

Gunga Din, B-26B-50-MA, 42-95996, with B-26B-10-MA, 41-18283, and B-26B-45-MA, 42-95789; with Battle Numbers 41, 45 and 43 respectively, on their tails. These *Marauders* were operated by the 320th BG, 442nd BS. A yellow band around the aft fuselage identified the 320th BG. The mud-streaked aft fuselages were due to the fields in the Mediterranean.





THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

by A.T. Lloyd

Editor, Boeing Airliner Magazine; Chairman of the Board, Washington State Air Force Association

DURING WWII THERE WAS AN ORGANIZATION KNOWN as the 320th Bombardment Group (Medium). Their motto was **Forever Battling**, and their insignia was a flying alligator. The group operated Martin B-26 *Marauders* as part of the Twelfth Air Force from bases in the Mediterranean.

Subsequently, the 320th would return as a strategic bombardment unit operating B-29s, B-47s, B-52s, KC-97s and KC-135s. As part of DOD cost-cutting measures required to meet the FY 90 budget constraints, the 320th Bombardment was inactivated on 1 October 1989. It is appropriate at this time that we recount their history.

Activated—The 320th BG was constituted on 19 June 1942, and activated at MacDill Field, Florida, on 23 June. During the month of August, the unit trained at Drane Field, Florida. The advanced ground echelon sailed from New York to England on 5 September 1942, while the air echelon continued their operational training at Baer AAFld., Indiana. The group's rear echelon sailed for England on 27 September 1942.

The ground echelons were joined at Hethel, England, on 4 October 1942, at what later would become a B-24 base. On 9 November 1942, the entire ground echelon sailed for North Africa. For a month, they provided intelligence and maintenance support to the 97th and 301st BGs which were operating B-17s.

The air echelon received their complement of 48 B-26s on 19 November 1942 and headed south from Baer Field to Morrison Field, Florida, and on across the southern ferry route to La Senia, Algeria. Both the air and ground echelons of the 320th BG were rejoined on 8 January 1943.

Entering Combat—From February until mid-April, the 320th BG was engaged in antisubmarine patrols. They flew 363 of these sorties and claimed 12 submarines. The 320th flew its first bombardment mission on 22 April 1943, when they attacked small craft and shore facilities at Carrloforte, Sardinia.

The 320th BG participated in Operation Corkscrew, the invasion of Pantelleria. The aerial bombardment of the island by all units of the USAAF in the theater resulted in the Allied invasion force meeting no resistance and a surrendering enemy; a first in military history.

Parker's Pride was B-52F-100-BO, 57-034. She was flown by Colonel Van Parker, wing commander. This photograph reveals 45 mission markers and a pair of Purple Hearts. The palm tree zaps were from Guam.

Brigadier General James Stewart was leaving B-52F-65-BW, 57-149, after completing a bombing mission with the 320th BMW in 1966.

This crew stands inspection in front of B-29A-55-BN, 44-61992, operated by the 106th BG based at March AFB, in July 1951. The Circle A on the tail identifies the group. A 15th Air Force insignia was applied to the base of the fin.

In October 1943, the 320th BG moved to Decimomannu, Sardinia, to get closer to the targets. At this time the unit was given a new mission—that of bridge-busting. For the next 10 months, the group primarily engaged in interdiction operations in Italy and France.

Italian Campaign—Operation *Strangle* was designed to cut off supplies to the Germans in central Italy. Between November 1943 and March 1944, the 320th BG was tasked with bombing marshaling yards and repair facilities between the Apennines and Rome.

The second phase of Operation *Strangle* was designed to destroy the rail lines south of the Apennines. The unit was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) for action on 12 May 1944, when 36 of their aircraft ran the gauntlet of intense anti-aircraft fire to drop 3,978 fragmentation bombs on enemy troop concentrations near Fondi, Italy, in support of the U.S. Fifth Army's advance towards Rome.

The 320th BG also was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Palm for their interdiction operations in central Italy during April and June 1944, as Allied forces advanced to Rome.

