

HISTORY OF THE 69TH BOMB SQUADRON (M)

The story of the 69th Bomb. Sqdn. (M) really begins with the acquisition of B-26 aircraft in November 1941, by the 38th Bomb. Group, of which this squadron was a part. The group, composed of the 69th, 70th, and 71st Squadrons, and the 15th Reconnaissance Squadron, had until that time only seven B-18's and five PT-17's. In January 1942, the group was ordered to leave Jackson, Mississippi, where it had been stationed for several months, and the personnel departed in sections on January 17th, 18th, and 19th respectively for San Francisco, California, and overseas duty.

The enlisted men of the ground echelons were housed upon their arrival in San Francisco, in the Livestock Pavilion, or "Cow Palace", and 2nd Lt. Walter Howard who is now engineering officer of the 69th, was the Officer of the Day, the first day, January 23rd. The weather was inclement, and considerable unpleasantness was encountered while erecting the cook tent and setting up the mess facilities.

On January 29th the ground echelon of the 38th Group boarded the Army Transport Bliss, formerly the President Cleveland. The Bliss left in convoy from San Francisco on the 31st and arrived at Brisbane, Australia on February 25th, 1942. The Group went by boat to Melbourne and thence by rail to Ballerat, where the troops were quartered in private homes for one week. They returned to Brisbane by rail, staying one day at Camp Dombum, and then they proceeded by truck convoy to Amberley Field, Ipswich, Australia. On May 17th the 69th ground echelon returned to Brisbane and departed on a Dutch steamer for Noumea, New Caledonia. From Noumea they went directly by truck to Tontouta, arriving there on May 20, 1942. They remained at Tontouta until June 23rd when they traveled to Plaines de Gaiacs, joining the air echelon for the first time and forming the complete 69th Bombardment Squadron. It was then that the 69th was detached from the 38th Group, for during their stay at New Caledonia they were operating under the direction of Colonel Rich, Air Commander of New Caledonia, who in turn received instructions directly from ComAirSoPac.

In the meantime the air echelon of the 38th Group stayed at Fort McDowell, California, until March 8th, when the air officers and crew chiefs departed for Patterson Field near Dayton, Ohio. The remainder of the air echelon left Oakland on April 2nd, arriving at Patterson Field four days later. During their stay at Fort McDowell 2nd Lt. Joseph P. Williams was left in charge of five officers and 130 enlisted men.

At Patterson Field the pilots, crew, and ground men received further instruction on B-26 airplanes, and it was in May 1942, that the 38th Group was equipped with this B-26B ships.

During this period the first officers' promotions came through. Lincoln E. Behling and James F. Collins were promoted to captain, while 2nd Lt. Clifford A. Johnston, Charles F. Lingamfelter, Lewis C. Long, and Fred C. Wright, Jr., became first Lieutenants. The authority was War Department Special order no. 80, dated March 20, 1942.

On May 19th the 69th Bomb. Sqdn. (M) under the command of Capt. John L. Burhus received War Department S.O. #128 to proceed overseas, and the first flight of three planes piloted by Capt. Collins, 1st Lt. Long, and 2nd Lt. Watson left immediately for Hamilton Field, California and Hawaii.

It is necessary to recapitulate at this point. Hitherto the air echelon personnel of the 69th had been actually the 71st Squadron, but when the order was issued, the 71st was assigned to the 69th ground echelon over seas while the original 69th became the 71st and staged at Patterson Field. Hence the officers and men of the 69th changed the numbers of their squadron.

Shortly thereafter 45 officers and 28 enlisted men left in B-26B planes while a few traveled by American Airlines to the West Coast. The planes left Patterson Field for Fort Wayne, Indiana, to load full with gas for their cross country trip, taking advantage of the long cement runway. The pilots and crews named their ships and started for California.

"Henry" was piloted by 2nd Lt. Robert E. Wilmarth with 2nd Lts. James B. Story and Paul E. Tibbetts as copilot and navigator respectively. First lieutenant Clifford E. Johnston with 2nd Lts. John S. Tkac and Joseph V. Seefried, Jr. flew "Yap Trap"; 1st Lt. Lewis C. Long, 2nd Lt. Lee H. Wagner, and navigator 2nd Lt. Thomas N. Weems, Jr. were in the "Hattie M."; while 1st Lt. Thomas R. Waddleton, 2nd Lt. Girard Dumas, and 2nd Lt. Chalmers W. Gustafson rode the "Peed off Patootie"; while 1st Lt. Fred C. Wright, Jr. with 2nd Lts. Joseph H. Moore and Samuel J. Chambers were flying the "Arkansas Traveler".

