'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".

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 B-24J 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.