On to France—Operation *Dragoon* was the codename for the invasion of southern France. On 15 August 1944, the 320th BG flew the last of its bridge-busting missions as medium bombers severed the approaches to the beachhead. In November 1944, the group moved to Dijon/Longvic Air-drome. Their last mission in Italy was to close the Brenner Pass.

Into Germany—On 1 December 1944, the 320th BG flew its first mission into Germany, to bomb the railroad bridge at Rastatt, a task for which they were well suited. A second DUC was awarded the 320th BG for action on 1 May 1945, when they bombed pillboxes, weapons pits, trenches and roads within the Siegfried Line, thus enabling the U.S. Seventh Army to break through the barricade into Germany.

During WWII, the 320th BG flew 584 combat missions, with 13,314 sorties, dropping 18,089.45 tons of bombs. They were credited with downing 84 enemy aircraft and destroying 183 more on the ground. The 320th BG lost 80 aircraft.

The unit was returned to the ZI during November–December 1945, and inactivated on 4 December at Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts. The 320th was allocated to the Reserve as a light bombardment group, activated at Mitchell Field, New York, on 9 July 1947, and inactivated there on 27 June 1949.

106th Bombardment Group—During the Korean conflict, numerous active duty, reserve and national guard units were called to duty in various parts of the world. One example was the 106th Bombardment Group stationed at NAS Floyd Bennett Field, New York. It was comprised of the 102nd and 114th Bombardment Squadrons which flew Douglas B-26