Captain Lincoln E. Behling with 2nd Lts. Elaine E. Wiesner and Mitchell S. Spadone left in the "Marmon Meteor"; 2nd Lts. Lloyd B. Field, Edwin J. Scherman and Thomas A. Rives, Jr. flew in "Judy"; Capt. James F. Collins, Jr., 2nd Lt. Colin O. Villines, and 2nd Lt. Frederick A. McNutt, Jr. rode the "Winsockie"; Captain John L. Burhus and 2nd Lts. James H. Doolittle, Jr. and Daniel M. Feeley took "Little John"; 2nd Lts. Stephen H. Howbert, Donald B. White, and Frank A. Morris were in the "Kansas City Kitty"; while two other unnamed planes were flown by 2nd Lts. Lloyd E. Whitley, Enders Dickinson III, and Eugene J. English, Jr.; and the last, 2nd Lts. William S. Watson, Leonard H. Whittington, and John P. Schuman. Along with the above crew were nine bombardiers; 2nd Lts. James W. Magers, Anthony D. Korumpas, Louis A. Bartha, Irving Kemp, Dayton T. Kort, Robert H. Hudson, John W. Bartos, Oscar F. McDaniels, Lawrence H. Krogh, Charles C. Hughes, and Jerome F. Goldstein. Pilot 2nd Lt. Vernon P. Martin, armament officer William H. Rosar, and engineering officer Jasper W. Howard were included.

Before reaching New Caledonia two planes were lost and two more damaged and replaced. The first to go was 2nd Lt. Whitley's, the second was 1st Lt. Long's, and the other two, Captain Collins' and Lt. Watson's were lost in the Midway Battle.

Ordered to take off from Baer Field at 0530 on May 19th for Sacramento Air Depot without maps or briefing, Lt. Whitley and crew were lost over Nebraska in a storm when the radio compass ceased to function. The fuel transfer pump also failed to operate, so despite Lt. English's successful navigation by use of the Airways Facilities' Chart, Lt. Whitley was compelled to land the B-26B in a tiny civilian airfield, near Fremont, Nebraska. Two rural citizens present at the landing, seeing a medium bomber for the first time, asked if it was a training ship, while another spectator was positive that Lt. Whitley and his men were recruiting.

After the weather had cleared and the plane had been lightened, Lt. Whitley attempted a takeoff from the short, grassy strip. Taking off the wet, slippery field proved hazardous enough in a B-26, and the plane cleared a telegraph pole only after crumpling the plane's rear port bomb bay door.

Lts. Whitley and Dickinson brought the plane safely into Omaha, where it was replaced by another B-26B from the Glenn L. Martin plant of that city. Several days later the whole crew in a new plane departed for Sacramento and arrived there without difficulty.

At the Sacramento Air Depot, the planes were stripped of armor plate, machine guns, and unnecessary equipment, while extra gas tanks were fitted in the bomb bays. From there they proceeded to Hamilton Field, where the planes were given a final checkup by the crew chiefs. They were then refueled, and the first flight of B-26s left for Hickam Field, Oahu, T.H., on May 22, 1942. The flight lasted 13 hours, and it was the first time that the 2200 mile hop had been negotiated by a medium bomber. Capt. Collins, 1st Lt. Long, and 2nd Lt. Watson piloted the three planes.

From May 22nd to June 10th the 69th and 70th Bomb Squadrons (M) ferried 26 Martin medium bombers from California to Hickam Field without a single mishap.

The guns, armor plate, and other equipment, which had been removed from the squadron's planes at the Sacramento Air Depot, were shipped from Hamilton Field in two LB-30s, as well as some of the combat crews of the 70th and 69th with their luggage. The first planes reached its destination safely, but two engines on the second one failed shortly after the takeoff. The pilot's attempt to turn the ship was unsuccessful and it crashed into the mountains killing some employees of the Consolidated Aircraft Company and 10 enlisted men of the 69th and 70th Squadrons. The men from the 69th who lost their lives were: T/Sgt Clyde Tweedy, T/Sgt Lloren Van Kirk, T/Sgt Floyd Gerald, and Pvts. Polk and Constantoponeos.

During the last ten days of May at Hickam Field Captain Collins' flight had practiced torpedo bombing with their B-26s, and it was not long after that their ability was tested. Having arrived at Midway Island two days before, Captain Collins and Lt. Watson with their planes and crews were ordered to participate in the Midway Battle, while Lt. Long and his navigator, Lt. Weems, who had gone along as spare crews, were ordered to stand by.

Each plane carrying one torpedo took off from Midway Island at 0630 on the morning of June 4th, and in 30 minutes contact was made with the enemy. With Japanese planes of four carriers around them, Captain Collins and Lt. Watson, following a flight of six Marine pilots, made their runs on a carrier. As Captain Collins drew close he dropped his "fish" and zoomed into the clouds for protection, while Lt. Watson's plane crashed into the sea with no survivors.

With 2nd Lt. Watson the squadron lost 2nd Lts. Whittington and Schuman, co-pilot and navigator respectively; Corp. Owen, radio operator; Sgt. Decker, engineer, and Cpl. Sietz, tail gunner. Captain Collins' plane returned with more than 100 bullet holes in it, and a crash landing was necessary, for the hydraulic system had been completely shot away. None of crew was seriously injured, though the radio operator sustained facial lacerations from the flying glass.

