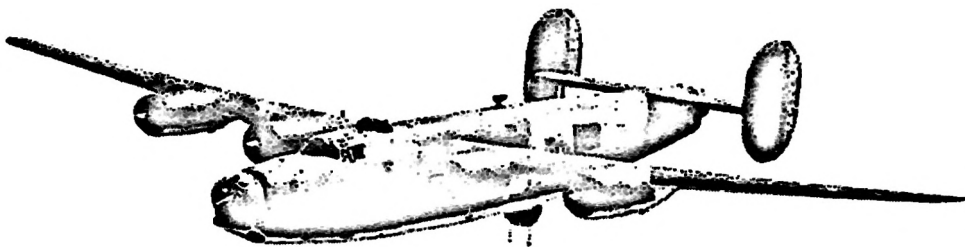


LOW LEVEL LIBERATORS

**The Story of Patrol Bombing Squadron 104
in the South Pacific
During World War II**



BY

PAUL F. STEVENS

**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
THE MEMORY OF WHITNEY WRIGHT,
A MAGNIFICENT COMBAT LEADER**



L.T. CHDR. WHITNEY WRIGHT, U.S.N.
Commanding Officer

REMEMBERING

Dear Men and Officers of "104":

It is with pleasure that I have looked through the pages of this "Tour Book," a book that records twelve months of living which to me will always be most memorable. In those months I lived and worked and laughed and grieved with men who at no time hesitated or stumbled or complained or criticized; who continually with their heart and soul, stamina and humor, and their very existence performed a job which was neither of their asking nor their liking; a job which was difficult and at times loathsome; a job which demanded everything, and which by all of you was well done—done far above and beyond what any individual could have expected.

It is with sadness that we think of our shipmates who did not return with us, and with sorrow for their loved ones who have waited and hoped for the return of those most dear to them. It is, therefore, to the many who have served at home and waited in vain for those who meant life itself, that I dedicate this book. To our shipmates who did not return may we dedicate a better world, and pledge our personal efforts to that end, remembering that they have but flown to the ends of the earth where God is with them.

WHITNEY WRIGHT,
Commanding.

Remembering

W. E. ABBOTT
O. A. ADAMS
E. J. ANDERSON
C. J. ARNETT
S. R. BEECHY
JOHN BIERMAN
H. P. CASEY
J. W. CLEMENT
C. B. COATES
C. R. COLVIN
F. M. CRAVEN
O. W. CRUMMITT
O. P. DAILEY
L. DERVARTANIAN
J. DIACHIN
W. S. DODSWORTH
E. H. EDEL
E. V. ERSKINE

D. G. FANELLI
W. R. FORRESTER
J. W. GARRISON
W. E. GOODMAN
J. F. HARLAN
J. D. HARRINGTON
A. V. HARRIS
M. K. HILL
D. M. HOLTON
L. M. HOWARD
L. S. JAMESON
J. L. KEIDEL
R. L. KEISEY
R. S. KNIGHT
E. G. KROM
D. W. LANQUIST
N. P. MADSEN
G. D. MARTIN

W. MAZUREK
V. L. MCCOY
E. J. McDONALD
K. R. MCHENRY
T. E. MCKENZIE
L. F. MORRIS
S. H. NEWELL
J. J. POLESKY, JR.
W. H. RUDGE
G. T. SCHOENWALDER, JR.
S. M. SKIFER
J. D. SHEA
R. H. SKEWS
R. M. THORNTON, JR.
W. E. THICK, JR.
K. A. WADDLE
W. J. WHELAN
J. M. WIMBERLY

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting
the SECOND PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to

PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON ONE HUNDRED FOUR

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Southwest Pacific Area from November 6, 1944, to June 7, 1945. Conducting extremely long-range search and offensive reconnaissance missions in heavily defended enemy territory, Patrol Bombing Squadron ONE HUNDRED FOUR inflicted crippling damage on the enemy, sinking a total of 110 ships, damaging 152 ships including a battleship, destroying 32 hostile planes and probably destroying or damaging 36 additional aircraft. Seriously handicapped by operational hazards, by maintenance difficulties resulting from a shortage of tools, men, spare parts and base facilities, and by repeated enemy air attacks on Tacloban airstrip and base on Leyte Island, the pilots, aircrewmembers and ground forces were instrumental in closing vital hostile strongholds to Japanese shipping, thereby contributing to the success of Allied campaigns in the Southwest Pacific. This illustrious record of achievement reflects the highest credit upon Patrol Bombing Squadron ONE HUNDRED FOUR and the United States Naval Service."

For the President,



Secretary of the Navy

A-17396

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book was the most unlikely thing to enter my mind. But encouraged by several people and recognizing that unless someone was to do it, the story of Patrol Bombing Squadron 104 would be lost forever, I undertook to compile the data and set about to record the history of an experience of a lifetime for most all of us "Screamers." Two years later, after much effort and labor, the book is completed. Without the help from a number of people this would never have been accomplished. I wish to thank those who contributed so much.

My grandson, Matthew Stevens, forced me onto the computer while I kicked and screamed all the way. Without his patience and expertise, I would still be struggling with my WP-80 word processor and most likely would never finish the book. Shirley Gordon, wife of stalwart Squadron member, Flash Gordon, has edited the rough draft and, lo and behold, it is now readable. Thank you, Shirley, you have taught me more about proper composition than all of my school teachers of so long ago.

The photographs have been accumulated from many members of the Squadron, for which I thank you all. Selecting those to be used was most difficult. A special thanks to those crewmen who manned the after station, hanging so far out of the hatch to get these great shots. Spectacular! My son, Greg Stevens, spent many hours in his lab reworking faded photos to make them usable. My apologies to his family for usurping so much of his time away from you. Mark Balasi provided photos and presentations that have helped so much. His father, Alfred, a member of the CASU(F) 57 at Clark Field, flew with VPB-104 during many of our photographic missions. Al Balasi had collected some rare photographs during our scenic trips across the South China Sea. Alex Durr, an aviation artist of great talent, produced the drawings depicting attacks by our flight crews. These illustrate our aerial combat methods that cannot be shown by the photos themselves.

The data and information from official U.S. Navy records were obtained mostly from the Operational Archives of the Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC. My thanks to Dr. William Dudley, Director, and his assistants there. They were most knowledgeable and cooperative. An extensive, well organized collection was always readily available to me. Much the same can be attributed to Hill Goodspeed at the Emil Buehler Library, National Museum of Naval Aviation, Pensacola, Florida. A special thanks to Ken Snyder and Mac McDonald. I'm sure I overworked you. However, your good nature and willingness to help is very much appreciated. I do thank you.

Without the Squadron members' contributions and participation, the book would be an empty account of repeating the data in the Aircraft Action Reports and War Diary, as informative as they are. But there is a great deal more to be written concerning the personal experiences in wartime of a combatant unit. The stories, accounts, and discussions of our patrols were inspiring for me. Lending to the real history of a fighting squadron were the stories of camp life, unusual adventures, and experiences while not in the airplanes. Some qualified as encounters of another kind. It has all added to what I hope and believe will be a

real story of great interest to many people. Fred Himsworth, you have an exceptional memory or kept a very fine and detailed diary. To you and all the others, I say that you have made a good story far better.

Last, but not least, I must commend my wife Joyce for her patience, understanding, and support. It has been a long and sometimes difficult role for her but she has prevailed and now a degree of normalcy has returned to our home.

INTRODUCTION

The story of the U.S. Navy's utilization of the B-24 aircraft for long-range search and offensive armed-reconnaissance missions during World War II has not been fully told. For our employment of the B-24 Liberator in this role, it was redesignated a PB4Y-1 and painted Navy Blue. The airplane served the long range search role very, very well.

However, success in almost any endeavor depends largely upon the men operating the machine. In turn, performance of duty under very hazardous and difficult conditions depends, to a great degree, upon leadership. Patrol Bombing Squadron 104's Commanding Officer, LCdr. Whitney Wright, USN, was an outstanding combat leader and possessed a fine understanding of human nature. Additionally, his competence and experience as an aviator provided the Squadron with leadership, insuring success in combat. The men of the Squadron idolized him and were more than willing to follow wherever he might lead us. And he did lead from the cockpit. A very high order of esprit de corps existed throughout the combat tour.

This book is a record of achievements rather than a scholarly report of history. Most certainly it is not a polished literary production. It is a story of what we did and how we did it. We are late in producing this, as the memories have faded. Many of our members are no longer here to add their personal recollections. However, a reasonable degree of accuracy has been obtained due to accessing a great many documents. I have relied heavily upon the Aircraft Action Reports, the Squadron's War Diary, and the Commanding Officer's Report to the Chief of Naval Operations dated June 1, 1945. The pilots and flight crewmen's logbooks have also provided much information about the day-to-day actions. Most informative has been the remarks sections of these logbooks. Here, the men added their thoughts, observations, and often the reports of wild happenings.

Photographs have been used extensively to help the readers grasp the feeling and understanding of the actions. A photo also served to confirm a shoot-down or sinking and the flight crews made every effort to record the actions on film. These were taken by a crewman hanging out (in both definitions) of the waist hatch in the after part of the fuselage. There were other means of confirming an event, but the photographic proof was the most effective. Besides, the flight crews could verify their tall tales by these photos. I obtained a considerable amount of my "proof" during a visit to the Photographic Officer's tent just before leaving for the States after the completion of my combat tour.

Some Squadron members' personal accounts and recollections are referenced and others quoted. However, where the "war story" differs from the AAR or War Diary, the written word prevails. Although personal cameras and diaries were officially forbidden in the forward combat areas, many photos are in existence depicting daily activities in the camp areas. There are photographs in old albums that are stamped "Passed by Navy Censor" which had been mailed to families at home. Squadron members managed, one way or another, to keep some records and memories of their adventures and the happenings of camp life in the tropics. Several have written an account of their view of the war for

their family history. These have proven most useful to me. A number believed their stories and recollections to be routine and of no significance, but I have dragged it out of them when possible.

The abilities of the Patrol Plane Commander was all important. It goes without saying that he must be a good aviator and hold the confidence of his crew. However, for successful armed-reconnaissance missions, the PPC must possess an aggressive competence and an excellent decision-making process. The decision to attack or not to attack frequently had to be made quickly, and it better be the right decision. The mission, his life and ten or eleven other people's lives in the airplane depended on it. The PPC was expected to take advantage of the opportunities presented. Yet, a foolish attack upon a minor target known to be well defended was indefensible. It was not only the attack decisions, flying in the combat zone was hazardous and correct decisions based upon a multitude of factors had to be made during every patrol. Surprisingly, there was no formal criterion for the attack decision. There most certainly was the one hard and fast rule. You had to cover your search sector, regardless. Once the takeoff was made, the PPC was on his own. He did have his challenges; a complex airplane grossly overloaded, one airplane alone flying deeply into enemy territory, and you would fly your patrol often in terrible weather. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

Fortunately, the Patrol Plane Commander was not alone. He had a well-trained and capable crew with him. Additionally, the men of Crew Nineteen worked long and hard in support of the airplanes and flying personnel. Our flight crewmen knew their business and were eager to do damage to the enemy on every patrol. Some crewmen were on their third combat tour of duty in the southern and western Pacific. All of the men wanted action and they got it. Firing the big 0.50 caliber machine guns gave them great satisfaction. A shoot-down of an enemy aircraft was exhilarating. Status among the crews was gained or lost by the number of kills. No reluctance with this group. They knew what they were doing and wanted to do it!

I hope you enjoy the book. These are true accounts.

CHAPTER ONE REFORMING NAAS CAMP KEARNEY

It was to be a once in a lifetime experience. Amazingly, the U.S. Navy had made a very good personnel decision. Bombing Squadron 104 (VB-104) would be broken up into three segments upon its return from the South Pacific. Some who would return to that tropical paradise would do so in VPB-104. Others would be assigned to the newly formed Patrol Bombing Squadrons 118 and 119. This distribution would provide a nuclei of combat experience for three squadrons rather than all the talent remaining in Bombing 104 for its second combat tour.

