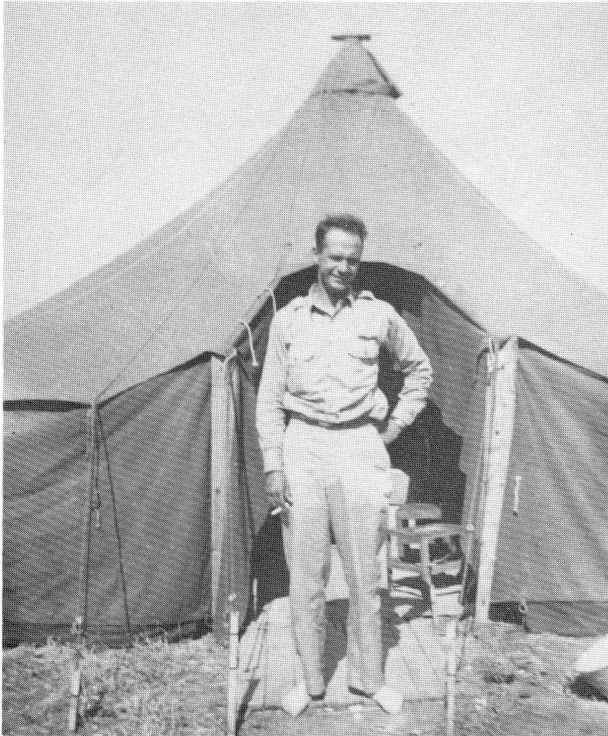


'GIVE IT A GOOD KICK'
BY
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The fight between man and machine has been going on since the dark ages. This is a story about how one flight engineer let the machine know "WHO'S BOSS".



Capt John P Roedel 1st Pilot Crew #76 July 44.827Sq. Fred Roessler Photo

At the very beginning of the 484th's existence at Harvard AAB Nebraska, several aircrews arrived from Pocatello Combat Training School to make up the nucleus of the new group. I was the co-pilot on John P. Roedel's crew which was assigned to the 827th. We arrived at Harvard about November 20th, 1943 and couldn't find anyone around except base installation personnel. They told us to come back in two weeks. In spite of the fact that we had just come from two weeks delay enroute and were all flat broke, we got orders for two more weeks of leave, borrowed money from the Red Cross, and took off again.

Perhaps the first flight made by the 827th was made on December 1st '43 in a B24-E with Squadron Commander, Major John C. Haldeman as pilot and 2nd Lt. Fred Roessler, me, as co-pilot. As John Roedel's crew was reporting into squadron operations for the first time, Major Haldeman came through the door, smiling and shaking hands all around. He was a very charming person so when he asked if anyone wanted to fly with him I volunteered even though it was not my usual reaction.

I did the walk around while he watched me, checking me out, I thought. In the cockpit, it was the same. He didn't seem to know the location of the switches and most of the instruments. It began to dawn on me that our squadron commander had not flown a B24 before! And I had never done anything but co-pilot before

The blind was about to lead the blind. We got it started with the help of the engineer and taxied out. As we lined up for take-off the Major said "I hear this plane will take off on two engines Let's see if we can do it. We'll try it with number one and two". It was ok by me, I had heard about two-engine take-offs also. We poured the coal on one and two, leaving the right hand engines in simulated feather (about 7"hg).

The plane yawed to the right and headed for the sage brush. I put my feet on the rudders and started correcting left even though he had the controls. I pushed left rudder all the way to the stop and we still drifted. "Give me some help on the rudders!" He yelled. "I am!" I yelled right back and shoved the other throttles open. We went bouncing through the dirt alongside the brand new concrete and finally got her off the ground.

The rest of the flight was easy by comparison. We managed a fair series of touch-and-gos and went on in. The B24 will take off on two engines but only if they are on opposite sides of the fuselage. I heard later that Major Haldeman had come to us from a B25 Squadron so maybe I was right about his lack of experience with the B24. Anyway he impressed me as one fearless pilot and a very cordial commander.

On January 10, 1944, John Roedel and our crew sandbagged out to Tonopah, Nevada, to pick up a B24J from the contract overhaul line. If there was a more primitive base than Harvard AAB in existence, it was Tonopah. There were tar paper barracks, of course, and shortages of all the necessities including food and coal. A train came through from Reno once a week. If a shipment of anything missed the train, you waited another week for it.

Chaos seemed to be the order of the day. All the permanent party carried around their own personal light bulbs and toilet paper. Transient troops did without. Winter had locked in with subfreezing temperatures and very few of the buildings were heated.