Capt. Collins, his co-pilot 2nd Lt. Colin o. Villines, navigator 2nd Lt. Thomas H. Weems, Jr., engineer Sgt Jack D. Dunn, radio operator T/Sgt Raymond S. White all subsequently received the Distinguished Service Cross for their exploit, namely, of sinking, as well as accounting for three "O" type Japanese fighters. Lt. Watson and his crew were all awarded the same

decoration, and the Purple Heart, posthumously. That was the first time land based aircraft had been used for torpedo attack against surface vessels.

On June 13th the 69th received orders to proceed to New Caledonia, and the first flight of four planes, piloted by Captains Behling and Collins, 1st Lt. Waddleton, and 2nd Lt. Field, left Hickam Field at 0700 on June 15th. The two other flights departed on June 16th and 18th. The planes went to Christmas Island, thence to Canton Island, Fiji and Tontouta, New Caledonia. The second flight, for observation purposes, passed over Jarvis Island on route from Christmas to Canton. On June 20th the rest of the air echelon, except for Lt. Rosar and a few enlisted men, took off in an LB30. Also Lt. Long and crew were left behind awaiting another plane to replace their damaged B-26B.

By June 23rd, all of the air echelon except Lt. Long and crew had joined the ground echelon at Tontouta. On that day a mass movement by air and truck convoy was made to Plaines de Gaiacs, 130 miles north of Noumea, on the west coast of New Caledonia.

It is here that the saga of the 69th, if it may be so called, really began. The 69th Bombardment Squadron at New Caledonia was the first medium bombardment outfit in the South Pacific, and along with the 70th Bombardment Squadron, which arrived at Fiji one week later, was the sole air striking force available for use against the Japanese fleet in the South Pacific during those crucial months before we had taken Guadalcanal and entrenched ourselves there. The flying officers were hailed by the ground forces on New Caledonia as saviors, and miracles were expected from this lone squadron at the time when the Japanese fleet was loose in that part of the Pacific, and when a landing attack was expected daily.

This squadron was the first to arrive at Plaine de Gaiac, and with the exception of two galvanized huts housing members of the Hawaiian Construction Co., there was absolutely nothing on the field. Only one runway had been completed, and the north-south strip was still under construction. It was necessary to establish a camp under the most adverse conditions quickly, for the squadron was called upon to perform its first missions only two days later, on June 26th. Lt. Howbert and co-pilot, Lt. White, patrolled, circling the island of New Caledonia and Isle of Pines.

A camp in the woods was set up off the northeast end of the field. Sleeping in tents under one blanket only for the first week, the men wrapped themselves at night in flight jackets and built small fires inside the tents to keep warm. The nearest running water was two miles from camp, and often both enlisted men and officers had to hitch hike to the stream for water since there were no vehicles assigned to the squadron as yet. Crude toilet utensils were constructed, and mess facilities were inadequate. Contact with Noumea was poor by road and infrequently by air. Food and supplies were often lacking those first few weeks, and the mess was unavoidably poor. For fresh meat the squadron depended upon the accurate aim of various officers and enlisted men who returned from hunting forays with large buck deer. Speaking of living conditions one of the bombardiers quipped, "It's a vicious circle that has no end, and a horrible fate awaits us all."

At that time Captain Burhus was commanding officer, 1st. Lt. Waddleton the operations officer, 1st Lt. Clyde Nichols was adjutant, Capt. Santo Cuppola flight surgeon, 2nd Lt. Howard engineering officer, 2nd Lt. Rosar armament officer, and A, B, and C flight leaders were 1st Lt. Johnston, Captain

Collins, and 1st Lt. Lingamfelter respectively. As stated before the squadron had by this time lost all contact with the 38th Group and operated under ComAirSop and through the Island Air Commander, Colonel Rich.

On June 26, 1942 there were attached to the 69th Bomb Squadron (M) at Plaines de Gaiac 80 officers and men from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Lexington. These survivors of the torpedoed vessel remained at Plaines de Gaiac with the 69th until the middle of August, 1942.

On June 28th the squadron lost its next plane. Lt. Wilmarth, his co-pilot Lt. Story, navigator Lt. Tibbetts, and bombardier Lt. Magers were about to take off when the bomb bay burst into flames. The officers and men hastily escaped through side and top hatches, by which time the plane was burning furiously. The bomb bay tanks had been filled with the doors closed, and fumes were ignited by a spark. In a few minutes the plane and its contents were charred, twisted metal.

By June 30th the squadron was already receiving further instruction from the Navy in torpedo bombing. It might be noted here that at the time the 69th and 70th Squadrons were the only medium bombers that were being trained to carry torpedoes and use them against surface craft.

On July 1st came the first alert, and the ships stood by with bombs and torpedo – an unidentified ship. A day or so later three planes were sent out to find a Japanese submarine carrying four 300# bombs, they sighted in the given location only a whale.

Only July 3rd the squadron navigator, 2nd Lt. Daniel M. Feeley, went with Lt. Stephenhagen, a TBD pilot from the Lexington, to confer with Colonel Rich and Admiral McCain aboard the seaplane tender U.S.S. Curtis, in the Noumea Harbor on Navy procedure of patrolling sectors that the 69th was to be assigned. It was necessary at that time to arrange for weather service, code agreements and method of communication. The squadron had no intelligence section, and they lacked maps, charts, and recognition signal procedure. At one time, in fact, the navigators were compelled to make their own charts when given patrol sectors extending toward Guadalcanal.