No question that the original VB-104 men would have preferred to stay with their squadron. But this sharing of combat know-how would be a major factor in the success of all three squadrons. VPB-118 and 119 would fly the modified and improved PB4Y-2 aircraft. VPB-104 would continue to operate the PB4Y-1, a B-24J Liberator painted navy blue with some niceties added, such as an improved search radar, an Electronic Counter Measures (ECM) package in three aircraft, and better gun turrets. Changing the designation from VB to VPB would have no effect upon the squadron's operation.

The squadron's complement consisted of 15 airplanes and 18 flight crews. A 19th crew was composed of 12, usually non-flying administrative and technical specialists. It was an efficient organization.

The Commanding Officer for the second tour was LCdr. Whitney Wright, USN. It is noted that a commanding officer in the Navy is totally responsible and has complete authority over his unit. This has been ever so since the age of sail. Wright would establish an aggressive and competent attitude in the squadron and would lead from the cockpit. He would fly more patrols and make more attacks than any other Patrol Plane Commander (PPC).

Of the eighteen Patrol Plane Commanders, ten would be from the first tour of VB-104. The others came from patrol squadrons operating PBY Catalinas. All of these pilots had combat experience and a minimum of 18 months overseas duty. The copilots were fresh from flight school and operational training on the PB4Y-1 at NAS Hutchinson, Kansas.

The flight crewmen returning with VPB-104 for a second visit to the South Pacific would be the crew leaders without question. They had contributed to making the first combat tour so successful. Regardless of their ratings or specialties, they would be the Plane Captains/Crew Chiefs for the airplanes. A number of them would be assigned to Crew Nineteen.

In addition to the technical specialists drawn from the first-tour crewmen, four officers added to the capabilities of this group. There was a lawyer from Texas, an engineer from Kansas, a college professor from Ohio, and a Harvard graduate (no, not the one that had his 40-knot PT boat run down by a 35-knot Japanese destroyer). For the clerical chores there were two yeomen attending to the typing, filing, preparing Aircraft Action Reports (AARs), and the maintenance of personnel records.

The lawyer from Texas was the squadron's Air Combat Intelligence Officer (ACIO). Once entering combat, we found that the one ACIO and the two yeomen were hard-pressed to keep up with the production of the Aircraft Action Reports. This would skew our combat record somewhat as the AARs were filed only when a kill, damage, or substantial action was claimed. If a crew came out second best or the bombs missed, often there was no AAR prepared.

Upon return from leave the flight crewmen reported in to ComFairWestCoast at NAS San Diego, California. It was here and during the period before reporting back into the squadron that the name "Screamers" was assigned to VB-104. These veterans accepted this designation. They knew what was required for combat and what Stateside rules and regulations were plain nonsense. They had not been at all reluctant in expressing themselves. The Buccaneers of VB-104 now became "Screaming One-Oh-Four."

The pilots of the squadron who would have a second tour in VPB-104 reported in to NAS Hutchinson, Kansas. The eight pilots joining from PBY squadrons also checked in to this naval air station located in the middle of the flat wheat fields. Here an anomaly of the Training Command occurred that was beyond belief. The pilots new to 104 had made the transition from the flying boats into the Liberator at NAAS Camp Kearney, California. Each had about 45 hours flight time in the big bomber. The ten "Old Hands" of the squadron had about 700 hours, mostly in combat, flying in the South Pacific. These pilots were required to complete the full training syllabus of 45 hours and then take a check flight. The "New Boys" to the squadron flew four or five hours at Hutchinson and were waved on through, no check flight required!

THE TRIALS OF WARTIME TRAVELS - The path of the pilots to reestablish the squadron at NAAS Camp Kearney was strewn with adventures all the way from Hutchinson to San Diego. A number of pilots, some with wives, boarded the Santa Fe Chief for the trip. At one stopover in Arizona, several pilots strolled up to the train's locomotive for a chat with the engineer. This friendly fellow invited them to ride in the cab to the next stop some 200 miles down the track. This exchange of seats was not made known to the ladies of the group. It was a fun ride for the pilots but a period of extreme concern for the wives. Their beloved ones had missed the train and how on earth would they ever rendezvous given the difficulties of wartime travel? Upon rejoining at the next stop, the wives were not amused.

For those traveling by automobile, gasoline rationing coupons were issued. However, there was no provision for worn tires. For some, and at varying points along the

highway, blown tires did not add to the merriment of the trip. They found that the rationing boards had already heard many appeals for an authorization for tires. As resourceful as these pilots were, they failed in their appeal. Then, camping on the courthouse steps, they announced to the board that they were there to stay and please send a telegram that they would be unable to report in as ordered. The ration coupon was issued.

Then there was the "expensive lunch" in Albuquerque. Ensign Tom Lusk, another Hutchinson graduate, tells of another adventure on the same train ride:

"On the way, I sat with three other copilots all just getting acquainted on the long trip to the West Coast. While riding through New Mexico we were informed that we would be stopping at Albuquerque for an hour and a half about noontime. I told my new friends that I was well acquainted there and knew of a fine place for lunch. They wanted to just eat at the train station but I would not hear of it as it was a great restaurant only about two blocks from the station. The two blocks turned into five blocks and it was just an ordinary lunch. The five blocks on the return seemed very long and when we got to the station the platform was empty. We stood watching our train disappear down the track.

"My new friends looked at me with disgust and I thought to myself, maybe I can get transferred back to PBYS. Since I was expected to say something and I hadn't stopped frantically thinking, I said, 'I have flown all over the valley and I know the railroad line goes south for about six miles before it crosses over the Rio Grande and makes a big loop to the west. Whereas Route 66 goes due west out of Albuquerque. Let's get a cab and try to catch the train at Grants, about sixty miles west.' So we ran out of the station and fortunately found a cab and told the driver to beat the train to Grants.

"With a lot of sweating and the luck of the Irish, we made it to Grants just as the train was pulling in. We pooled our resources and gratefully paid the driver a lot of money. We boarded the train and found our seats, vowing not to get off the train again. My new friends were so relieved they decided not to kill me. But they probably were thinking that some day they would get even with me and later might even laugh at the very expensive lunch in Albuquerque."

Despite the trials and tribulations of wartime travel, the squadron was beginning to assemble at NAAS Camp Kearney. This facility had been established as an U.S. Army Cavalry training base during WW I. There seemed to be little question of the previous tenants of the barracks as both ends had swinging doors. But there was a long concrete runway with associated taxiways and parking ramps that would serve our purposes very well.

VPB-104 was reformed on May 15, 1944, with Lieutenant Henry S. Noon, USNR, Acting Commander Officer, as authorized by ComFair West Coast Dispatch 13205 dated May 4, 1944. Subsequently, the squadron would report to Commander, Fleet Air Wing 14 (ComFAW) in connection with reforming VPB-104. Two PB4Y-1 aircraft, Bureau of Aeronautics Numbers (BuNo) 32003 and 32007 (definitely war-weary aircraft) were assigned temporarily.

Located on Kearney Mesa, this was out in the boondocks for sure. For the veterans the living arrangements were only slightly better than that of the South Pacific. But there was one vast difference. The bright lights of San Diego loomed only a short bus ride or drive to the southeast. For the married men it was a chance to locate a bedroom (never mind the kitchen or living room). For the single men the major effort was acquiring gas coupons and, from time to time, very temporary quarters ashore.

During June 1944 the inflow of personnel increased and additional training aircraft were received. The following PB4Y-1 aircraft were received temporarily for training: BuNo 32079, 32114, 32072, and 32101. This brought the number of training aircraft available up to six. Also, an NE-1 (a J-3 Cub) was assigned for liaison with NAS North Island. Flight training consisted of familiarization flights, bounce drills, gunnery practice, and Link Trainer for the pilots. Ground school continued, including lectures on radio, radar, communications, navigation, gunnery, engineering, and recognition.

A TRAGIC ACCIDENT - Each morning personnel gathered at the squadron's office area for muster and to receive the plan of the day and flight schedule. At the time of the following event about 25 to 30 members of 104 had gathered, awaiting muster. The date was June 6, 1944.

At 0755 a PB4Y-1, BuNo 32073, assigned to VPB-117, also in training at Camp Kearney, crashed into the 104 Squadron area. Three members of 104 were killed and four wounded to varying degrees. Those killed: Edward Guy Woodward, ARM3c; Henry Ignatius Ladowski, ARM3c; and John Daniel Fuller, AMM3c. Wounded were Lt. Travis E. Baker, Lt.(jg) Richard O. Ulin, Ens. John F. Putman, and James H. Emerson, AOM2c.

Fred Hinsworth, who would fly with Ettinger and Crew Nine, had just arrived at Camp Kearney the afternoon before from training in Hutchinson, Kansas. He was 18 years old and a qualified radioman-gunner. Awed and excited to be joining a first-line combatant squadron, he tells in graphic detail of the big Liberator's crash into the squadron's area:

"Little did we know of the dramatic event that was about to take place at Camp Kearney.

"In order to properly describe what occurred that morning, I will attempt to draw a verbal picture of the office area to help visualize the chain of events. A small open area, approximately 150 feet square was bordered on the left by the squadron offices; two rows of small Quonset huts facing

one another across a space of about fifteen feet. A larger one-story building, used for temporary sleeping quarters, was located at the front of the open area and a large hanger that separated the open area from the taxi apron and runways bordered the back edge.

"I arrived in the office at about ten minutes to eight and, along with several others, was standing in a group on the edge of the open area near the door of the end office hut closest to the hanger. Two or three fellows from my class were sitting on a bench along side of the wall of the opposite hut, talking to several others who were standing nearby. All in all, there were probably about 25 or 30 men standing in or walking around the immediate area.

"There was a dense fog hanging about 150 feet off the ground and the visibility was very poor. I noticed the sound of an aircraft flying over very low in the vicinity, but I couldn't see it because of the fog. It came and went several times but I wasn't experienced enough to realize what was going on and actually didn't pay much attention to it. I guess I was more interested in finding out about my new assignment than I was anything else. What was actually happening was that the aircraft was trying to land but it couldn't find the runway in the fog. It was descending through it periodically in an effort to locate the ground and get a reference point so it could tell where it was in relation to the runway.

"The first time I really became aware of it was when the noise of the engines became so loud that I involuntarily looked in the direction of the sound. To this day, my memory of what I saw is still very clear. All of a sudden a B-24 came down out of the fog at an altitude of about a hundred feet.

"I stood frozen in awe as Lieutenant Ulin, the Personnel Officer who had been talking to us, yelled 'Run' and raced to the left, between the rows of the office buildings. The aircraft seemed to try to pull up but only munched through the air without gaining altitude. Then the left wing slowly dropped and struck something and the aircraft cart-wheeled into the ground. I finally came to my senses when the wing struck and started running, but only to go the wrong way.

"I ran to the right, across the open area, and directly in front of the rolling and burning wreckage that came crashing towards me. I looked back over my shoulder as I ran and saw what looked like yellow two-by-four planks whirling through the air along with some flaming billows of gasoline coming toward me. I was struck in the head by something and knocked down, but got back up immediately and ran again. When I finally thought it was safe, I stopped to look back and saw nothing but burning wreckage

covering the open area behind me. I'm sure there was another fellow running behind me but I don't know whether he made it or not. There was no one between me and the wreckage when I stopped to look back and he could very possibly have been killed.

"The only injuries I suffered were a small cut on the back of my head, which did not require stitches, and blisters on the backs of my ears. The only way I can figure I got the blisters is that I must have been knocked down just as the flaming gas passed over my head. The heat of it alone must have caused the blisters as, strangely enough, my hair wasn't even singed. It may have been lucky that I was knocked down at that precise moment as I might have been enveloped in flames if I had still been on my feet.

