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S E C R E T5. Prisoner of War Missions

After an eight-day period of uncertainty, orders came through to commence flying again. However, these would not be combat missions, but mercy missions; the dropping of clothing, food and medical supplies on Prisoner of War Camps. The first of these missions took off on 26 August, to stage at Iwo Jima, and then to proceed to a Camp at Weihsien, Shantung Province, China. Ten planes took off, and dropped the next day in a field, next to the compound, marked by a smudge pot, and a white cross. The compound itself seemed to seethe with excitement, as the planes dropped their loads from 500 feet. They had been preceded by a leaflet plane, which dropped leaflets telling the prisoners and inhabitants of exactly what was going to happen. 6/ To paraphrase the words of Lt. Colonel Neil Van Sickle who flew on the mission, what a wonderful feeling there must have been among the men and women in the Camp, after so many years, to find themselves remembered, in such a startling fashion, by planes larger than they ever dreamed of.

On 28 August, 35 aircraft were airborne on a second such mission. They went to 10 different Camps in Japan. One Camp could not be found, but planes dropped on all the others. 7/ Reports multiplied as to the excitement of the prisoners. All of the Camps were found, adequately marked, with PW, or POW. Some flew U.S., British, French and Dutch flags. Some had signs painted on the roofs, or laid out in whitewashed stones, spelling out, cigs - thanks - and in some instances giving the name of a unit, or a ship, or the number of prisoners in the Camp. All crews reported that the prisoners seemed frantic with joy; waved, cheered, and ran around. Two instances were reported where Jap civilians picked up

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the supplies, and carted them to the Camp.

Tragedy stalked the mission in two separate instances. Lt Cripps and crew failed to return from the mission. No word from him was received after take-off, and crewmen reported that he was not at Iwo Jima, where all planes were grounded on their return. Two days later, the anticipated announcement came in. The Japanese Government reported to Manila, that a B-29 had crashed into a mountain in Northern Honshu, where his target lay. 10 men were reported killed, and one slightly injured. This left one man unaccounted for.

The other tragedy lay in the probable killing of two prisoners by the supply barrel's falling free from their parachutes and crashing through a roof. Planes from this Group reached a Honshu target and found spelled out on the ground: Do not drop in here. Two men killed. This Groups report indicated 47% chute failures, indicating a real possible danger if the drop was made inside a prison compound.

The next day, 29 August, six more planes were air-borne to Honshu and Kyushu targets. These also had nearly 50% chute failures, spattering the contents of the barrels over the ground. g/

Another maximum effort mission went out on 31 August. The planes dropped on 14 different Camps, and reported the same wild enthusiasm. Planes, however, could not find one Tokyo target, (the Tokadana Haba), but dropped on another Camp in the vicinity. Results of drop were much better this time. There were only 10% chute failures. This was attributed by Lt. Shick, Ordnance Officer of the 869th Squadron, to two factors. First the chutes had not become wet during loading, and second, only one barrel was attached to each chute. This mission was more successful in that

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respect, than any of the previous ones. 9/ However several crewmen expressed the view that Jap civilians got the food dropped on Tokyo Camps, which appeared vacated. The prisoners may have been moved to the coast, and put aboard hospital ships.

From this mission came the first authentic identification of a B-29 crew member being alive in a Camp. At a Camp, near Odate, Capt. Stuart, Airplane Commander of a plane of the 870th Squadron, noticed a sign 'Ross - 498'. A report to the 498th Group elicited the information that one of their crew members of that name was missing. Hopes immediately soared in this Group, that many of its personnel would be found, and liberated from other Camps. Many crews could well be Jap prisoners - Capt Waddy Young's - Major Joe Baird's - Lt. McDonnell's - Lt. McSpadden's, and others.

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