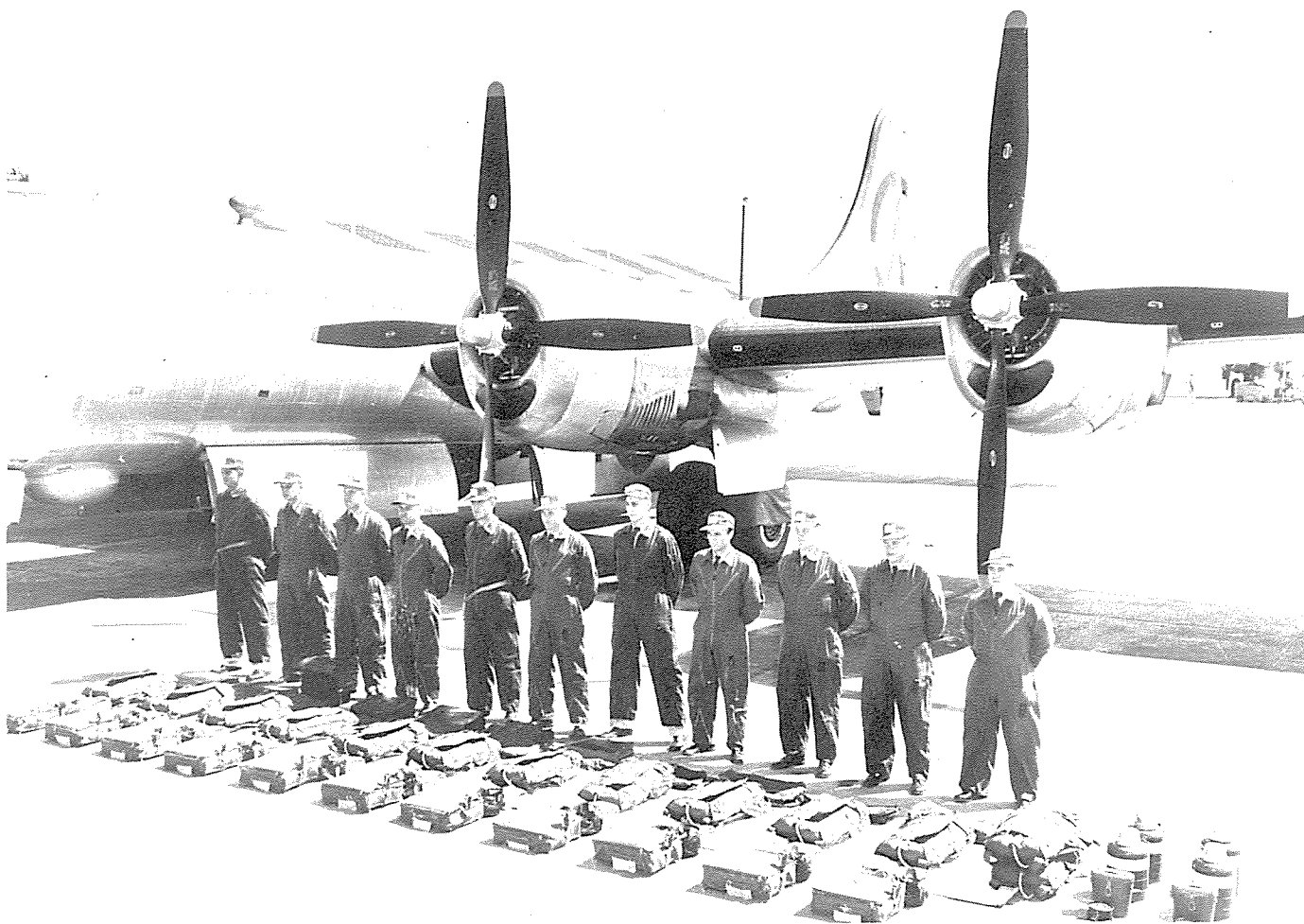


Invaders (redesignated from the WWII A-26).

The 106th BG was activated and the personnel deployed to March AFB, California, where they were joined by the 135th BS, an active duty squadron. The group was equipped with B-29s and served as a replacement training unit for bomber crews heading to the Pacific. The 106th BG was operational between 1 March 1951 and 30 November 1952. The guard units returned to New York and were reequipped with B-26s. The 106th BG's motto, **Strength through Awareness**, was transferred through mutual consent to the new 320th Bombardment Wing.

320th Bombardment Wing—The 320th BMW was activated at March AFB on 1 December 1952, gaining the assets of the inactivated 106th BG. Components of the new wing were the 320th AREFS (initially the 106th AREFS), equipped with KC-97s, and the 441st, 442nd, 443rd and 444th BSs, operating B-29s. While the KC-97s remained in the inventory until 1960, the B-29s were replaced with Boeing YRB-47 *Stratojets* in July 1953. The latter aircraft were an experimental combination of bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. Because the 320th BMW's mission was that of bombardment, these airplanes were replaced with B-47s in March 1954.

The 320th BMW conducted global bombardment training and air refueling operations as part of SAC between 1952 and 1960. They trained the B-47 cadre for the 96th BMW between December 1953 and January 1955. The 320th deployed to RAF Brize Norton, England, between 5 June and 4 September 1954, and Andersen AFB, Guam, between 5 October 1956



and 11 January 1957.

In 1955, for the first time in the SAC Bombing Competition, B-47s bested B-36s in both navigation and bombing. The 320th Bomb Wing won the Fairchild Trophy for this achievement.

The 320th BMW was discontinued at March AFB on 15 September 1960.

Four-Digit MAJCOMS—SAC underwent a reorganization in the sixties and developed a four-digit system for its combat wings. The 4134th Strategic Wing was activated at Mather AFB, California, on 1 May 1958, and equipped with B-52Fs.

By 1963, SAC knew that their historic lineage for bomber units would be lost with the MAJCOM designations and requested Headquarters Air Force to return to the previous system using one, two or three digits. The result was a return to the former designations and the restoration of the lineage and honors for SAC units. On 1 February 1963, the 320th BMW replaced the 4134th SW.

320th BMW Reactivated—The reorganized 320th BMW obtained the B-52Fs which were in the inventory of the 4134th SW. Only the 441st BS would remain as a bombardment squadron, and the refueling operations would now be conducted by the 904th AREFS. From this point in time until its inactivation on 1 October 1989, the 320th BMW is recognized as the safest bombardment wing in SAC for flying 27 years without having sustained a Class A mishap. During three periods of the war in Southeast Asia, the 320th BMW was drastically reduced in size when all of its aircraft and

crews were deployed to the Pacific. These time frames were February–July 1965, December 1965–March 1966, and June 1972–October 1973.

