3rd Iron Fistory & Scrap Book

History

I

In line with its far-sighted policy of building a strong and powerful Air Force, one capable of meeting the stringent requirements of the then-impending war, the Headquarters of the U.S. Army Air Corps, in the first month of the year nineteen hundred and forty-one (1941), ordered the activation of several Bombardment groups.

The history of the 3rd Antisubmarine Squadron thus dates back to the 15th day of January, 1941, date of activation of the 13th Bombardment Group(M).

The 13th Group was formed from the personnel of the 2nd and 22nd Bombardment Groups, both stationed at Langley Field, Virginia. Lt Col W. T. Larson was its first Commanding Officer.

Composing this group were the 39th, 40th, 41st, and HQ and HQSQ. Our interest is centered on the Squadron designated as the 39th Bombardment Squadron(M), for she is "our baby", (to avoid con — fusion, it may be well to note here that the 3rd Antisubmarine Sqdn. (H) was formerly designated as the 39th Bombardment Squadron (M).

Commanding the 39th for its first few weeks was 1st Lt. Edward R. Casey. Major Robert V. Johnston then took over the helm for several weeks, but, unfortunately he developed an internal malady, and was confined to the Walter Reed Hospital.

1st Lt. Raymond T. Petersen ("Big Pete"), red-headed, red-mustached, stoop-shouldered, personable Swede with a sense of humor, then became the first really active Commander that the Squadron had. "Pete" was out of West Point, loved to fly, and vowed he'd have the finest Squadron in the Air Corps.

It was in early June, 1941... the 13th Bombardment Group was moved intact to Orlando

Air Base, Orlando, Florida.

The entire Group was assigned to the Army Air Forces Combat Command, operating under the jurisdiction of the Third Air Force.

It was in August of 1941 that the 39th Bombardment Squadron (M) personnel, then numbering about eighty-five, conceived the idea of getting for themselves a distinctive and appropriate insignia. Ideas were submitted to the Squadron draftsman, drawings were made and voted upon. Far and away in the lead in the balloting, the famous — "Bat Out Of Hell" insignia was thus born. The War Department approved, and the "Bat" has stuck.

At Orlando, the Squadron was proud of its first airplanes — two B-18's and one PT-17. B-25's began to roll in around the middle of November, though, and soon the Squadron had twelve Mitchells.

Orlando was a veritable paradise until December 7, 1941...

II

When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into World War II, one of the first considerations of our War and Navy Departments was that of protection for Allied Shipping.

The German Submarine menance was a number 1 problem. Merchant vessels were being sunk, three, four, five a day. Someone had to combat those submarines; and because of it's other operations, the Navy could not favorably tackle the task alone. The Air Corps was called upon; active steps were immediately taken.

On January 19th, 1942, the 13th Bombardment Group was on the move again, this time to West-over Field, Massachusetts. We had a job to do; we were going after U-Boats.

The 13th Group was placed under the command of the 1st Bomber Command, of the 1st Air Force. It was still a Bombardment Group, but the primary objective of the Group, indeed the entire Bomber Command, was to seek out and destroy enemy submarines.

Procedures had to be worked out; training methods had to be adopted; equipment had to be experimented with, tested, standardized. It was a new type of warfare, this chasing after sub - marines with air planes. Thus, for the first few months of 1942, the 39th Bombardment Squadron soldiers were novices, playing a new game.

Our Group Commander, now full Colonel Larson, was given command of the 1st Bomber Command and promoted to Brigadier General. Lt Colonel Walter Bryte became the new Group Commanding Officer.

Special Orders Number 67, Headquarters 13th Bombardment Group (M), dated 10 April 1942 relieved Captain Petersen (promoted in March) of command of the 39th. Captain Petersen had feverishly desired service in a combat theatre, and his desires were granted.

These same Special Orders designated Captain Alfred E. Bent as the new Squadron Commander. Captain Bent had been on the 13th Group staff,

and all the boys had hoped that out of the shake-up that was taking place in all the Squadrons, the 39th would draw Captain Bent as its Commanding Officer.