On the morning of July 6th all 12 planes carrying four 500# bombs were ordered to the northwest tip of New Caledonia to intercept the Japanese fleet, which was reported heading for New Caledonia. Fortunately the fleet failed to appear, and the next day the squadron continued practicing torpedo runs.

On July 11th an alert was called when an enemy submarine was sighted, and that day the last B-26, piloted by Lt. Long, arrived from Hawaii. On the 15th, Captain Burhus with Lts. Martin and Gustafson landed the first bomber on the runway at Efate, New Hebrides. They picked up General Rose and flew over Espiritu Santo, the first army plane to do so. General Rose pointed out a field of stumps that was to become strip #1. Leaving General Rose at Efate, the plane returned to Plaines de Gaiac, where the next two days were spent on as consumption tests to determine whether flights to Guadalcanal and return were possible.

It was at this time, July 17th, that the first list of squadron promotions came through. First lieutenants Waddleton, Wright, Long, Johnston, Glover, Lingamfelter, Nichols and Saunders became captains; and Dickinson, Story, Whitley, Doolittle, Reardon, John S Schuman, John Tkac, White, Wiesner,

Field, Wagner, Villines, Howbert, Wilmarth, and Martin were promoted to the rank of first lieutenant.

On July 19th Captain Burhus with Lt. Howbert escorted the first four P-39s to Efate and returned with three F4Fs and 30 cases of beer to everyone's joy.

At this time a plan to have the 69th take off from Efate, carrying two 1000# bombs or one torpedo, fly to Guadalcanal and return was projected. Captain Burhus insisted the runway at Efate was too short for B-26 to take-off with that load and that it was impossible to carry enough gas to make the round trip non-stop. He refused to send his men out on what he considered a suicide mission, though he did offer to go himself. The following day he was relieved and assigned to the 65th material Squadron at Tontouta. Captain Collins became commanding officer and Captain Behling was appointed "B" flight leader, vice Captain Collins.

Several days before, on July 15th, when nine B-26s, six with torpedoes and three with six 100# bombs, were practicing coordinated torpedo runs with the destroyer, U.S.S. MacFarland, off the Noumea Harbor, an enemy submarine surfaced in their midst and immediately crash dived. The plane piloted by Captain Wright and Lt. Howbert with navigator Lt. Chambers and bombardier Lt. Kemp dropped their bombs as the destroyer released depth charges. The submarine was destroyed, and the B-26s was credited with an assist.

On July 22nd the first eight B-17s of the 11th Bomb Group landed at Plaines de Gaiac. On August 2nd and for the next six days thereafter the 69th sent four B-26s to patrol a sector with units of 14 degrees South and 170 degrees East to cover our task force then moving toward the Solomon Islands. The sector covered 167000 square miles and went 50 miles northwest of Espisto Santo, thence west to 170th meridian. During this time the fleet was sighted twice, on August 4th and 6th.

On August 5th and thereafter for approximately six weeks the 69th sent six B-26s on a daily anti-submarine patrol south and west of Noumea 150 miles, one plane to each sector. The day before four B-26s had searched south of the Isle of Pines for two lost Navy planes.

On August 8th and 12th, ships of our fleet were escorted into the Noumea Harbor by the 69th, and on the 13th this squadron conducted a search for the crippled cruiser, U.S.S. Chicago. On the 11th a new patrol of three planes daily toward the Solomons was inaugurated.

On August 16th six planes conducted a search over 3,000 mile area for the survivors of the destroyer, U.S.S. Jarvis, and on the 22nd the three planes on daily patrol toward the Solomons were called off while six planes with torpedoes were ordered to stand by.

On August 26th the 69th took Col. Melvin Maas, USMCR, and Congressman from "Minnesota, on an inspection tour by air of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands. Later Col. Maas made a report concerning the lack of supplies and equipment in the South Pacific area that made the 69th believe he had them in mind as well as other military organizations.

Five days later the squadron's former commanding officer, Captain Burhus, died. A P-40 which Captain Burhus was test flying at Tontouta burst into flames shortly after the take-off. On September 1st the 69th with a nine

plane formation flew over the U.S. Military cemetery to pay honor to Captain Burhus at his burial. The 69th's former commander had received the respect and liking of every man in his organization. A strict, truly efficient military man, Captain Burhus was just and fair. Both his officers and men knew that there was no favoritism, and they knew that their commanding officer never demanded anything of them that he would not require of himself.

Two weeks before several other promotions for the squadron came through; navigators 2nd Lts. Feeley, Seefried, Gustafson, Rives, McNutt, and Weems; co-pilot Girard Dumas; engineering officer Howard, and armament officer Rosar were promoted to first lieutenants. About this time the squadron received its first addition, 2nd Lt. George M. Hinkel, who became assistant armament officer.

