant another 3 engine landing at Kharagpur (Camp Salua). They arrived at 09:30. Lt. Bob Feldmann was heard to make a classic remark, which we never let him forget, "Where the Hell is the Officers' Club, I need a drink," as his feet touched the ground of Mother India. I am sure that early departure was to miss the high temperature during the middle of the day.

They took 56 days, making a trip that took most crews only 20 to 21 days. That was not their fault, but it shows some of the problems experienced when a new plane was put into operation with no testing. That was the reason I thought it should have been called the 58th Test Wing, and not the 58th Bomb Wing. This is not the end of this story of 42-6235 as there was more to be told.

When they finally arrived at Kharagpur (Camp Salua), they were surprised to find a mission had already been flown to Bangkok, and another mission was in the works. After arriving at Kharagpur (Camp Salua), two engines had to be changed on the aircraft. After those engines were changed, other work was done. In about 2 weeks, they were to put in a few hours of slow time before they could carry heavy loads. After the plane returned from slow time, the engine sumps were checked for metal shavings. That was



done to see if any excessive wear occurred during the breaking in of the new engines. With Capt. Anderson at the controls, they made several practice takeoffs and landings. At that time, Capt. Anderson and Lt. Corvinus exchanged seats to allow Corvinus time as a first pilot. Up until this time, Corvinus had never landed a B-29. After Corvinus made the first landing from the pilot's seat, everything was going normally with an airspeed of about 90 MPH down the runway.

At that time, Corvinus requested Capt. Anderson in the Co-Pilot's seat to retract the flaps. This was done to prevent rocks from being thrown against the extended flaps. Capt. Anderson, being unfamiliar with riding in the Co-Pilot's seat, used the gear switch. As soon as he actuated the gear switch, 42-6235 immediately collapsed on the runway. The fire fighters arrived, and sprayed foam on the plane. The entire crew escaped out the top hatches as there was no way to escape out the nose gear or bomb bay doors. The plane was too extensively damaged for repair, and was considered a total loss. It was jacked up, gear extended, and towed to the bone yard for use as scrap parts.

I know this was a long story, but it was necessary to understand the significance of the events they encountered. From that accident, it was determined that a simple micro switch had not been installed that would not permit the gear to be retracted while the weight was on the landing gear. This was probably the only one of the B-29s they had failed to install the limit switches.

When Capt. Boyce Anderson appeared before the Flight Review Board, he admitted a simple error was made. In a very short period of time, he was promoted to Major, and was assigned a new plane. Everyone in the Squadron thought he well deserved the promotion as well as another plane.

This story was written and confirmed by Lt. Charles E. Moresi, Lt. Robert G. Feldmann, and Sgt. Alexander D. Coan.

See their crew photo on the next page.

The Story of The "Billy Mitchell Group"
468 H-Bomb Group – From the C.B.I. to the Marianas



Capt. Boyce Anderson's Crew, Salina, KS 1944

Left to right:

Boyce C. Anderson Pilot
Frederick N. Corvinus – Co-Pilot
Charles E. Moresi – Navigator-Bombardier
Richard H. Stillions – Bombardier-Navigator
Robert G. Feldman – Flight Engineer
Eugene Summerville – Radio Operator
Alexander Coan – Central Fire Control
William Hubbard – Right Gunner
Paul Hunt – Left Gunner
John Pletcher – Tail Gunner