"I later found out that the B-24 had struck the ground just short of the barracks building at the front of the lot, demolishing most of the building and killing the people inside. The aircraft broke up when it hit and various sections of it, along with debris from the building, careened through the open area.

"The two squadron office huts were absolutely undamaged other than having one of the huge wheels of the landing gear ending up on top of the one I had been standing next to. The edge of the trail of wreckage was no more than two or three feet from the building and had I run to the left instead of the right, I would have been completely out of the way of the crash. How I survived after running directly across in front of it is a mystery to me.

"There were a total of 26 men killed in the crash, including three of the men in my group from Hutchinson. Two of them had been sitting on the bench by the hut opposite the one I was standing near and were apparently trapped between the buildings. The other was hit by flying debris as he was trying to get out of the way. The entire group had become well acquainted after spending almost two months together and it was a shattering blow to those of us who survived.

"I suppose I had realized there were hazards to flying prior to that but thought them more likely to come from combat rather than an everyday possibility. There had been no accidents in my short experience and it had never quite come home to me that I could possibly lose my life in an operational accident.

"A puzzling aftermath of the crash was that Lt. Ulin, the officer who yelled 'Run,' was terribly burned about the face and suffered disfiguring injuries. It appeared to me that he had done everything right because he ran in the direction that should have put him well clear of the wreckage. I never

did find out how he became injured as we didn't become well enough acquainted to ask about it."

Lts. Baker and Ulin were eventually released from the hospital and returned to the squadron. The other two injured men were assigned to different commands.

On June 21, 1944, LCdr. Whitney Wright, USN, assumed command of VPB-104 in accordance with the orders from ComFairWest Coast, dated June 8, 1944. The reporting senior for the squadron remained ComFAW-14. LCdr. Wright was the youngest and most junior officer to take command of a Navy PB4Y-1 Squadron at this time. He would meet his responsibilities and be recognized as one of the finest squadron commanders of WW II. During the year in command of VPB-104 he would fly 64 combat patrols and a total of nearly 1,300 hours (all flights included).

To place Wright's accomplishments in perspective, Lt. Stevens as Executive Officer (second in command), would fly 50 combat patrols and a total of 965 hours (all flights included); Lt. George Waldeck, 65 combat patrols and 1,082 hours; and Lt. Earl Bittenbender, 54 combat patrols and 1,095 hours.

During the month, two more of the PB4Y-1 "32XXX" series war-weary airplanes were received. The aircraft on hand as of June 30, 1944, were as follows:

PB4Y-1

32003
32007
32072
32078
32101
32114

At some point while at Miramar the squadron was also assigned a twin-engine Beechcraft (SNB). Our records show no information as to purpose or usage.

This system of operating the 32XXX series airplanes for the early portion of our training was a good one. The early bounce drills for the PPCs and copilots were tough on airplanes, no question about it. It was likewise tough on the flight crewmen. No joy at all riding through the circuit and bumps with nothing to do but hang on!

The flight crews of the 15 senior PPCs would be assigned new 38XXX PB4Y-1s to be their very own. Receipt of the airplanes would be in reverse order of seniority. The Commanding Officer and his flight crew received the last delivery, the Executive Officer the next to last, and so on.

The more senior; the fresher their airplane. But this policy did have its downside somewhat. The last three PB4Y-1s delivered had the belly gun turrets removed and

APS-15 radar installed in its place. We all wanted ALL the 0.50 caliber machine guns possible for our airplane!

While preparing for battles to be fought in the South Pacific, a more timely and imminent war was being waged just beyond the gate of Camp Kearney. There were nightly forays into the dens of San Diego, Coronado, Mission Beach, La Jolla, Tijuana, or wherever a friendly female might be found. Some adventures even occurred aboard the base. One forever to be unidentified ensign arose from his bunk very late one night to visit the community bathroom. A statuesque blonde, completely nude, stepped from the shower, patted him on the cheek, and said, "Hello, little boy," and strolled back to her date for the evening.

A number of men made the run to Los Angeles for a visit to the famous Stage Door Canteen. And who could tell, maybe even a dance around the floor with Betty Grable. Sorry, Betty's not in tonight nor any other night from all reports. Nor any other star or starlet, except for photo opportunities.

Disappointment was to continue when one found he had missed the last bus back to San Diego. And once on highway 101 to hitchhike, he found that hundreds of other uniformed men were alongside with their thumbs out.

A NIFTY SOLUTION - Transportation was a big problem in the States during WW II. But there was the "Flash Gordon" solution. Flash, otherwise known as Frederick L. Gordon, AMMc and Plane Captain for Waldeck's crew, could surmount most any obstacle that lay in the path of liberty ashore:

"It was always difficult to get from Camp Kearney to San Diego and back. To solve this problem, Jimmy Mathews and I pooled our resources and purchased a 1926 Hudson Super 6 from a Navy man who was going overseas. It cost us a grand total of \$26.00, just \$13.00 each. We only got the keys—no paperwork or title. The license plates were outdated but were the same color as those issued that year. That didn't worry us as we stayed on the side streets in San Diego. We didn't have gas ration coupons but found 100 octane aviation fuel worked well but mileage was poor. With 100 octane we could pass on the left lane going uphill into San Diego.

"The car had a box-like passenger section with the top missing; probably from deterioration. When we saw something worthwhile, like a pretty female, we would all stand up and look out over the top.

"We would often take as many as 20 to 25 squadron members to chow hall at Camp Kearney. Of course, that many passengers would only fit if we all stood up, but it was better than walking.

"On one occasion, we drove the Super 6 to Los Angeles for a weekend. We had a full gas tank of 100-octane avgas when we left Camp Kearney but less than half a tank when we were ready for our return trip. As previously mentioned, we didn't have gasoline ration coupons, so we had to be innovative. Kerosene could be purchased without ration coupons so we took a chance and topped off the tank with kerosene. The return trip to Camp Kearney was uneventful--obviously the 100 octane/kerosene mixture was compatible with the car's engine.

"Jimmy took the Super 6 to San Diego one night without a full gas tank. He ran out of gas in one of San Diego's nicest residential sections. He simply left the Super 6 there and returned to base by public transportation. We were scheduled to go to Kaneohe shortly so we never attempted to recover the car. Someone later spotted it in a police impound yard.

"Jimmy says the purchase price of the car was \$75.00 or \$37.50 each. After 50-plus years, whose memory is correct? At either price, we got our money's worth."

HARDSHIP DUTY - Young naval aviators are very dutiful--and innovative. Several volunteered to serve as liaison while the squadron was receiving the new airplanes from NAS North Island. Such was a "complex arrangement." Delivery from Consolidated Aircraft Company to FAW 14's Acceptance and Delivery Unit to VPB-104 required close supervision. These pilots would take up residency in the deluxe Del Coronado Hotel in order to perform this task. They would even pay the \$1.00 per night hotel charge themselves!

I wonder if Paul's Inn is still in business? Not sure that is the correct name as some thought the name was Paul's Passion Pit. Located just around the corner from the Grant Hotel, it was very popular. And very late at night, rooms sometimes became available at the Grant.

July 1944 saw an increase in the tempo of operations. My pilot's logbook shows a total flight time for the month of 115 hours. Added to our "bounce" training flights were over-water navigation (day and night), bombing, gunnery, formation, and tactics. In addition, there was no letup in the ground schooling.

The bombing flights were both high altitude (8-10,000 feet) and low altitude masthead or skip bombing at 50 feet. The high altitude, level attitude bomb runs were guided by the Norden bombsight upon a target planted in the middle of the Salton Sea. It was run after run, over and over. Many hours were spent practicing this bomb delivery method. My bombardier was Lee Webber, a first-tour veteran and a first class metalsmith by rating. He was very good. However, in six months of combat, we were to make only two drops with the Norden bombsight, though one was to be of great importance.

The masthead bombing target was a wooden frame and canvas replica of a ship erected in the desert alongside the Salton Sea. These simulated bombing attacks were made at very low altitude and run-ins at 45 inches of manifold pressure (MAP) and 2,500 RPM power on the engines. This gave us about 200 knots indicated air speed (KIAS) and very good maneuvering capabilities. As we approached this target, all 0.50 caliber guns that could bear forward, blasted away. This consisted of three twin-gun turrets; bow, top and belly. Later and during actual combat, the belly turrets were restricted in firing forward as the possibility existed that this gunfire could strike the bomb fuse. Such could spoil your whole day.

Our bombardiers, crouched behind and below the bow turret, made these drops by using a "seaman's eye" release. That is, the bombs were dropped using only visual judgment. Against this stationary target, emitting no "red golf balls" inbound against the PB4Y-1, our bombardiers seldom missed. The practice, non-exploding bombs did little damage, but the six 0.50 caliber machine guns did. The target was soon destroyed. The total number of 0.50 caliber ammunition rounds expended during July was 55,200.

The tactical flights also included our being the targets for the Navy fighter squadrons. In our box formations at 15,000' to 20,000' altitude, the F6F and FM-2 fighter aircraft made diving mock attacks. We simply held formation and suffered through. Not at all an enjoyable flight, but it did provide a different perspective of our PB4Y's. At these altitudes they were more responsive and the controls lighter. And the turbo-superchargers still gave us full power on the engines.

A tragedy did occur with one of the other PB4Y-1 squadrons. Flying the box in their patrol planes, one of the fighters misjudged and collided with the PB4Y flying the rear position. All hands died in both airplanes.

A WELCOME ADDITION - During July, a beautiful female with dark black hair and lovely brown eyes joined our squadron. She was to become the personality of the outfit and the object of much affection. Ensigns John Freeman and Frank Chase made the trip to Los Angeles to visit the Stage Door Canteen. Walking along the sidewalk in anticipation of mingling with the stars, they noticed this lovely creature watching them from a window. Entering the shop, they quickly concluded the purchase for \$25.00 and carried the little dog away. It was the best \$25.00 John ever spent.

At the Stage Door Canteen, the hostess gave the two ensigns a warm greeting, but not to the dog. John charmed the hostess and claimed the animal to be well trained. She relented and returned to her duties and it was well-timed, as our pet let go big time. Quickly whisking up the evidence, the two ensigns made a hasty retreat without a good-bye nor meeting any glamorous movie stars. Even so, it was well worth the trip.

If this lovely animal was to be a member of the squadron then fly she must. On her first flight she was placed in one of the pigeon-hole compartments over the radioman's desk. Tucked in tail first she seemed well content--until the first of the four engines fired

into life. The noise and excitement were too much for her and the radioman became a bit wet. However, she settled down and then obviously enjoyed being around the crew and the flights.

She had acquired her name during one of the pre-flight activities. One of the crew shouted to another to start up the "putt-putt." This was the name used for the aircraft's auxiliary gasoline-engine electrical generator. The name seemed most appropriate and everyone liked it. And so it was that Putt Putt became a valued member of Screaming 104.

The squadron was now receiving the new and permanently assigned airplanes and the old ones were returned to FAW-14. Airplanes on hand as of July 31, 1944, were as follows:

NE-1	26216
SNB	39769
PB4Y-1	38807
PB4Y-1	38809
PB4Y-1	38806
PB4Y-1	38801
PB4Y-1	38795
PB4Y-1	38974
PB4Y-1	38774
PB4Y-1	38789

Two of the old PB4Y-1 airplanes, 32101 and 32010, remained on board.

The squadron remained based at NAAS Camp Kearney. However, some airplanes were temporarily based at NAAS Holtville for gunnery and bombing practice. All training was conducted in accordance with ComFairWestCoast Confidential Dispatch 132025, dated May 4, 1944, addressed to FAW-14.

HIGH TEMPO OF OPS - Flight operations during August continued to be at a high level for the squadron. My pilot's flight logbook shows 105 hours for the month. Several new training exercises were introduced. Our flight crews made simulated day and night attacks against battleships and destroyers off the coast from San Diego. We made glide bombing, high-altitude bombing with the Norden bombsight, and low-level masthead attacks. Experiments were conducted utilizing the radar for bomb releases. Six airplane tactical flights were conducted for bombing and defensive exercise. We used gun cameras to grade scoring against attacks by fighter aircraft.