On September 5th, Generals Harmon and Patch with Colonel Rich came to Plaines de Gaiac to present Captain Collins and his crew with the Distinguished Service Cross for their part in the Midway Battle. T/Sgt White, T/Sgt Dunn, and Lt. Weems were present, but the co-pilot, Lt. Villines was in the hospital.

On September 7th, Lts. Field, Wilmarth, Weems and Feeley were the first officers to go to Australia on what was to be the only vacation the 69th has been granted since arrival overseas. On the 15th nine planes carrying torpedoes left for Efate on an alert to attack the Japanese fleet which again was reported headed southward toward New Caledonia.

It was the night before that two members of the 69th figured in another incident that helps to make the history of this medium bombardment outfit unique. On September 13th a B-17E, which made a crash landing, was sighted on a reef 135 miles north of Plaines de Gaiac off the shore of Belep Island. Several survivors on the beach were apparently in distress. So Captain Lingamfelter, acting operations officer, prepared the OS2U-3, which had been assigned to the squadron by ConAirSoPac as liaison plane and crash boat, for take off. Second Lt. James W. Magers, a bombardier, offered to accompany Captain Lingamfelter since he was adept at administering first aid.

Packing medical supplies, food, and water into the plane they took off and discovered the survivors late that afternoon. Lt. Magers rowed the supplies ashore and attended to two men, finding it unwise to move them. Lt. Magers returned to the OS2U-3, which by this time was drifting seaward, for the small anchor would not hold in the coral bottom. The electrical starter switch failed to function, and after 30 minutes effort the officers abandoned the plane, paddling two miles back to shore. After an hour and a half struggle against a choppy sea they rejoined the survivors on the beach. The next two days were trying ones without sufficient food or water, but on the 15th a PB5Y-5 landed, taxied into shore and rescued them. The wounded were taken to the 9th Station Hospital, and Captain Lingamfelter and Lt. Magers returned to the 69th a few days later. The OS2U-3 was never seen again.

Several days later on September 18th the 69th lost its next B-26 when Lt. Wilmarth with Lts. Field and Tibbetts and six enlisted men on a flight to Efate from Plaines de Gaiac were lost in bad weather. The radio compass was 180 degrees off, so after turning the plane around and heading back for what fortunately was land, Lt. Wilmarth and crew were forced to bail out over

Espiritu Santo. All men landed safely in or near the shore, except one man, Pfc. Erwin R. Wilkening, who was lost at sea.

On the 21st the nine planes at Efate returned to Plaines de Gaiac. The alert was off, and the Japanese fleet again had failed to appear. On the 23rd the squadron was supposed to leave for Guadalcanal, but the runway at Henderson Field was not long enough to accommodate a B-26. The following day the squadron learned for the first time that it was to receive B-25s. On September 30th the squadron continued practicing torpedo runs.

On September 24th the squadron had received its first pilot replacement from the States, 1st Lt. Matthew W. Glossinger, the first man who had been specially trained in a twin engine school. All the other pilots without exception had been trained in pursuit or attack aircraft.

Two weeks later the officers celebrated the completion of their new club, the results of four weeks' hard work. The 36 by 60 foot building was erected using native materials entirely, except for a cement floor. Hard wood uprights, split bamboo siding lashed with strips of bark, and a bark roof made this structure original enough to warrant an article about it in the February 1943, issue of Air Force Magazine. The club was unique in one respect at least, namely, that the manual labor for its erection was done entirely by the officers themselves. A case of whiskey was donated by Colonel Rich for the club's opening, and the celebration included the presentation of a cow bell to the squadron navigator.

On October 9th Captain Lingamfelter had escorted a squadron of P-39s to Efate and Espiritu Santo. On the 11th at the direction of General Harmon, the 69th commenced navigation instruction for air transport men in New Caledonia, and in the nine following days several 69th officers navigated C-47s to Guadalcanal, Fiji, and Espiritu Santo.

On the 17th a P-39K was assigned to the squadron, while from the 13th to the 21st the 69th was again on the alert, standing by with 1,000# bombs and torpedoes. It was at this time that General H.H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces, stopped at Plaines de Gaiac, where he personally commended the men of the 69th Bombardment Squadron for their unstinting labor, excellent morale, and hard work. Specifically he praised the ingenuity of the commanding officer, Captain Collins, and the armament officer, Lt. Rosar, for the construction of the improvised forward gun turret installation made of welded sections of an oil drum.

For months the maintenance of the airplanes had been a serious problem for lack of supplies, and it was only the ingenuity of the officers and men of the engineering and armament sections that kept the B-26s in the air. Oil drum sections ... (missing text) ... fence wire was used as (unintelligible text). The 69th truly operated on a "shoestring."

On October 25th supplies and food were dropped from B-26s to the survivors of a C-47 sighted on a reef off northwest New Caledonia. During the last week of October, Captain Collins, the commanding officer, was promoted to major, and on the 28th the first two B-25s were assigned to the squadron. By November 10th there were three more.

On November 3rd there were two near accidents. Lt. Dickinson ground looped the P-39 when the left brake grabbed, and the propeller was badly bent. A few minutes later Lts. Whitley and Glossinger in a B-25 managed to bring

their plane to a halt at the very end of the runway when a tire blew out on the take-off. The plane was indicating 100 mph at the time of the blowout, and only the pilots' dexterity saved the aircraft from crashing.

