

The History of the 315th Bomb Wing

By Major Ralph L. Swann

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PREFACE

This study is based primarily on the monthly World War II historical reports of the units comprising the 315th Bomb Wing, Very Heavy (VH). Specifically, these units were the 315th Wing Headquarters and the four bomb groups and four service groups assigned to it. This study is not intended to be a complete unit history. Instead, it summarizes the story of the 315th during World War II and highlights the dedicated efforts of the men who served it and their country with honor during that global conflict. Their heroic deeds provided the basis for this study, and many people helped to bring it to fruition.

My sponsor, colonel George E. Harrington, USAF (Ret), provided the inspiration for this study. Colonel Harrington served as the 315th Wing Supply Officer during World War II and is currently the Chairman and Executive Director of the 315th Bomb Wing Association. His enthusiasm and pride in the 315th's accomplishments were infectious and sparked my interest in this project. Moreover, Colonel Harrington furnished key documents, photographs, and personal information to support this study.

In addition to Colonel Harrington's help, I was aided by several men who served as senior leaders in World War II. Major General Curtis E. LeMay was the Commander of the XXI Bomber Command from 21 January to 16 July 1945. His personal thoughts about the 315th's strategic bombardment role and combat effectiveness were extremely valuable to my study. Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., the First Commander of XXI Bomber Command, provided extremely useful background information on Twentieth Air Force's strategic air campaign against Japan in World War II. Brigadier General Paul W. Tibbets, Commander of the 509th Composite Group, served with Brigadier General Frank A. Armstrong, Commander of the 315th, during the war and shared his personal recollections of General Armstrong's personality and leadership qualities. Furthermore, General Tibbets provided an invaluable analysis of the 315th's role in pioneering precision radar bombing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Ralph L. Swann was commissioned in 1971 as a graduate of the AFROTC program at Bowling Green State University, Ohio. After completing pilot training at Webb AFB, Texas, he was assigned to McCoy AFB, Florida, as a KC-135 copilot. He subsequently upgraded to aircraft commander and instructor pilot at Rickenbacker AFB, Ohio. In 1977, he was a distinguished graduate of the Squadron Officers School. He earned a Masters of Arts degree in Business Management from Central Michigan University in 1984. His most recent assignment was as a Squadron Training Flight Instructor Pilot at Wurtsmith AFB, Michigan, where he was selected to attend the USAF Command and Staff College (ACSC). At ACSC he researched and wrote this history in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation.

After his tour at the Command and Staff College, Major Swann was assigned to Headquarters, Strategic Air Command.