Operations in the desert from NAAS Holtville continued. All departures from Holtville were made with full fuel tanks as 100 octane gasoline was in short supply. We carefully and quietly determined if fueling from Holtville would count against our fuel allowance at our home base of Camp Kearney. The Navy's accounting system was not that good. We were beating the system.

The first step into the Pacific was looming. The departures would begin August 31, 1944. So, we would make practice TransPacs. These flights consisted of flying about halfway across to NAS Kaneohe, Territory of Hawaii, do some practice gunnery and then return to Kearney. My logbook shows 10.5 hours with about half at night for this "halfway" TransPac. What it doesn't show is that San Diego was fogged-in upon my return. It was then over the mountains to Holtville. Unfortunately, I failed to get a visual check by my crew to verify landing gear down and locked for the landing. There was no instrument in the cockpit to indicate gear position. The procedure was to call for a visual check for every landing. I didn't on this late night. The very split second that the nose went below a given level during the landing rollout, I knew the nose wheel was not down. There was a crunch and then a grinding rollout to a stop on the runway. It was mid-morning before we got the airplane jacked up and the nose wheel lowered into place. Then the flight over the mountains with the gear down was a slow grind with cylinder head temperatures over the red line. This chore was nothing compared to having to march into the C.O.'s office to face the music. Whit Wright was a master at understanding and handling people. He made light of my dereliction and recounted his experience of holding up an USAAC bomber strike at Carney Field, Guadalcanal, after missing a turn on the taxiway in the wee dark hours of the morning.

The halfway TransPacs were of value. It did put the copilot-navigators to the test. This flight was dependent upon celestial navigation for real. Granted it would be difficult to miss the west coast of the United States, but we did make our initial landfall without other navigation aids. Also, the radio operators gained a good workout communicating by CW at long range.

As a further indication of the tempo of the operations of these days, I flew my simulated TransPac the night of 28/29 August. My actual flight to Kaneohe was then flown on the night of 31 August/1 September, 1944. The simulated TransPacs were not an easy trip around the pea patch. Representative simulated TransPacs flight times logged were; 11.1, 12.0, 12.3, and 13.3 hours. There were no unhappy incidents that occurred during these practice long-range flights, other than mine.

While the flight crews were sharpening up their long-range navigation there was movement of another kind. On August 28th 119 officers and men under the command of Lt. Travis E. Baker, USNR, embarked aboard a CVE for transfer to NAS Kaneohe, Territory of Hawaii. This, of course, was in preparation for the transfer of the squadron to their next base of operations.

During August the squadron expended 86,000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition and 3,700 Mk. 19 miniature bombs. While operating under FAW-14 and based at NAAS Camp Kearney during reforming and training, we flew a total of 4,000 hours.

By the end of August all of the 32XXX-series airplanes had been transferred back to FAW-14 as well as the two utility airplanes, the NH-1 and SNB.

Three PB4Y-1 aircraft, BuNo 38895, 38901, and 38885, were received by the squadron for ferry to NAS Kaneohe. This would provide 15 airplanes for the TransPac. Upon arrival, the three airplanes ferried would be assigned to the FAW-2 pool.

The PB4Y-1 aircraft on board for permanent assignment as of August 31, 1944, were as follows:

<u>BuNo</u>	
38801	38816
38806	36754
38807	38774
38809	39974
38813	38789
38814	38795

CHAPTER TWO INTO THE PACIFIC NAS KANEOHE

The squadron was well prepared for movement to NAS Kaneohe. The training had been excellent from June 1944 to the end of August. The good-byes had been given to wives, sweethearts, and friends. Cars had been sold, dress uniforms and other personal belongings shipped home. Morale was high and we were ready.

The TransPac, which began with my five-plane section the night of August 31/September 1, would continue for the next two nights; five PB4Y-1s each night. Representative flying times to Kaneohe from NAAS Camp Kearney were; 14.8, 14.5, 14.2, 14.1, and 14.0 hours. It was not an easy leg. Although our philosophy was to travel light and take nothing with us that we didn't want to lose, we still took off at about 65,000 pounds. Maximum range cruise control was a must as we would be flying against the prevailing westerly winds. However, all aircraft made the trip safely and without incident. It was a very proud group of young ensigns who had been on the navigation tables these three nights. It went without saying that the PPCs had kept a close, but not intrusive watch throughout the night.

Not all TransPacs went as smoothly. Shortly after our movement to Kaneohe, a PB4Y-1 squadron C.O. put his theory for long range flight into practice. That is, he would lower the wing flaps to five degrees to obtain a better lift-drag ratio for the flight. It didn't work. He very nearly ran out of fuel and was facing a ditching just before landing at Kaneohe.

Realistic and intensive training began immediately. The areas for flight operations were far superior to that of San Diego. These were much less congested.

Night tactical operations were stressed. We conducted night radar navigation, both high-altitude and low-level masthead bombing against island targets and towed spars, parachute flare attacks, and live bomb drops. During the daylight hours, we flew gunnery against a towed sleeve, camera gunnery against F6Fs, high-altitude defensive formations, simulated attacks against submarines and surface convoys, strafing ground targets, mine-laying exercises, and pro-submarine coordinated attacks against convoys. A feeling developed of being "overtrained." Wright, ever sensitive to the squadron's morale, ordered a twelve-plane tactical flight. This was something very different from our basic mission of long-range single-plane search. However, it all went very well and the C.O. was very pleased. Our landing interval on the mat at Kaneohe was every bit as good as any fighter squadron's. Our good humor was restored.

Searches were flown as a part of our training and were to some degree for real. They were a piece of cake considering those to come as the flight times were only eight to ten hours. Since Wright and I had not yet received our airplanes, we would fly the first of

these patrols in "war-wearies" of the 32XXX series. We did finally receive the last airplanes to be our very own and to deploy with into the South Pacific. Mine was BuNo 38889. Wright's was serial number 38869 and both were equipped with the APS-15 radar in place of the belly gun turret.

During my second patrol, I was to learn that this radar, as good as it was with the Position Plan Indicator (PPI) 360-degree sweep, did have one serious deficiency. Rain and heavy weather, sometimes even showers, would show a return on the radar's scope. Near the end of my search, we picked up a number of radar contacts. These appeared to be ships and since none were reported to be in this area, I turned to investigate. Soon we sighted several heavy showers and it was clear that these had generated the returns. Later, flying our combat patrols, such radar performance did create problems. Once deployed into the combat zone, we would fly our search missions with heavy weather sometimes blanking out much of our search sectors.

Our flight training was quite realistic and the ground schooling likewise was most practical. The survival course really got our close attention. Staying alive after a water ditching or parachuting into the jungle would require real know-how. Also, a sobering lecture on what to expect if we were captured by the Japanese was a shock. If you were not beheaded on the spot, brutal torture would be the unwelcome alternative. This would break the strongest of men. Disregard the previous instructions to give name, rank, and serial number only. Now the policy was to talk your head off. Try to save your life. Besides, you don't know enough to damage the war effort. If you do know something truly top secret, hide this knowledge at all costs. Blab about the performance of the PBY as a diversion.

Because of the possibility of being captured, we applied very little "nose art" upon our airplanes. Also, we did not paint miniature Japanese flags on our airplanes to indicate our kills. Our cover story was to be that we were a replacement just on our first patrol. We knew very little, were quite inept, and, therefore, were now the guest of the kindly Japanese gentleman who had retrieved us from the water, jungle, or whatever. I doubt very much if such would have worked, but it was worth a try.

Equipment was issued for the forthcoming trip to the tropical paradise. And this was a lot of stuff; marine jungle fatigues, boondocker shoes, steel helmets, knee-high rubber boots (very useful when existing on an Army field kitchen), mess kits, mosquito nets, machetes, etc. Personal weapons for each flight crewman was a Smith & Wesson 0.38 revolver. A Thompson 0.45 submachine gun was given to each crew also. Just how effective these guns would have been in a hostile survival situation is questionable. However, it did make one feel better. Jim Mathews, Plane Captain in Crew Fifteen, tells of acquiring their "chopper:"

"I got the word that we were supposed to draw a submachine gun for the crew. I went over to the armory and saw the duty ordnanceman. He brought out the 'chopper' wrapped in brown tarpaper and covered in

cosmoline, a sort of heavy, real sticky, grease. The ordnanceman sat down with me at a cleaning bench, disassembled the weapon, and we started cleaning all the components. It was a new model weapon, much lighter and simpler than the older models.

"He had the gun stripped and we had it about half cleaned when he was called away for something. I was left with a weapon scattered across three feet of table top. I finished cleaning all the parts and then started putting together the damndest jigsaw puzzle I ever saw. It took me over an hour to figure it out and get it reassembled. I then turned it back into the armory for storage. But it now belonged to Crew Fifteen.

"Fahnstock drew it from the armory before we left Kaneohe and thereafter we brought it along on each flight. Lugging it back and forth to the airplane sure made it questionable as to its worth but somehow it made us feel a little more secure."

The more experienced crews had jointly purchased Coleman lanterns and camping cook stoves. They well understood the value of a mess in their tent. In actual practice, cooking utensils combined with the "ten-in-one rations" proved to be a welcome alternative to the usual camp food. Not so successful were two enterprising pilots. They chose to stock up on snacks for "cocktail hour." They brought along cases of boned chicken, sardines, potted ham, AND a case of anchovies. Do you have any idea just how many anchovies there are in one case?

A SPEEDY PB4Y-1 - At my direction, Crew Two undertook a drag reduction program for our airplane, BuNo 38889. For two days we sanded and waxed the exterior. Next we flew a paced flight alongside Hill's airplane. We claimed a five-knot speed advantage but they denied any such thing. It didn't matter one bit. After penetrating the first tropical weather front the wax and the paint were more or less eradicated from the leading edges. The bare metal leading edges were to become the hallmark of Navy patrol squadrons in the forward areas of the Pacific. The wicked frontal systems did add to the "ordinary hazards of flight" for our crews.

It wasn't all fun and games in our airplanes. A liberty in Honolulu was an unforgettable experience. Not the least of which was the taxi ride over the Pali with a Kanaka driver. The pass that traveled from Kaneohe to Honolulu was a twisting, turning, up-and-down road of great splendor and stark terror, cut alongside and through the mountains. Once in the city it was a shoulder-to-shoulder sea of military uniforms. And a never-ending line of sidewalk vendors happily separating the servicemen from their pay checks.

A more enjoyable trip was the "radar navigation" flight to NAS Hilo on the Big Island of Hawaii. In fact, it was a Cooks Tour of the islands at low level. It was a beautiful

and very scenic trip and a good steak luncheon in Hilo. It would be the last steaks eaten for a long, long time.

One such "steak trip" to the Big Island could not be considered to be totally enjoyable. On October 10, 1944, PB4Y-1, BuNo 38835, received major damage on landing at Hilo when the starboard landing gear collapsed. There were no personnel injuries and Lt.(jg) Shea was absolved of any pilot error.

As the end of October approached it was "Party Time!" One last fling before hitting the road for the realities of combat against the Japanese. The men assembled at Kilua Beach for a picnic with beer, a Hawaiian Hula show, more beer, a great "Hilo Hattie" performance, and more beer. Some contended enough beer was consumed to float the Battleship *Missouri*! Chuck Vey was awarded the beer drinking championship but was unable to arise to accept the award (another can of beer).

The pilots gathered at the "O" Club for their ceremony. A good many black uniform ties were cut off by scissors-welding ensigns. Those not yet blinded by the rum punches and with some sense of survival, quickly discarded their ties. A very strong motivation to return from combat intact was instilled by a 17-year-old hula dancer. Gorgeous, curvaceous, and could she wiggle! Wonder if she still fills out that sarong so very, very well?