On November 10, 1942 the air echelon went to Espiritu Santo, and four B-26s made a round trip flight to Guadalcanal, returning the next day. Again there was no place for the 69th at Henderson as gasoline was so scarce there it was being ferried in by aircraft.

On November 23rd the first and only court martial in the 69th was held. The enlisted man, accused of stealing the contents of a mail bag, was acquitted. On the next day two B-25s left with equipment to choose a camp site for the squadron at the new post, Efate, New Hebrides. On the 25th the squadron was presented with a plan to carry magnetic mines to Shortland Harbor, drop them there and return to Espiritu Santos non-stop. Fortunately nothing ever came of it. It was this same day that the 69th first started low altitude masthead bombing practice, better known as skip bombing.

On December 2, 1942 the air echelon arrived at McDonald Field, Efate, carrying crews, equipment, and fresh meat in the form of live pigs, chickens, as well as some stray dogs and cats. Five days later the ground echelon arrived from New Caledonia aboard the Irving McDowell, a liberty ship, escorted by one destroyer. The officers fell to, and for a day or two they turned truck driver, stevedore, and deckhand. The ground echelon was disembarked in record time.

From the 12th to the 15th the squadron made practice torpedo runs with Navy planes. On December 19th a search was conducted for four P-40s which were located subsequently on Eromanga Island. On the 24th some guards shot one Tonkinese and captured 11 more that night when the natives were found tampering with one of the planes.

A few days before Major Collins had departed for Australia to obtain the first modified B-25 at Amberley Field, so when the 69th proceeded to Guadalcanal on December 31st, Captain Behling, "B" flight leader was acting commanding officer. On arrival one engine of Lt. Robert Wilmarth's plane failed, but he piloted the B-26 perfectly, and the landing was made without trouble. On that last day of 1942 the squadron arrived early in the afternoon tired and cramped from their four hour flight, and the squadron had missed a noon meal. Nevertheless, they were put on an immediate alert, and in less than two hours they took-off to bomb Munda. Upon returning from the raid late in the afternoon, they were assigned a camp site. Down in the hollow which had been used for both a garbage dump and a Japanese burial ground, the squadron crawled in under salvaged marine tents. With the stench of garbage and decomposed bodies strong in their noses, the men and officers of the 69th spent their first night on Guadalcanal.

The next two days bombs were dropped on Rekata Bay at 7,000 feet on two runs, and contact was made with nine enemy float planes. Rekata Bay was to be a fateful place for the 69th. During the next week five more raids were made on Munda, Rekata Bay and Japanese positions on Guadalcanal. It was during this week that the 69th received replacements who joined the ground echelon at Efate. They were: pilots 1st Lt. Lloyd D. Spies, 1st Lt. Henry A. Schmidt, 2nd Lt. Albert M. Burbank, Jr., 2nd Lt. Wirt M. Corrie; navigator 2nd Lt. Edward L. Ostrove, and bombardier 2nd Lt. Elmer H Steege.

On January 7, 1943 Captain Behling and his crew were shot down over Rekata Bay while leading a flight of six planes. The other pilots were: Captain Long, Captain Lingamfelter, Captain Wright, Lt. Howbert and Lt. Field. At 300 feet 100# fragmentation bombs were dropped on the bivouac area, and converging automatic AA fire scored direct hits on Captain Behling's plane. Lost with him were Lts. Wiesner, Spadone, and Hughes, along with radio operator S/Sgt Otis L. Sharp, tail gunner Pfc. Robert Pietroloungo, and engineer Sgt. Daniel Mulcahy.

Lt. Field's plane had 37 bullet holes in it, while Lt. Howbert's ship was perforated in 64 bullet holes. Captain Wright escaped unscathed, but Captain Lingamfelter's ship lost the hydraulic system and gas lines, and his whole crew was forced to bail out over Guadalcanal. This included co-pilot Reardon, navigator Lt. McNutt, bombardier Lt. Goldstein, engineer S/Sgt Governale, radio operator T/Sgt. Clark, and gunner S/Sgt. Ritnour.

With the possible exception of their former commanding officer, Captain Burhus, the loss of Captain Behling was the greatest shock sustained by the men in the squadron. Aside from being a superb pilot Captain Behling was a natural leader and the guiding light in the squadron. A tall, handsome fellow with much mental ability and considerable personal charm, Captain Behling was beloved by the officers and almost adored by the enlisted men. Captain Behling's death cast the squadron in a state of gloom, and Captain Waddleton, the operations officer, became acting commanding officer. The squadron had made 11 strikes during this stay at Guadalcanal, and for wounds sustained in the unfortunate Rekata Bay attack bombardier 2nd Lt. Robert H Hudson received the Purple Heart.

On January 12th the flying personal rejoined the ground echelon at Efate. Here sickness and disease caught up with the squadron, and many men were confined to the hospital with malaria, dysentery, dengue, and a few with psycho-neuroses. Discharged from the hospital at Efate, Lts. Field, Weems, Schurman, and Krogh were sent back to the States.