In early 1964, a new look was taken at the global situation and the result was the need for a long-range, heavy bombardment capability, of a conventional nature, which could be employed in guerrilla-type wars. When the then CINCSAC, General Thomas S. Power, let this requirement be known, Colonel Van R. Parker, commander of the 320th BMW, volunteered his wing to develop and test this capability.

Under **Project South Bay**, 28 B-52Fs were modified to carry 24 750-pound bombs on external wing pylons like those on the B-52Ds. The pylons were adapted from their former use in carrying the AGM-28 *Hound Dog* missiles. This program, conducted in June 1964, doubled the conventional stores capability of the B-52F. On 18 June 1965, the first **Arc Light** mission was carried out by 27 B-52Fs assigned to a combined force of the 7th and 320th BMWs. These were the first B-52s committed to combat in the Southeast Asia War. An additional 46 B-52Fs were similarly modified in June 1966.

During two tours of duty in the Western Pacific, the 320th BMW flew 145 combat missions. They dropped more than 72,000 pounds of bombs and flew in excess of 16,000 combat hours. For these two tours, the 320th BMW was awarded its first two Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards.

In July 1968, the 320th BMW transitioned into B-52Gs, gaining the aircraft from the 5th BMW which was being de-

activated at Travis AFB, California. These aircraft were capable of carrying the ADM-29 *Quail* decoy missile and the AGM-28 *Hound Dogs*. A year later, the 320th activated a satellite detachment at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho; thus becoming the first 15th Air Force unit to participate in SAC's Satellite Rebasing Program.

In November 1969, the 320th became the first bombardment unit in SAC to score 100 percent in the bombing reliability and weapons delivery capability phases of an Operational Readiness Inspection. In May 1970, four SAC *Stratofortresses* and their crews participated in the RAF Bombing Competition at RAF Marham. B-52Gs came from the 2nd and 320th BMWs; while the 319th and 379th BMWs had B-52Hs. A combined crew from the 319th, 320th and 379th BMWs took the *Blue Steel Trophy* for the best combined bombing and navigation score in the event. The 320th BMW won the *Blue Steel Trophy* again in the 1976 RAF Bombing Competition.

The 320th BMW has garnered its share of trophies in the SAC Bombing and Navigation Competition over the years. It captured the Daugherty Trophy for compiling the most points in simulated SRAM launches in 1980 and 1981. The Bartsch Trophy, awarded to the unit compiling the most points in electronic countermeasures, found a place with the 320th in 1981 and 1984.

In September 1982, the 320th BMW was selected as the

The 320th BMW got into doing nose art with the same fervor of flying their missions. Examples of their creativity are shown here. These B-52Gs have since gone into the inventory of other units.

lead unit to develop the U.S. Navy's *Harpoon* antiship missile for use on the B-52G. A pair of aircraft and crews was dedicated to the program. Today these missiles are part of the inventory of both the 42nd and 43rd BMWs.

The 904th AREFS was inactivated in October 1986, making the 320th BMW solely a bombardment unit. Also, in 1986 the CINCSAC placed additional emphasis on conventional operations and directed several wings within SAC, including the 320th, to develop new tactics. The 320th BMW developed, tested and implemented conventional tactics which would maximize damage, yet minimize crew and aircraft exposure. These tactics included low-level, close trail, night multi-axis attacks using night vision goggles to assist in weapons delivery. The 320th BMW developed new procedures which would serve as the criteria for judging future conventional Operational Readiness Inspections.

In August 1988, the 320th BMW generated and flew every available B-52G in their inventory and produced a bombing circular error of less than an average of 110 feet for all weapons scored. This accomplishment will serve as a yardstick for future operations.

As part of the base closures resulting from the FY 90 budget, the 320th BMW was inactivated on 1 October 1989.

The 320th BMW served its country well during WWII and again during the war in Southeast Asia. In between, the wing provided a portion of the strategic deterrence. They also pioneered the use of new systems and tactics in an excellent and safe manner. Their motto was **Strength through awareness.** □