The final tally for the 18 flight crews with our 15 PB4Y-1 aircraft during the two months at Kaneohe is an indication of the tempo of operations. We had flown 1,509 hours, dropped 2,059 bombs, fired 233,075 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition, and dropped 42 magnesium flares and 105 float lights. And above all else, the squadron was eager to get at the Japanese.

All of the gear other than personal belongings and that necessary for the ferry flights to the combat area had been shipped to the central Pacific. Given a choice, it would have been to the southwest Pacific for our combat deployment. The vast oceanic areas of the central Pacific would limit the number of engagements with the enemy as compared to the many island bases of the Japanese in the southwest Pacific.

However, never underestimate the knowledge of the Navy's radiomen. They enjoyed a very close fraternal relationship. Only several days before our scheduled departure from Kaneohe for the central Pacific, my senior radioman in Crew Two came to me privately and said that there was something he thought that I should know. Our orders had been changed. We would be going to the southwest Pacific! Allen B. Anania, ARM1c, had many contacts within the radio gang of FAW-2.

In accordance with secret dispatches 240114, 270108 and 301740, Patrol Bombing Squadron 104 would execute a movement from NAS Kaneohe to Morotai, an island within the Halmahara Group. Departure date was set for October 30, 1944. The routing would be via Johnson Island; Kwajalain in the Marshall Group; Manus in the Admiralty Group; Owi,

at Biak Island off the northwest of New Guinea; and then on to Morotai, Netherlands East Indies. All 210 members of the squadron would travel in our PB4Y-1 aircraft. The planes would be crowded but since all of the legs were relatively short ones, aircraft weight, passenger crowding, and fuel uplifted would not be a problem.

The movement would be similar to that of the TransPacs, five-plane sections with daily departures to begin October 30, 1944, led by Wright. The entire movement was again made without incident. Our young ensign navigators met their first challenge of hitting Johnson Island very well. This isolated and small atoll emitted no navigation aids. However, once beyond this chore the navigation became a bit easier. In addition to dead reckoning and sun lines of positions, radar fixes became more readily available.

The personnel to make the journey into the combat zone follow with their crew assignments:

Crew One

Plane Commander	LCdr. Whitney Wright
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Joseph Fisher
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Mike Blevins
Plane Captain	Robert Thornton
Mech-Gunner	John Cooper
Mech-Gunner	Joseph Morin
Mech-Gunner	John Dennison
Radioman-Gunner	Jack Laming
Radioman-Gunner	Robert Miller
Ordnance-Gunner	Wallace Schroeder
Bombardier	Alwin Perret

Crew Two

Plane Commander	Lt. Paul Stevens
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Ed Streit
Copilot	Lt.(jg) John McKinley
Plane Captain	David Gleason
Mech-Gunner	Arvid Rasmussen
Mech-Gunner	Derral Pedigo
Radioman-Gunner	Allen Anania
Radioman-Gunner	Adrian Fox
Ordnance-Gunner	Lee Little
Ordnance-Gunner	Marx Stephan
Bombardier	Lee Webber

Crew Three

Plane Commander	Lt. Maurice Hill
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) James Wimberly
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Fred Pratt
Plane Captain	Charles Vey
Mech-Gunner	James Diachin
Mech-Gunner	William Waddles
Radioman-Gunner	Erwin Anderson
Radioman-Gunner	Dow Gothard
Ordnance-Gunner	William Forrester
Ordnance-Gunner	John Nason
Bombardier	Thomas McKenzie

Crew Four

Plane Commander	Lt. Henry Noon
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Don Chase
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Roy Fluegel
Plane Captain	Joe Devine
Mech-Gunner	James Simpson
Mech-Gunner	George Mitchell
Mech-Gunner	Norman Baxter
Radioman-Gunner	George Johnson
Radioman-Gunner	Maurice Cowan
Bombardier	Clifford Weymouth
Ordnance-Gunner	Stewart Swan

Crew Five

Plane Commander	Lt. Vance Adler
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Clarence Bare
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Richard McCarthy
Plane Captain	John Berg
Mech-Gunner	Bernice Hardin
Mech-Gunner	Daniel Collins
Radioman-Gunner	Clovis Bass
Radioman-Gunner	Duffy McKenzie
Radioman-Gunner	Robert Tidwell
Ordnance-Gunner	Thomas Yoakum
Bombardier	Marvin Skinner

Crew Six

Plane Commander	Lt. Tilphor Thompson
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) John Mahoney
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Arthur Cheroske
Plane Captain	Jack Bartell
Mech-Gunner	Mark Hagen
Mech-Gunner	James Meacham
Mech-Gunner	Joseph Asay
Radioman-Gunner	Harold Whist
Radioman-Gunner	Roy Sallee
Ordnance-Gunner	Lee Starling
Bombardier	Lawrence Baker

Crew Seven

Plane Commander	Lt. George Waldeck
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Carl Thorp
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Phil Clemens
Plane Captain	Fred Gordon
Mech-Gunner	Michael Bann
Mech-Gunner	Henry Bagein
Mech-Gunner	Lazarus DeVartanian
Radioman-Gunner	Edward Bomar
Radioman-Gunner	Leonard Holtzman
Ordnance-Gunner	Raymond Kelsey
Bombardier	Forest Marlow

Crew Eight

Plane Commander	Lt. Stanley Wood
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Darrel Jay
Copilot	Lt.(jg) David Stein
Plane Captain	Chester Osiecki
Mech-Gunner	Leon Bashist
Mech-Gunner	Harold Gronquist
Mech-Gunner	Robert Cummings
Radioman-Gunner	William Finady
Radioman-Gunner	Irving Gloman
Bombardier	George Gruner
Ordnance-Gunner	Nick Sabula

Crew Nine

Plane Commander	Lt. Raymond Ettinger
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) James Walker
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Buford Bramlett
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Clyde Gibb
Plane Captain	Allie Lymenstull
Mech-Gunner	Clifford Batton
Mech-Gunner	Alfred Dixon
Radioman-Gunner	Fred Himsworth
Radioman-Gunner	Raymond Burlew
Radioman-Gunner	William Collins
Ordnance-Gunner	Joseph Kovac
Bombardier	John Osteen

Crew Ten

Plane Commander	Lt. John Burton
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) John Freeman
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Frank Chase
Plane Captain	William Wales
Mech-Gunner	Robert Beck
Mech-Gunner	Gilbert Baker
Mech-Gunner	Ambrose Haas
Radioman-Gunner	Herbert Houseward
Radioman-Gunner	Ray Lavender
Ordnance-Gunner	Albert Fleeman
Bombardier	Lee Kilgore

Crew Eleven

Plane Commander	Lt. Walter Heider
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) David Perry
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Walter Whelan
Plane Captain	Henry Butler
Mech-Gunner	Earl Henning
Mech-Gunner	Robert Beovich
Mech-Gunner	John Elliott
Radioman-Gunner	Xavier Yuzapavich
Radioman-Gunner	Donald Nuckolls
Bombardier	William Thys
Ordnance-Gunner	Frank Miller

Crew Twelve

Plane Commander	Lt. William Goodman
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) John Keidel
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Richard Knight
Plane Captain	Elmer Krom
Mech-Gunner	Alvie Harris
Mech-Gunner	Lloyd Howard
Mech-Gunner	John Bierman
Radioman-Gunner	Cecil Colvin
Radioman-Gunner	Sidney Seifer
Radar-Technician	John Polesky
Ordnance-Gunner	Vernon McCoy
Bombardier	Samuel Newell

Crew Thirteen

Plane Commander	Lt. Earl Bittenbender
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Garner Culpepper
Copilot	Lt.(jg) David Lusk
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Leonardo Rallo
Plane Captain	Gene Montoux
Mech-Gunner	Howard Brown
Mech-Gunner	Thomas Burns
Mech-Gunner	Harry Bourgeois
Radioman-Gunner	C.F. Houghlan
Radioman-Gunner	Robert Anderson
Bombardier	Faust Verna
Ordnance-Gunner	Carl Everhart

Crew Fourteen

Plane Commander	Lt. Woodford Sutherland
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Harvey Drake
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Harry Hoch
Plane Captain	Harold Kane
Mech-Gunner	Edwin Edel
Mech-Gunner	Calvin Coates
Mech-Gunner	Oran Crummitt
Radioman-Gunner	Walter Mazurek
Radioman-Gunner	Jack Augsbach
Ordnance-Gunner	Ira Williams
Bombardier	Sidney Beechy

Crew Fifteen

Plane Commander	Lt. Edward Hagen
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) John Miller
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Ralph Meadows
Plane Captain	James Mathews
Mech-Gunner	Jean Cramer
Mech-Gunner	Robert LaBissoniere
Mech-Gunner	Donald Bruce
Radioman-Gunner	Charlie Johnson
Radioman-Gunner	Louis Schiavone
Ordnance-Gunner	Byron Fahnestock
Bombardier	Earl Harris

Crew Sixteen

Plane Commander	Lt. Gerald Didier
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Roy Long
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Joseph Raphael
Plane Captain	Frank Casson
Mech-Gunner	Grover Combs
Mech-Gunner	Julian Locke
Mech-Gunner	Charles Burke
Radioman-Gunner	James Wotherspoon
Radioman-Gunner	Louis Gross
Ordnance-Gunner	Robert Hayes
Bombardier	Jacob Ulrich

Crew Seventeen

Plane Commander	Lt. Jeff Hemphill
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Joe Wasneski
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Norman Madsen
Plane Captain	Walter Cavinee
Mech-Gunner	Don Holton
Mech-Gunner	Robert Golden
Mech-Gunner	James Harlan
Radioman-Gunner	Emmet McDonald
Radioman-Gunner	Ernest Boyles
Bombardier	Jack Saunders
Ordnance-Gunner	Robert Smith
Seaman-Gunner	James Biggerstaff

Crew Eighteen

Plane Commander	Lt. Joseph Shea
First Pilot	Lt.(jg) Floyd Craven
Copilot	Lt.(jg) Edward Perkins
Plane Captain	Gordon Martin
Mech-Gunner	William Abbott
Mech-Gunner	James Clement
Mech-Gunner	Otto Adams
Radioman-Gunner	James Harrington
Radioman-Gunner	Walter Toice
Ordnance-Gunner	Owen Dailey
Bombardier	Billy Casey

Crew Nineteen

Intelligence Officer	LCdr. Travis Baker
Radar Officer	Lt. Clarence Heinke
Engineering Officer	Lt. William Irwin
Personnel Officer	Lt.(jg) Dick Ulin
Leading Chief	Samuel Pruitt
Ordnance Chief	Francis Mahaley
Radio Chief	Charles Ehemann
Yeoman	Jack Cody
Yeoman	Clarence Bordeman
Radar Technician	Ivan Smith
Radar Technician	Nicholas Glauber
Radar Technician	William Mathisen

Note: Ranks are those obtained at the end of the tour.