During the last two weeks in January there were only six navigators for 12 ships, and they did their own jobs as well as that of the bombardiers, and occasionally they even rode co-pilot. For three days from January 27th to 30th the 69th searched for the downed B-17 which had carried General Twining and Colonel Jamison from Guadalcanal to Espiritu Santo. And it was during the last week in January, 1943, that more pilot replacements arrived. They were: Captain Charles W. Brown, 1st Lt. Oiva Kivipelto, and 2nd Lts. Frank T. Jensen and Arthur M. Wright, Jr. Major Collins returned from Australia that week and resumed command.

On January 26th the ground echelon left on the transport Hunter Liggett for Guadalcanal, and they arrived on February 9th, after stopping at Espiritu Santo. On the 7th as they were unloading, orders came for the ship to embark from Guadalcanal as an invasion force was expected. The ship returned two days later, and the ground echelon set up a 100 yards from the military cemetery.

It was then that the squadron's morale was at low ebb. Officers and men collapsed from sickness and strain, a whole crew had been lost at Rekata Bay, and despite the now additions to the squadron the announcement of the 69th would return to Guadalcanal. After having been promised relief and return to the States, was sufficient to discourage the most optimistic member of the squadron. However, there was still some hope, for Major

Collins asserted that he had been assured the 69th would return to America after their next session at Guadalcanal.

On January 30th, 1943, the crews went to Guadalcanal, and the rest of the air echelon came on February 5th, only to learn that Major Collins had been assigned to the 13th Air Force Headquarters and that Lt. Col. Rivard was their new commanding officer. During this second stay in the Solomons the 69th had only four navigators for eight ships, and during the two week period here they ran six missions.

On February 9th the 69th bombed Vila for the first time and three days later during an attack on the same target, bombardier 2nd Lt. Anthony Korumpas was wounded and subsequently received the Purple Heart. On the 15th another attack on Vila was made from high altitude, and five planes were hit with AA fire. Three men in Lt. Wilmarth's plane were injured, and along with that goes another little story illustrating the morale of the 69th. Shortly after his plane was hit, Lt. Wilmarth called back to radio operator T/Sgt Murchinson and engineer S/Sgt Hamilton, and they both admitted they had received slight cuts. Pfc. Robert Lawrence, the tail gunner, replied that he was "all right". However, the navigator Lt. Tibbetts attended to the first two men and went to the tail of the ship when Lawrence admitted he couldn't come forward. An inspection showed that a piece of shrapnel had severed one toe from the foot and that another hung only by a thread of flesh. All three enlisted men received the Purple Heart.

On February 19, 1943 the 69th air echelon left for Nandi, Fiji, and Captain Lingamfelter was made commanding officer, vice Captain Waddleton, who was ordered back to the States. Captain Wright, Lt. Chambers, and Lt. Bartos were sent to America after sojourns in the hospital. Navigator 2nd Lt. Frederick W. Dunlap, Jr., had joined the 69th at Espiritu Santo while the squadron was in route for Fiji, and navigator 2nd Lt. Harvey Hiller arrived on February 24th.

On February 27th, all the B-26 planes were transferred to the 70th Bomb Squadron (M), and B-25s with crews began to arrive in March. Pilots 1st Lt. Eugene R. Brogan, Charles T. Everett, 2nd Lts. Thomas D. Allison, Merle H. Lamkin, Alvert B. Marx, Donald C. Doty, Roy D. Burkhart, Melvin Van Dyke, Norbert C. Schweikert, and Lawrence B. Capos; navigators 2nd Lts. David D. Kallman, William J. Mallory, Jr., Robert F. McGlone, and Jason K. Goldwater and Hugh D. McNeil all joined the 69th during the first two weeks in March, as did Wayne D. Scott, Jr., assistant engineering officer. During those two weeks 10 new B-25s were added to the squadron.

On March 22, 1943, by order of the 13th Air Force, the 69th and 70th Squadrons were reassigned to the 42nd Bombardment Group (M), commanded by Colonel Harry T. Wilson. At this time the B-25s were being modified at Eagle Farms, Australia, and the 13th Air Depot, Tontouta, New Caledonia, with eight forward firing .50 caliber guns and the squadron began its three-month training program of strafing and low altitude bombing.

On the night of March 27th during a Japanese bombing raid over Guadalcanal the following 69th ground echelon men were wounded when bombs landed in the bivouac area: Pfc. David Bradbrook, S/Sgt Julius Baim, Sgt. Clifford Humphrey, T/Sgt. John Kilgoro, S/Sgt. Daniel Nenish, and Corp. Amos Moore.

