

# WAR OF THE WINGED TORPEDOES

ATTACKING ENEMY SHIPPING IN NAGASAKI HARBOR DURING THE FINAL DAYS OF WWII,  
MITCHELLS CARRYING THE GT-1 GLIDE TORPEDOES ACHIEVED MIXED RESULTS

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Flight jacket insignia for the  
47th Bomb Squadron.



James P. Muri (second from left, front row) and his Marauder crew on Midway Island.



On 1 May 1944, the Wright R-2600s on the first of a fleet of 18 North American B-25J Mitchells came to life amidst oily clouds of smoke as the propellers began to beat an increasing tempo in the cool morning air at Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Base (now Travis AFB) in northern California. The aircraft were destined for a remote and quiet field on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. As that first B-25J, heavily laden with “Tokyo Tanks” — the extra fuel tanks in the bomb bay required for the long journey over the Pacific — rose into the damp air, the

balance of 17 Mitchells would follow. However, aboard the new medium bombers the crews did not know their final destination nor their true mission in America’s war against the Japanese Empire.

Specially picked and chosen from combat transition crews at Greenville Army Air Force Base in South Carolina, each six-man crew consisted of a pilot, copilot, navigator/bombardier, radioman/waist gunner, tail gunner/armorer, and top turret gunner/mechanic.

Twenty of these crews had been

carefully selected from the many combat transition training crews at Greenville by Col. Oliver H. Stout who was the base commander. The next stop for these 20 crews would be Eglin Army Air Force Base in Florida. At the time, Eglin was a secluded and wide-spread field where a great deal of experimental work (especially with armament) was being conducted.

At Eglin, these selected crews would soon be introduced to an experimental weapon that had been in operation for just a short period of time. This new and novel weapon was called

the “Flying Torpedo.” Consisting of a standard US Navy torpedo that had been modified by USAAF engineers so that it could “fly” for distances ranging from ten to 20 miles, enter the ocean, and then proceed towards an enemy target for up to 19,500 yards, the Flying Torpedo was hoped to have great success than the earlier Flying Bomb, which had proven to be a failure.

In Nazi-controlled Germany, scientists had initiated the concept of building a glider weapon that would be carried aloft to 25,000 feet and then dropped against an enemy target some 30 miles distant. This weapon would carry a 1000-pound high-

explosive warhead. Necessity is often the mother of invention, and the idea for the weapon came about from the heavy losses among *Luftwaffe* bombers attacking the British Isles during the Battle of Britain.

Anti-aircraft guns, balloons dragging steel cables, and the superb Hawker Hurricanes and Supermarine Spitfires of the Royal Air Force’s Fighter Command were tearing through the *Luftwaffe* bombers at a rapid rate. These bombers could enjoy the protection of escorting Messerschmitt Bf 109E fighters for only a limited amount of time because of the short-range of the *Emil*, which would have to break away and return to bases

in France before running out of fuel. The German aircraft would have to enter this web of defense while heading towards targets in London and other cities and then endure it again while returning. Wouldn’t it be better to create a “glide bomb” that could be dropped from high altitude and then “steered” to the target? Released some 30 miles from targets, the bombers could completely elude some of the protective forces.

Seeing what the Germans were up to, British “boffins” tried to create their own similar weapon. However, the British were plagued with problems on their prototype glide bombs since

Fitted with their GT-1 glide torpedoes, the B-25J Mitchells begin to takeoff for the mission to Nagasaki harbor with B-25J “LUKI BETS” in the lead.