Representative flight times for the trip follow:

Kaneohe to Johnson I.	4.5 hours
Johnson I. to Kwajalain	8.6 "
Kwajalain to Manus	10.0 "
Manus to Owi	5.1 "
Owi to Morotai	3.9 "

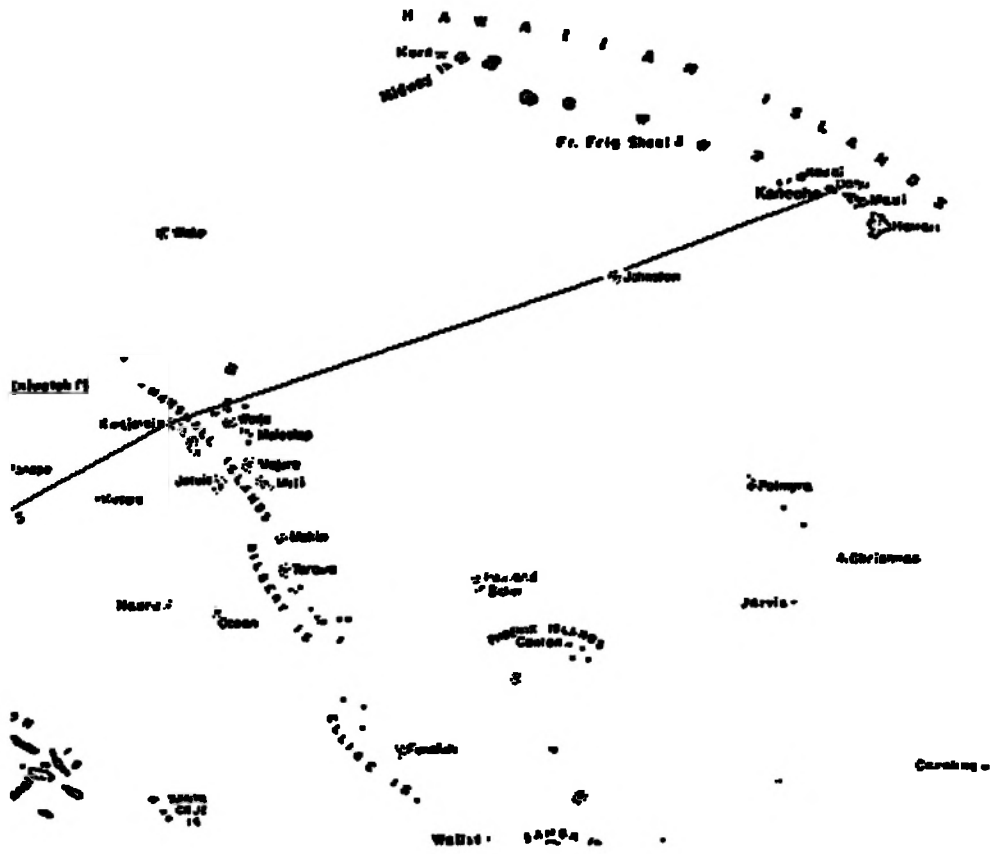
The PB4Y-1 aircraft assigned and flown to Morotai, by Bureau of Aeronautics Numbers, follow:

38801	38753	38816	38774
38806	38794	38835	38814

38807	38795	38849	38889
38809	38813	38869	

Once beyond Johnson Island and approaching Kwajalain, an eerie feeling was developed for the "second timers." We were flying through areas of bypassed Japanese bases. Some, merely small outposts, others formerly feared and strong bastions, and some where we had actually engaged the enemy. For the uninitiated, the education was dramatic. The first view of a coral atoll with all its splendor; the devastation still evident from the terrible ground fighting at Kwajalain; until now, the unknown aircraft of the RAAF and RNZAF and USAAC airplanes returning from strikes to Owi. But most of all were the smoldering ruins at Morotai from the previous night's bombing by Japanese aircraft.





CHAPTER THREE COMBAT BEGINS MOROTAI, NEI

The five-airplane sections of the squadron arrived at Morotai on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of November 1944. Wright added an extra leg to his section's flight from Manus Island to Owi on November 3rd. Continuing on from Owi, he flew to Morotai for a preliminary check-in with Fleet Air Wing Seventeen and a meeting with Captain C. B. Jones, the Wing Commander. Wright returned to Owi on the 4th and led his section back to Morotai that afternoon.

The squadron would be under the direct operational and administrative command of FAW-17. The Wing, in turn, operated under Commander Aircraft Seventh Fleet (Task Force 73) Rear Admiral Frank D. Wagner, USN. Our search missions, more descriptive as armed reconnaissance flights, were conducted in accordance with TF 73's Operation Plan Number 8-44, Annex D (revised). Within this Operation Plan was the phrase regarding our mission which stated, "... and as ordered by the Commanding General Fifth or Thirteenth Air Force." While this was meant to insure coordination between the services, knowing the personality of Captain Carroll B. Jones, there is no question who controlled our flight operations.

Our mission, as stated in OpPlan No.8-44, dated October 15, 1944, was to support Southwest Pacific Ground Forces and Western Pacific Task Forces in the seizure and occupation of the Leyte Gulf area of the Philippine Islands.

However, in the History of Patrol Bombing Squadron One Hundred Four, dated June 1, 1945, prepared and submitted by LCdr. Whitney Wright, USN, our mission is more definitively stated as follows:

"Search and offensive reconnaissance was the primary mission assigned the Navy Search Group by Commander Aircraft, Seventh Fleet, with a secondary mission of striking targets of opportunity. Emphasis was placed on enemy shipping. Danger to friendly submarines and interference with their operations precluded any attacks on submarines."

ComAir 7th Fleet established our search sectors as well as the other Navy patrol squadrons in Annex D to the OpPlan. From Morotai, these sectors were directed outward from 354° counter-clockwise through an arc to 265°. Our missions were flown to 850 nautical miles normally and for other squadrons the radius depended upon aircraft capabilities. A more descriptive field of the search are the areas bounded roughly by the east coasts of the Philippine Islands to 14° 30' north latitude, westward to 119° 30' east longitude, southwest along the Palawan Passage, and the west coast of Borneo to the town of Miri, the Makassar Straits to 02° 00' south latitude, the west and north coasts of Celebes, and Halmahara. ComFAW-17 had the authority and did modify these search

sectors as required to meet the current combat situation. He also added special search missions quite often.

Captain C. B. "Doc" Jones was a very tough task master. Highly professional, a veteran aviator and disciplinarian, he had commanded a patrol plane squadron in the Aleutians. As the C.O., he had led his squadron from the cockpit with dive bombing attacks upon the Japanese invasion fleet in June of 1942. He knew what was required to run a very efficient and capable air wing at Morotai. He was of the old school that believed loyalty downward was equally as important as loyalty upward. He supported his flight crews fully. Reflecting this, the camp, mess hall, and tent area were all first class, given that this was the tropics, a combat zone, and the Japanese owned most of the island.

The airdrome itself was also first class. Both a fighter strip and bomber strip was in operation. The runways were hard-packed coral of adequate length. There were plenty of hard stands for aircraft parking. There were a large number of bombers on the field but the congestion was somewhat organized. Owned and operated by the Fifth Air Force, the land-based Navy squadrons had their own hard stands and servicing areas. The relationship between ComFAW-17 and the Commanding General Fifth Air Force at Morotai was one of coordinating with each other's operations. Beyond this coordination, most likely, a formal command relationship existed but such was unknown to the flight crews. Without question, the public relations aspects were owned by the Fifth Air Force. Our shipping kills were always credited in the news reports as "MacArthur's Bombers."

FAW-17 was made up of one PB4Y-1 Catalina squadron, one PV-1 Ventura squadron, two PB4Y-1 squadrons, a patrol aircraft service unit (PATSU), and a headquarters squadron (HedRon). We would relieve VPB-115. The "turnover" was quite informal. But we did move into their tents and fell heir to four jeeps, a "fat cat" PB4Y-1 (an airplane stricken from the records and stripped of guns and armor) and one Montgomery-Ward refrigerator. Actually, it was a return of the refrigerator rather than a turnover. It had traveled in the bomb bay of a VB-104 Liberator from San Diego to Guadalcanal in August of 1943. In April 1944 it was given to the C.O. of VB-115 at Munda as they relieved VB-104. It then traveled in a bomb bay up the chain of islands to arrive at Morotai. Now it was turned back to the original owners. It is most likely still performing very well for a Filipino owner somewhere on the island of Luzon.

Morotai was not a tropical paradise. That it was in a war zone became all too apparent very quickly. On the first night the term "up the creek without a paddle" was surpassed by "up the creek without a fox hole!" One young ensign's experience, while not typical, is illustrative. Upon landing at Morotai he was transported in a six-by-six truck to the camp area. After finding his tent and the mess hall, he had been served a reasonably digestible dinner. He experienced very new and insecure feelings, partially offset by the excitement of at last having arrived to do a job so long trained for. However, the continual dull boom of mortar fire and the crack of machine gun and rifle fire on the perimeter only 500 yards from our tents did create a decided unease. The landings at Morotai were only a way-stop for the big push to come upon the Philippines. Therefore, our forces had

assaulted the Japanese on Morotai only to carve out a small portion of the island for the airstrips. The Japanese could have the rest of the real estate.

With nightfall, the firing on the perimeter only increased. And it seemed that the perimeter was entirely too close for comfort. This ensign was lying on his cot in the nude as the tropical heat further added to his discomfort and unease. **WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!** The heavy anti-aircraft batteries had just signaled a red alert for a bombing attack by enemy aircraft. This wise young pilot had seen a rather large slit trench just down the lane between the row of tents. Grabbing his steel helmet and thrusting his feet into his shoes, he made a mad dash for this air raid shelter. In the dark and running at full tilt, he ran smack into a man, full force. Not offering to help up the person he'd knocked down, he leaped into the slit trench. Breathlessly he sat down, trying to hide his nudity from the others. Very shortly the Wing Commander came stumbling into the shelter. Obviously very angry he said, "Some damned fool ran into me and nearly killed me!" Our ensign was thankful for the very dark night.

Very quickly our recreation at Morotai became digging fox holes. Conversations were dominated by various design criteria, location, and how deep. While falling bombs from the Japanese bombers were one thing, flying shrapnel from "friendly AA fire" was an additional hazard. The enemy air raids generally included both high-level and low-level (very low) bomber profiles. Unfortunately, the tall trees on the island served as a trigger for

the AA projectiles fusing. The eerie music during an air raid consisted of the freight train rumble of the downward rushing bombs and the whistling whine of friendly shrapnel flying through the trees. Added to this was the crescendo of exploding bombs and large caliber AA gunfire.



McGoon's Saloon became the ultimate solution. This plush deluxe air raid shelter was built to accommodate 20 men comfortably and 26 in an emergency. It was strange how 60 could be counted emerging after a particularly heavy raid. It looked like the grand finale automobile number at the circus when 30 clowns leave a four-passenger car!

The tall trees were a hazard themselves. With a breeze a bit over ten knots one should be alert. With the tropical forest thinned out to provide for various living areas and servicing units, the trees lost a good deal of mutual support. This then contributed to the crashing down of the trees. It was somewhat amusing to see the Wing's office tent become a casualty to one falling tree.

It was a good camp, all things considered. Even the water from the rubberized lister bags was somewhat drinkable (the "iodinized" taste was very evident).

The large population of pythons and boa constrictors on one occasion created panic in the camp. With the perimeter being so close, the rumors of a Japanese break-through was ever present. One night after the movie several pilots returned to their tent to find one very large snake lying on the wooden floor. The fright was equal. The pilots ran out in one direction and the python slithered out the other, only to fall into a deep slit trench. Unable to climb out, the snake thrashed about while a number of the pilots drew their 0.38 caliber pistols and 0.30 caliber carbines. Then cautiously approaching the trench, they emptied their weapons into the now snakepit. This small arms firing within the tent area confirmed the worst, the Japanese had made a break-through and everyone's life was in danger! Not through accuracy but sheer volume of gunfire was the snake finally subdued. Peace and quiet was slowly regained within the camp area.

Patrol Bombing Squadron 104 had arrived at Morotai with 18 flight crews and 15 PB4Y-1 airplanes. The B-24J aircraft was an excellent choice for our mission. Painted Navy blue, there were several modifications and additions to the basic Liberator. The two forward bomb bays were loaded permanently with 390-gallon fuel tanks. These tanks were self-sealing which reduced the usable number of gallons available to about 300 each. These tanks could be jettisoned in an emergency. The total usable fuel load for our maximum range search missions was 3,400 gallons according to our Aircraft Action Reports. The maximum design weight for a bomber mission was 56,000 pounds initially. We flew our airplanes on search missions as high as 68,000 pounds at takeoff. Our bomb load varied but was usually limited to 1500 pounds carried in the two aft bomb bays. We carried a mix of 100#, 250#, and 500# high explosive bombs with four- to five-second delayed fuses. Most of the bombs were general purpose high explosives. However, the 100# incendiary clusters were found to be very effective against the small wooden ships of the Sugar Dog and Sugar Puppy classes. The incendiary clusters did not work very well at all when dropped on the larger steel-hulled vessels.

