



## Interview with Staff Sergeant Clyde Saylor – Waist Gunner on the B24 that Bombed the Bridge Over the River Kwai

### Questions

1. Can you describe the training you did to become a B24 Gunner?  
12 months training, basic in Florida; Gunnery at Arlington Texas, with crew together at Tonopah Nevada.
2. Was it a close team, had you been on many missions before the River Kwai Bridge? Yes, very close – 18 missions before the bridge run.
3. Have you ever been back and walked across it? No.
4. Did you bomb other parts of the Death Railway in Burma? Yes, often.
5. Did your B24 have a nickname? No.
6. As a Gunner, where was your position on the aircraft? Waste Gunner.<sup>1</sup>
7. What type of gun did you operate on the B24? 50 Cal
8. Where there any common problems with that gun? No.
9. Where there any issues with the turrets that you may have used or position you fired from? No.



SSGT Clyde Saylor



B24 Waist Gunner position

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<sup>1</sup> “There were good and sad things about being a Waist Gunner in a B24. The good things were that you could move around and weren’t cramped up like the turret gunners; you had a better view of the outside world than anyone else in the plane; and with those big waist windows and the nearby floor hatch you had a better chance of escape if it ever came to bail out in a hurry. The bad things were having to stand over your gun for hours; the cold and breeze; and being bucked around by any sudden changes in flight altitude the pilots made. There was a slipstream deflector at the forward end of each waist window which could be swung out to keep out the worst of the blast, but it was pretty breezy at the gun. The .50 wasn’t difficult to manipulate but the kick made accurate aim difficult. If I’m honest I’d say that you just pointed the gun in the direction of the target and hoped. Any enemy planes shot down by Waist Gunners were more by luck than skill and I think most men would go along with that.” Gunner Bill Robertie – 68 Bomb Squadron USAF.

# Death Railway

T O U R S



10. How long was the flight from India to the Bridge Over the River Kwai in your B24?  
7.5 hours – each way.
11. On the corner of the River Kwai Bridge was the Japanese anti-aircraft battery; was it this battery that gave your team the flak problems and hit your aircraft?  
Yes.
12. Was there any other Ack Ack sites giving your flight-team defensive fire?  
No.
13. Were you able to fire back with your gun to the Ack Ack sites?  
No.
14. Did you silence any of the Japanese defensive sites with your gun?  
No.
15. Three passes over the Steel Bridge and you hit it on the 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt. Did you fly parallel to the bridge or parallel to the river when bombing it?  
Parallel to the bridge – hit on 1<sup>st</sup> attempt – close misses on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.
16. In bombing mode, the B24 goes into auto-pilot to stabilize – was it at this time when you sustained the hit from flak?  
Yes.

# Death Railway

T O U R S

17. Henderson dropped the Azon Bomb on the bridge. Did he have more than one Azon bomb given you had 3 attempts at bombing the bridge?  
Had 6 Azon Bombs – 2 for each run. 1st run only 1 released – dropped 2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> run, 3 on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.
18. What altitude were you flying in bombing mode with the Azon?  
6,000 ft.
19. Your B24 was hit on that third attempt – how badly was it hit – what damage did you sustain?  
Blew off Bombay Doors, lost 3 of 4 radios, cut Aileron Cables, lost 3 Feet to the end of the right-wing tip; spiralled down to 2,000 feet – before gaining control.
20. Were any of your team injured?  
No.
21. When you got back to India did you celebrate the mission and getting back with that damaged aircraft?  
Ended up on a beach in Burma.
22. What other parts of the Thai-Burma Railway did you bomb?  
Various sections – Mile Markers 50-120, etc. Varied with each mission.
23. In your sortie could you see any trains operating from your aircraft?  
Yes – we strafed them.
24. Was the B24 repaired and put back into service?  
No.
25. How many missions did you work?  
19.
26. After the war what job does a Gunner of a B24 do?  
Carpenter for Father's Business.
27. How did you get into that role?  
Father.
28. Has any family followed your steps and joined the military?  
No.



# Death Railway

T O U R S

The VB1 – (Vertical Bomb) - Azon Bomb was a 1,000-pound bomb fitted with a tail assembly that was controlled by moveable rudders. Later the VB2 would be a heavier 2,000 bomb variety. Bill Henderson on the B24 over the River Kwai Bridge guided these Azon Bombs down whilst the aircraft was in auto pilot mode – that kept the aircraft stable during the bomb raid.

The guided bomb could be steered to the left or right – this action known as the 'Azimuth' hence the name: Azon Bomb. On the tail was a flare that also activated on release (a 600,000 Candela flare) – it could then be monitored by the Bombardier on its way down and the trajectory altered. This type of bomb was ideally suited for bombing long structures like railways and bridges – hence its use against the Burma Railway.

The Azon was the only radio-controlled bomb used in operational theatres by the US Air Force. The technology paved the way for some highly technical guided bombs and missiles in use today.



The VB1 – Azon Bomb – at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton Ohio.

## References:

SSGT Clyde Saylor  
[http://www.lipper.cc/8th\\_AF/pages/waist.html](http://www.lipper.cc/8th_AF/pages/waist.html)  
Lancaster on Line  
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