In March Captain Lingamfelter went to the hospital with malaria, and Captain Johnston acted as commanding officer until April 11, 1943 when Captain John

F. Sharp of the 70th Squadron was appointed commanding officer by order of Colonel Wilson, commanding officer of the 42nd Group. During April and May the 69th received more replacements to compensate for its losses from sickness, men lost in action, and others relieved. On April 17th 2nd Lt. Walter H. Pleiss, Jr., joined the squadron as intelligence officer, on May 5th pilots 2nd Lts. Walter B. Daffin and Jack P. Christian came in, while on May 12th 2nd Lts. Harry W. Stockoff, Albert R. Hogg, and Floyd C. Dawson became communications officer, assistant adjutant, and assistant operations officer respectively. On the 18th 2nd Lt. Robert P. Clark became weather officer and two new pilots, 2nd Lts. Arthur J. Cordeil and Herman F. Birlauf, arrived on May 22nd.

The first week in April one navigator, 1st Lt. McNutt; one pilot, 1st Lt. Reardon; and six bombardiers, 2nd Lts. Bartha, McDaniel, Kort, Kemp, Goldstein, and Hudson were transferred to the 70th Bombardment Squadron, and Lts. White and Dickenson returned from New Guinea after 3 weeks with the 38th Bomb Group observing skip bombing procedure.

On March 12th the squadron had learned from Colonel McCormick of the 13th Air Force Headquarters that the list of promotions of 10 officers, who had been recommended for the second time, would be refused, that no leaves were forthcoming, and that the 69th would be a first squadron to return to Guadalcanal---for the third time. So the continued practice of skip bombing left no doubt in anyone's mind where the next move would be made. During the last preparations for their return to Guadalcanal in B-25s, the 69th encountered difficulty with the exhaust stacks, which were finally replaced by new types.

During May, 1943, there promotions became effective, 2nd lieutenant Burkhardt and bombardier Korumpas were elevated to the next higher rank, and Lt. Martin, operations officer, became a captain.

On June 5th, 1943, eight officers and 23 enlisted men of the air echelon came to Guadalcanal to join the 75th Squadron's ground echelon which had replaced the 69th ground echelon during the last week in May. The 69th returned to Plaines de Gaiac, New Caledonia, where it is at this writing. On June 6th the combat crews left Fini (Fiji) and arrived here on the 10th, after waiting three days in Espiritu Santo because of weather.

The 69th Bombardment Squadron with 18 ships and crews, 16 of the ships being modified types arrived in Guadalcanal. On June 14th all 18 planes made a medium altitude bombing attack on Vila, and it was this same day that Lts. White and Whitley were promoted to the rank of captain.

During the next nine days 10 missions were carried out, including a two plane night bombing attack on Ballale, a two plane search for a lost B-24, and eight low altitude combat searches for enemy shipping at night by single B-25s in the vicinity of New Georgia, Choiseul, Shortland, and Fauro Islands.

On June 23, 1943 during a low altitude strafing attack of a Japanese held village on the northern tip of Ganongga by eight B-25s on their 11th mission a plane piloted by 1st Lt. Eugene R. Brogan was lost in a cloud bank over Rendova. The strafing run had been completed, and all eight planes were returning when Lt. Brogan's plane disappeared and was never sighted again. Exhaustive searches the two following days were unsuccessful. With Lt. Brogan were his co-pilot 2nd Lt. Melvin Van Dyke, navigator 2nd Lt. Hugh D.

McNeil, radio operator S/Sgt Leo E. Hamilton, engineer S/Sgt William Pierce, and Sgt. Frank Spognardi, who was the gunner. One photographer from the 13th Air Force Headquarters also accompanied the lost crew.

On June 22nd 1st Lt. Reginald Hayes, transferred from the 75th Squadron, joined the 69th and became intelligence officer, and during the next week 12 more low altitude combat missions in search of enemy shipping were carried out.

During the 69th's 13 months of overseas duty they had carried out 40 combat missions from Guadalcanal, and it is conservatively estimated that from June to December 1942, when the squadron was at New Caledonia and Efate, it accomplished more than 300 missions. For approximately six weeks alone there were six daily patrol missions southwestern of the Noumea Harbor, not to mention the many searches for lost planes and surface vessels, alerts with torpedoes to intercept the Japanese fleet, escorting of fighters to Efate and Espirtu Santo, and the ferrying of torpedoes to Espiritu Santo.

Owing to the fact that there never was a squadron historian it is impossible to offer documentary evidence for many of the flights made by the 69th Bombardment Squadron (M). Records have been lost and misplaced, and it would take months of checking both at Guadalcanal and New Caledonia to verify all the statements made in this history. However, every officer of the original group in this squadron had proof read this history and attest to both its accuracy and veracity.

The 69th had flown enough missions so that the following officers and enlisted men have qualified for and been recommended for the Airmens' Medal and/or Distinguished Flying Cross. They are: Captain Johnston, Captain Long, 1st Lt. Howbert, 1st Lt. White, 1st Lt. Wagner, 1st Lt. Story, 1st Lt. Whitley, 1st Lt. Dickinson, 1st Lt. Tkac, 1st Lt. Dumas, 1st Lt. Doolittle, and navigators 1st Lt. Tibbetts, Skawienski, Seefried, Feeley, English, Rives, and Morris. The enlisted crews of the above pilots qualify, and 1st Lt. Robert Wilmarth has been recommended for the Oak Leaf Cluster also.