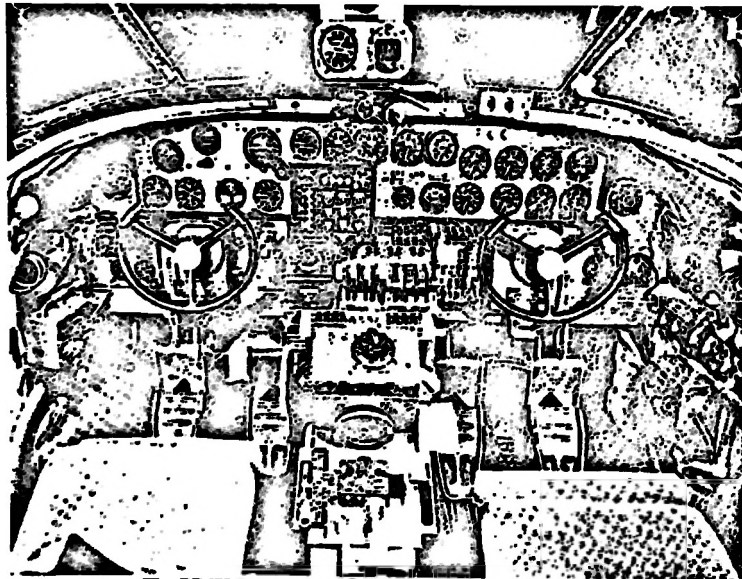
Occasionally, and particularly on the shorter patrols, extra 100# high explosive and/or incendiary cluster bombs were carried loosely stowed on the bomb bay walkways and alongside the nose wheel crawl space. Loading these extra bombs while in-flight required very strong-armed crewmen.

Initially, all but three of our PB4Y-1 airplanes were equipped with four powered twin 0.50 caliber machine gun turrets and two single 0.50 caliber machine guns in the waist hatches. Three airplanes and most replacement airplanes had the belly turret removed and the APS-15 radar installed. The bow turret was manufactured by Engineering and Research Company (ERCO) and was an exceptionally fine gun turret. The top turret was supplied by both Sperry and Martin; the Martin being the better of the two. The belly turrets were supplied by Sperry. The tail turret was built by Consolidated Aircraft Company which also manufactured most of our Liberators. On all patrols we carried extra 0.50 caliber ammunition and gun barrels. Due to the experience of the first combat tour,

extra feed motors were installed for the tail turret. The feed trays for the tail turret were 14-feet long. After every patrol the guns were broken down, cleaned, and the head spacing checked. Under the care and close supervision of our Ordnance Chief, Moe Mahaley, our guns were very well maintained. Besides, the ordnance men in each flight crew had a personal interest in this endeavor.

To a man, we were strongly against the removal of the belly turret. We wanted all the fire power we could get. The APS-15 radar did prove to be most valuable for the search mission. The scope presented a 360° pattern and gave a good positioning of a target. It was also a great assist with our navigation. Land mass targets could be identified at ranges of 100 nautical miles (nmi) or so and "mapped." Large ships gave a return at 25 to 50 nmi, dependent upon aircraft altitude, atmospheric conditions, and no heavy weather around the target area. As stated before, heavy weather would blank out a ship's return on the scope.

The airplanes with the belly turrets had the ASE radar. Two array antennas were mounted low on the forward hull just aft of the bow turret, one on each side. The antennas could be rotated from dead ahead through 90° to both beams. Detection ranges were about the same though the ASE did not paint the weather nor did it "map" a land mass. Once a target was detected, it was necessary to head the airplane in the direction of the target and balance the returns on the scope to home in on the target.



The PB4Y-1 was a complex and demanding airplane.

The last three airplanes delivered were also equipped with an electronic counter measures device (ECM) as were some of the replacement airplanes. These passive devices received both radar transmissions and VHF radio signals. By heading the airplane in the

direction of the transmitted signal, one could home in on the station. This proved to be of considerable value. It did require a radar technician for operations.

Other features of the PB4Y-1 are worth mentioning. One, the Pratt & Whitney R-1830-65 engines served us very well. Turbo supercharged, they could deliver full power all the way up to service ceiling. Electronically controlled, it was a simple twist of the graduated knob to demand power even above the maximum allowed for the engines. Beat the engines as we did, the reliability was excellent, especially considering the tropical operating conditions. However, at around 500 hours run time we did begin to experience engine problems. A turbo by-pass feature permitted the pilot to by-pass the turbo and rely upon the basic engine mechanical supercharger to generate the 1200 HP for takeoff. This did help with controlling cylinder head temperatures somewhat. One final nicety was the auxiliary power unit (APU or putt-putt) which helped with starting the engines and servicing the airplane. Nine hundred seventy-seven PB4Y-1s were built during WW II.

The operating principles were few and very straight forward. The squadron would fly six single-airplane searches/patrols a day. Some additional and special searches were assigned from time to time. We would conduct our patrols regardless the weather. Covering our search sectors was a must. We were free to make attacks on "targets of opportunity" although there was no requirement to attack. Nor were there an attack criterion or guidelines established. It was the PPC's on-the-spot decision. Kills must be confirmed by photo, subsequent report by another crew or an intelligence report, flight

crewmembers specific sighting of the target blowing up, massive fire, definite sinking, or aircraft striking the ground or water. Regarding kills, it was on the conservative side for sure. There were no indoctrination flights nor extensive briefings as we were expected to be ready and we were.



On November 6, 1944, VPB-104 launched six aircraft for their first search missions. At mid-day the last five-airplane section arrived to complete the movement from Kaneohe. As would be expected, Whit Wright participated in the first search missions and made the first kill. Flying in sector one, Whit sighted two luggers, about 90 feet in length, in the vicinity of the Balabac Straits (between the south end of Palawan Island, Philippines,

and the northern most point of Borneo). Making an immediate attack by running in at 100', indicating 180 knots and strafing, a bomb release was made on the first lugger. Due to a malfunction in the bomb release mechanism, all six 250# bombs were salvo'd and blew the stern off. The lugger sank very quickly. A second attack was made on the other lugger which was seen to be loaded with oil drums. Strafed with 0.50 caliber machine guns, the lugger caught fire from end to end and sank. During these attacks the luggers turned in tight circles but made no return gunfire. A total of 2000 rounds were expended against the two luggers. Later in the patrol an enemy destroyer was sighted but no attack was made.

Patrols were flown on November 7th and 8th but no engagements were made with the enemy. This initial entry into combat was definitely a "feeling-out period."

Stevens and Crew Two flew their first patrol on November 9th from Morotai northward through the central Philippines. The bomb load this day was six 250# high explosives with the 4-5 second delayed fuses. On the outbound leg two Tonys were sighted over the north end of Negros Island. No engagement was initiated by either party. During the return leg contact was made with four steel-hulled Sugar Charlies (SC) of 500 tons and one small freighter-transport (FTD) of 1000 tons in the vicinity of Panay Island. Attacks were made on all vessels at altitudes of 50' to 100' and speeds of 160 to 200 knots.

Engine power was set at 45" MAP and 2500 RPM as sharp maneuvering was required due to the terrain where the vessels were anchored and moored. The first target was an SC anchored very close to a cliff about 300' high. This denied a normal masthead bombing run. I made two runs releasing one bomb on each attack while in a 30-degree bank and strafing each time. One bomb hit in the number two hold on the second run. The ship exploded with the deck rising and the sides blowing out. The ship burned and sank.

The three small coastal freighters with engines aft (SC) and a second FTD not seen before were attacked by strafing. About 800-900 rounds were fired into each ship. The freighter-transport caught fire but it was soon extinguished. Slight damage was claimed upon all four of these small ships. We landed back at Morotai after 10.1 hours in the air.

Burton and Crew Ten flew a special 1000 nmi search this day looking for a Japanese Task Force. No contact was made with the reported enemy force. During the return leg the search plane was stalked by six Japanese night fighters believed to be Irvings. The incident took place just off Zamboanga, Mindanao, PI. The conditions during the engagement were very poor and it was a very dark night. The enemy fighters were first picked up by the PB4Y-1's APS-15 radar at 18 miles and closing rapidly. At three miles the night fighters took stations on the search plane at three, six, and nine o'clock; two of the twin-engine fighters at each position. Burton quickly reduced altitude from 3500' to 200'. The fighters then closed to 50' at the nine and eleven o'clock positions. The PPC directed his crew to hold fire so as not to disclose his position clearly. Final evasion was eventually made after 20 minutes of fright by flying down and around two islands. The finale of this event was anti-aircraft fire from one of the small islands along the escape route.

During this encounter Burton had turned the IFF on to the emergency position, believing that this would blank out the night fighter's radar. On the endorsement of the Aircraft Action Report (AAR), the FAW-17 electronic experts rejected this concept. Burton was not miffed; try anything in an emergency!

On November 10th Noon, on patrol to the west of Palawan Island, PI, found and reported two light cruisers.

November 11, 1944, was a very black day for the squadron. Lt. Maurice K. Hill and Crew Three were shot down at Ormoc Bay, located on the west side of Leyte Island, PI, by two Tonys. The following men were killed in this action:

Lt. Maurice Kenneth Hill
Ens. James Mack Wimberly
James (n) Diachin, AMM3c
Kenneth Alan Waddles, AMM3c
Erwin James Anderson, ARM1c
William Ralph Forrester, AOM2c
Thomas Edward McKenzie, AOM1c

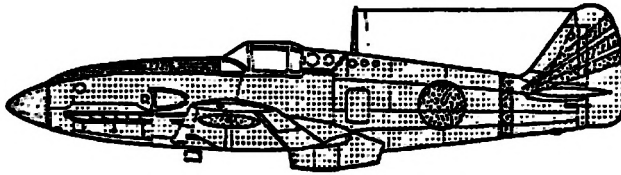
This loss was a shock to the squadron. Any loss of a shipmate was very hard to take at anytime and under any circumstances. With Crew Three, this was particularly so as they were highly respected as one of the most experienced and competent crews. "Tex" Hill began his combat the night of December 7, 1941, at Midway Island by coming under gunfire from Japanese destroyers. Subsequently, he had served in the Australia-New Guinea area. "Red" Anderson, "Big Bill" Forrester, and Tom McKenzie had been in combat with the first tour VB-104.

The battle over Ormoc Bay was ongoing. The Japanese were running reinforcements into the ground fighting for the Island of Leyte. U.S. Forces were determined to deny this replenishment of men and materials. The situation qualified this as a "hot" sector and two PB4Y-1s had been assigned for mutual support.

Clearing the island of Mindanao with Hill in the lead and Didier with Crew Sixteen following, the flight was still flying at 6500'. Ahead at Ormoc Bay they saw Japanese destroyers under attack by our carrier aircraft. A flight of Tonys were defending which resulted in a melee of some confusion. Two Tonys chose to attack the PB4Y-1s initially with an overhead diving firing pass. Hill's airplane was at a disadvantage this day as it was APS-15 radar equipped vice an installed belly turret.

Another weakness of the PB4Y-1 was the 14-foot long feed trays to the tail turret. With the first firing pass by the Tonys, hits were taken in these feed trays which disabled the tail turret. Hill's aft area was now indefensible. The next attack by a Tony was from directly astern. Noting no return fire, the Japanese pilot held in there, raking the airplane with his dual 20 mm and 12.7 mm machine guns. Severe damage was made on the airplane

and crew. Hill was killed and slumped forward against the controls. Several crewmen were seriously injured.



