



The crew of J Roedel, 827 Crew #76 Sq Back row from left: Carl C Frasure (R/O); Judson N Suddarth Jr (N); Fred Roesseler (C/P); John P Roedel* (P); Marvin Fischer (E); ____? Crew Chief. Front Row: Wayne A Bardin (B/G); Ralph E Lewis (N/G); A Bennett Jr (T/G); Warren W Watts* (B); Joseph D Heleman* (U/G) Marvin W Fischer Photo 827 Sq.
* Deceased

We reported in and were assigned a plane already scheduled for departure early the next day. After a frigid night, we went to preflight our bird only to find gasoline streaming out of the wing into the bomb bay. We logged a red X and went back to operations to pick up another plane. One of the operations types took John and me aside and explained that once a crew was assigned to a ship, they could not be changed. We had to wait until the repairs were made, and furthermore, there was a 30 day backlog of planes awaiting maintenance with no special priorities for us poor transients. I'm inclined now to think we were conned but at the time, we fell for it completely. We were doomed to frozen isolation for a month. Some of the crew members had only blue electric long johns on under their sheepskins so we couldn't go back to Harvard on the weekly train. Nobody was prepared for more than one night away from base. The only thing we could do was take our bird and leave exactly as the Tonopahs wanted.

We loaded up and filed for Denver because we wouldn't have safety fuel reserve to make it to Harvard. We cranked up and taxied out with bomb doors open and that was the way they stayed for the whole trip. We bypassed Denver and went straight home. It was a mighty cold trip! We turned the plane over to base maintenance. It never flew again while we were at Harvard.

"I looked back and saw Sgt. Fischer kicking hell out of the transfer pump"

On March 12, 1944, we left Harvard AAB with our new flyaway B24-Hs on our way to combat. We landed at Lincoln Nebraska for 100 hour maintenance, and staging.

Everybody was decked out in brand new equipment: Leather jackets, wrist watches, sun glasses, and even new octants for navigators. John Roedel's crew departed in aircraft #76 on March 17th for Morrison Field, Florida, thence to Barinquen Field Trinidad and Belem and Natal, Brazil. When we reached Belem the usual afternoon thunderstorm was in progress. The tower told us that the rain would clear the runway by the time we made our approach.

They were right but they didn't tell us that the wind had shifted. We landed long and hot with a ten knot tailwind. The runway had a layer of slippery green moss on it from constant moisture so when we tried our brakes, we went slithering toward a row of PBV patrol boats which were parked wingtip to wingtip along the edge of the runway.

John straightened us out with the throttles then shut down and waited for the end of the pavement to arrive.

The Seabees were clearing jungle to extend the runway and had cleared stumps on the new overrun leaving a mud slurry several feet deep. We hit that mud and went boating along on our belly for about fifty yards. The stuff squirted around the edges of the bomb doors and into the nosewheel well filling the bottom of the fuselage with a couple feet of mud. Two cleatracks hooked on to pull us out. One snapped its cable, the other stripped its gears. We were stranded. After awhile a Seabee came by on a caterpillar bulldozer and hooked on to us with a piece of heavy steel cable. He had us out of there in no time.