He had already been tagged, in the short time that he was with the group, as the kind of an Officer who might be aggressive, smart, decisive; the kind of a man who was loyal to his soldiers, but who meant business; and to top it off, who was a "swell Joe". The boys had him tagged right - Lady Fortune still smiled on the "But Out Of Hell".

At Westover, the 39th operated with B-18's, A-29's and B-25's. The 25's became the "honeys" of the Squadron.

Just a few events took place before the "Bats" were ready for another move. Personnel had increased from eighty-five to some two hundred and fifty men; Captain Bent was promoted to Major; and Lt. Colonel John G. Fowler became the new Group Commander.

III

On July 18, 1942, the 39th packed bag and baggage once again, and headed for new territory. This time, however, the Squadron was doing a solo; that is, it was moving out alone, without the Group. In order to efficiently combat enemy submarines, Squadrons had to be placed all up and down the Eastern Coast; the idea of holding Groups together was impractical in Anti-submarine work.

The new station was just outside of the little town of Dover, Delaware. When the Squadron arrived, there was one small temporary hangar, one tarpapered building, and one barn. It looked like foreign service, but even leaking tents, no running water, or lights, no decent cooking stoves, mosquitoes as large as the 25's themselves, and mud two feet deep, proved no obstacles; the Squadron not only survived it,—but thrived it. The independence enjoyed at Dover offset the lack of facilities.

The Squadron performed its tactical missions success-

fully out of Dover. Shipping losses along the Eastern Sea Frontier were being steadily and sharply reduced, and the area patrolled by the 3 9th Bombardment Squadron showed no losses, month after month.

However, Allied shipping losses in other parts of the world were continuing; the submarine menace was still a painful thorn in the side of the Allies. To take cognizance of that fact was inescapable; to take further action was imperative.

Accordingly, there came into being, on October 17, 1942, the Army Air Forces Antisubmarine Command, under the command of Brigadier General Westside T. Larson. The Antisubmarine Command was in reality a redesignation of the old 1st Bomber Command; that is, the primary function remained the same, as did personnel. However, now there were distinct differences; the Antisubmarine Command was a separate Command, not under any Air Force; it was responsible to the Commanding

General of the Army Air Forces, but for obvious reasons was placed under the operational control of the Navy; its mission was to seek out and destroy enemy submarines, wherever they may be.

The 13th Bombardment Group was inactivated, and on November 29, 1942, the 39th Bombardment Squadron (M) was redesignated as the 3rd Anti-submarine Squadron (K). It became a part of the 25th Anti-submarine Wing.

The "But Out of Hell" flew its missions from Dover until February 27th, 1943.

R-6012

IV

Movement Order #4, Headquarters Army Air Forces, Antisubmarine Command, dated February 24, 1943, directing the 3rd Antisubmarine Squadron to a change of station was received, this to be a temporary change. The new station was to be the Army Air Base at Fort Dix, New Jersey. And so, without its Commanding Officer (for Major Bent was at Command and General Staff School), and with a feeling of regret, the 3rd pulled anchor from Dover in the early morning of February 27, and arrived at Fort Dix several hours thereafter.

During the month of May, '43, the entire flying personnel of the Squadron, plus a large cadre of maintenance men, were placed on Detached Service at the Antisubmarine Command O.T.U. in order to familiarize themselves with, and become "checked out" on, the B-24 type airplane.

In the early part of June the B-24 D's began to arrive, and the combat crews had to part with their 25's in favor

of the "Big Clunkers". Although this change was not so welcomed at first, the boys soon developed a real affection for the big "babies". After a few weeks, the Squadron had several of the camouflaged B-24's, and performed successful long range patrol missions, as well as convoy coverages and searches for survivors.

In the early part of August, rumors were rife that the Navy would soon take over all antisubmarine work. It looked as if the 3rd might soon find itself engaged in the work that the 39th had originally been designed for — bombardment. Olive drab B-24's began to arrive, and intensive bombardment training was initiated.

The 3rd Antisubmarine Squadron (K) ceased its patrol operations as of 1 September 1943. With that feeling of satisfaction that comes with a job well done, and with a glint of eagerness in their eyes, the boys of the "Bat Out of Hell" Squadron look forward to their new missions.

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