

J.C. Dodman Crew

Fielder Newton (389th Bomb Group)

The J C Dodman crew joined together at March Field in Riverside, California in September for crew training. I had graduated from navigation school at Selman Field in Monroe, Louisiana on August 7 1944 and reported to March after a 10-day leave. The four gunners were fresh out of gunnery school. The Bombardier, Radio Operator and Flight Engineer were also recent graduates. The Pilot had been a twin-engine flight instructor for some time and the Co-Pilot had just finished twin-engine flight school. Training consisted of cross country flights, flights dropping 100 pound bombs on targets in the desert, low level flights firing 50 caliber machine guns at desert targets and night flights over the Pacific for celestial navigation.

After completing our training we were sent to Hamilton Field in San Francisco for processing. In due time we were placed on a train and sent to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey which was a POE. We sailed from Brooklyn Navy Yard on the Ill de France docking down the Firth from Glasgow. We then went to Stow, England and from there to Hethel arriving in late November. We spent time in orientation on the base and in December we were made a lead crew, which required additional ground and flight training. We flew our first mission to Koblenz January 2 1945 the target being a railroad bridge over the Mosel River.

Mission number 13 deserves being covered because of the great job J.C. did when we lost #3 engine and the autopilot over Berlin. Dodman had to take verbal instructions to make corrections to our course from Dowell. He did a great job in guiding the B-24 to the target and then on our return flight on three engines. We were burning fuel very rapidly so J.C. asked for a course to an emergency field in France. After staying on this course for a while he asked for a course change for the emergency field on the Channel. When we hit the Channel he asked for a heading to Hethel. Well, we made it home, and when I asked Brace how much fuel we had he reported we only had 50 gallons. Too close for comfort.

On 20 May 1945 we were placed on detached service to the 466th BG where wooden racks were placed in the bomb bay to hold equipment and baggage for our crew and ten ground crew passengers. When this was completed we were ordered to proceed via Valley A/D for the best route to Bradley Field, Connecticut. We stayed overnight at Valley and the next morning we were assigned to fly to the Azores Island and on to Gander Lake, Newfoundland.

The weather between the Azores and Newfoundland was such that we had to stay there for 3 days. After finally getting to Gander Lake we stayed overnight and the next day flew to Bradley Field. Unfortunately when we left there for our respective homes we never saw each other again as a group.