Both Liberators scored hits on the enemy fighters. One left the fight smoking and the other, heavily smoking, was fatally damaged. The pilot of this Tony bailed out but his parachute (if worn) failed to open.

In the lead PB4Y-1 the situation was critical. It was obvious that it was nearly out of control. Pratt, the copilot on the navigation table this day, entered the cockpit. With the help of Anderson, he lifted Hill from the pilot's seat. Pratt then seated himself at the controls and the two pilots gained control of the airplane to some degree. The airplane's descent could not be fully arrested but the pilots maintained a wings-level attitude and had some minimum control of the pitch attitude. Near the water there was a rustle as the airplane first touched down. This was followed by a crescendo of sound as the bomb bay doors ripped off and the airplane began disintegrating. Fortunately, the two copilots had flown the PB4Y-1 into the water wings level and it did not cartwheel.

Now in the water and suffering with varying degrees of injuries, the survivors; Pratt, Nason, Vey, and Gothard, helped each other to locate and board a rubber life raft.

Quickly, Philipinos came in dug-out canoes to take them to an island only about a mile away. The story of kindness and attention given and the risk taken by these Philipinos was very heartwarming. Most noteworthy was the medical attention and aid given by Nurse Irene Gonzales, RN, the "Medical Department" of the local guerrilla force. Also fortunate was the flotation of the first aid medical supply kit carried on board the patrol plane. After retrieving the survivors, the Philipino benefactors brought in the medication for use by Nurse Gonzales.

It was marginal as to whether the Japanese troops about the area would capture the crewmen or U.S. Forces could be notified in a timely manner for a recovery. After several days and with the combination of U.S. Army Rangers and a U.S. Navy motor torpedo boat, the rescue was made. Unfortunately, the Japanese did acquire knowledge of the rescue and pickup. Later, two barges full of enemy troops took revenge on those who had helped our crewmen so much. They captured all the civilians they could find and tied them all together in one long row. They then bayoneted the defenseless Philipinos repeatedly to all parts of their bodies. Twenty were killed and twenty-three severely wounded. There was some little satisfaction that Mrs. Gonzales was able to render medical assistance more effectively to these victims due to our help. After we had learned of the assistance given by

these Islanders, a considerable amount of medical supplies had been dropped to them by our aircraft.

Such beastly actions taken by the Japanese Forces was well documented during WW II. Regretfully, this is no longer acknowledged whatsoever. Now it is politically incorrect but the world should remember the Japanese character for what it is and always has been.

The PT boat delivered the survivors to Tacloban, Leyte, and they were the "guests" of an U.S. Army hospital for three days. This was a decrepit warehouse equipped with cots and poor facilities overall. They were then delivered to the USS *Currituck*, a Navy seaplane tender. Here the service and treatment was first class; white sheets, a clean medical facility, and good food. They were then returned briefly to Morotai and the squadron. Once again they were turned over to the Army Medical Service. Unfortunately, they were treated very poorly and it was over two months before they finally reached the United States. The squadron was not aware of this situation and only learned of it after the war. Nor was this an isolated case. This very shabby treatment of our wounded when transferred to the Army was the norm.

CONVOY ATTACK - On November 12, 1944, Stevens and Crew Two departed Morotai at 0612 Local Civil Time for a patrol to the northwest through the Celebes and Sulu Seas. After reaching the west coast of Palawan Island and very near the northern tip, a search was begun of the inlets and bays. This portion of the search was being conducted at a very low altitude, about 100' or so. Rounding a promontory just after searching Becuit Bay, two large freighter-transport ships were seen on the horizon. They were judged to be about 15 miles away.

At this time it appeared that these two big ships had just "blown stacks" or perhaps applied more power. Immediately I increased power on the engines to 56" MAP and 2700 RPM for a maximum speed run in to possibly make an attack. Within two minutes, at about 1230(I) the entire force was in view. It consisted of two large transport ships (FTB), one tanker (SB), three destroyers (DD), and one destroyer escort (DE). The auxiliary ships were in a column with the largest FTB estimated to be 8,000 to 10,000 tons (later identified as the *Celebes Maru* of 6,000 tons), leading on a course of 170°. The escorting ships were in column on the west side of the transports with the DE leading and one DD trailing the auxiliary ships. The convoy's position was 11° 03' N, 119° 12' E, speed 10 knots.

I made the decision to attack as it was judged that with this formation the attack could be executed without too much gunfire from the escorting destroyers. The selected target was the leading FTB as it was obviously the largest ship.

My course inbound for the attack was about 200°, approaching alongside the column. The trailing DD and leading DE had a clear field of fire at the PB4Y-1 as we approached. The other two DDs increased speed and began heading into the transport column to position themselves for a better field of fire on our patrol plane. I was as low to the water as possible, 30 feet or so, and by the over-boosting on the engines, our speed was

just over 200 knots. I transmitted in the "blind" on the VHF voice radio that I was attacking a convoy, but no acknowledgment was received.

When about five miles from the convoy, the ships began firing with heavy anti-aircraft (AA) gunfire, but it was inaccurate. At maximum range (one mile) for our 0.50 cal. machine guns, we began firing upon the tanker. An estimated 200 rounds were fired and hits were observed. As we closed on the second transport in line, fire was shifted and about 800 rounds were fired with many hits obvious. Smoke began to rise from this ship due to our heavy firing on its superstructure.

Closing on the target ship, the leading FTB, the AA fire became much heavier and the airplane was hit in the forward area. The bow turret took a 20mm or 40mm hit which disabled the turret and seriously injured Pedigo, bow gunner. Also, Webber, the bombardier, crouched just below the bow turret, was lacerated by shrapnel.

Pressing in close upon the target, I was dismayed to see a haze of gray smoke rising from the ship. It appeared that the ship had been hit before, was damaged, and the wrong target had been selected. This view was quickly discarded when it became clear that this was smoke rising from so much gunfire emanating from the ship. Conversely, the gunners on the airplane poured in 1200 rounds of 0.50 cal. gunfire. There were many hits as most of the firing on the ship was at very close range.



In very close, I was looking up at the ship. Soon I started to ease the airplane up slightly for the bomb release. At 100' altitude, six 250# bombs were released with 50' spacing. As the bombs fell out of the bomb bay, the airplane was pulled up sharply to clear the superstructure. Three bombs hit into the hull from the waterline, stair-stepping up to the cabin level. The other three bombs overshot the ship.

As the bombs exploded, there was an additional large explosion. Debris was thrown up 500' in the air and flames bellowed from amidships. The large transport ship made a slow turn to starboard of 90° and came to a stop.

Clearing the ship, I threw the airplane into a skid and got back down, very close to the water. Now the DDs were unrestricted in their field of fire and bracketed the airplane with heavy AA fire. It may have been the wild skid or closeness to the water, but whatever, this heavy AA scored no further hits upon the PB4Y. The escape passed close to the leading DE and 300 rounds were fired from the top turret and waist guns. There was a

flash flame just aft of the stack from the DE and then a plume of steam from the stack itself. The DE went dead in the water, but was later observed to be underway again.

Leaving the action, the engine power was reduced to a normal climb of 45" MAP and 2500 RPM. I then set a course to follow over a line of mountains and took photos of the convoy. As the airplane was climbing out over Palawan Island, I made contact on VHF radio with the search plane in the next sector, flown by Shea.

Shea reported that he received a transmission from me at 1245 of the action and report of injuries. Shea was asked to confirm the convoy sighting and damage to the large enemy ship. He proceeded at 7000' altitude and made contact with the convoy at 1300(I). Shea confirmed the disposition and location and that one large ship was dead in the water and burning with smoke rising to 3000'. In addition, a tanker was dead in the water and the escort ships were maneuvering to take the survivors off the ship and at the same time, protect the convoy. Shea circled the area for 30 minutes taking photos and observed that there were two large explosions on the burning ship, one at 1310 and one at 1320. As he left the convoy, the large freighter-transport ship was still burning and very low in the water. One DD was standing by the ship, but the other ships all got underway and were proceeding out of the channel between Tukuran Island and the west shore of Palawan.

As our damaged PB4Y-1 was climbing out, Webber helped Pedigo exit the bow turret. Once the cockpit business had been taken care of, I went to assist with the first aid being rendered by Webber. Due to the fact that the nose wheel tire had been hit and gone flat, the decision was made to move Pedigo from the bombardier's station to the navigator-radioman's area just aft the cockpit. The wooden door to the ECM compartment was removed and broken up to provide a splint for Pedigo's badly injured leg. Sulfa power was liberally applied, the splint bound to his leg, and Pedigo moved to the crowded compartment. It was not an easy task and very painful for the injured man, but he bore it very well. It was a long 875 miles back to Morotai through the Sulu and Celebes Seas.

There were no problems with the landing at Morotai in spite of the punctured nose wheel. Pedigo was given further first aid treatment by medical personnel in the airplane and then transferred to the Army Advanced Base Hospital Fifteen for eventual return to the United States. Webber was treated by the Medical Officer, HedRon FAW-17, for his wounds and returned to duty. Intelligence reports definitely confirmed that the larger FTB sank. Slight damage was credited for the strafing of the other shipping targets.

Of the other patrols flown November 12th, only one other AAR was filed. Hemphill and Crew Seventeen, flying an 840 nmi sector, dropped two 250# bombs to destroy a 50-foot barge loaded with cargo. The barge disintegrated with splinters flying everywhere.



Another Japanese convoy was sighted this day by Ettinger and Crew Nine. On their sector just to the south of Palawan they sighted and reported one light cruiser (CL), three destroyers (DD), two gunboats (PG), one large tanker (SA) of 10,000 tons, and one large freighter-transport (FTB) of 8,000 tons. Entering the Balabac Straits, they came upon the convoy unexpectedly. There was no chance to gain surprise so no attack was made.

These contact reports were very important to our war effort. The submarines of the United States Navy were conducting a highly successful campaign against Japanese seaborne commerce and warships. Our reports were relayed quickly to our submarine forces and were of considerable value to them.

Unfortunately, there were no official recordings of these sightings. Since there was no combat engagement an AAR was not filed. Nor were these sightings entered into the Squadron's War Diary. A few pilots did make entries in their personal logbooks. However, Wright was an excellent administrator as well as an outstanding combat leader. In his final report upon being relieved as Commanding Officer, he stated the squadron had sighted and reported a total of 758 warships and 4,357 merchant/auxiliary ships during our six months in combat. A significant tally!



SPECTACULAR EXPLOSIONS - On November 13, 1944, Wright and Crew One flew sector "X" northward from Morotai over the Philippines. The search covered the larger islands of Mindanao, Cebu, Luzon, Negros, and Panay. Off Marinduque Island, 90 miles south of Manila, contact was made with a 90-foot armed patrol craft. A strafing attack was made and no more than 50 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition was fired when the ship blew up from either a gasoline or ammunition explosion. A second armed patrol craft was found in the same general area off Mindoro Island. Several attacks were made, missing with one 250# bomb, but many hits were made by strafing. The vessel caught fire and was soon burning from end to end. Finally, it blew up with a terrific explosion in similar fashion to the first PC.

On November 14th, Heider and Crew Eleven flew a patrol to the northwest from Morotai. About 20 miles north of the Japanese base of Kudat, located at the northern tip of Borneo, contact was made with three wooden-hulled Sugar Dogs of about 200 tons each.

The PB4Y-1 was on top of an overcast and the sighting was made at seven miles through a hole in the clouds. Heider descended and broke out of the clouds at 800' and immediately began an attack. Diving in, he made a drop of six 250# bombs up the column of SDs. During this run he recognized that the lead ship was towing the other two ships. All bombs missed alongside the SDs and a number of strafing runs were then made. The lead ship cast loose the other two as they cranked up their engines. One ship was destroyed by fire and the other two damaged. Two days later another patrol sighted one of these SDs aground on a reef a short distance from the shore, lying on its side, gutted. It appears that this was a second SD destroyed.

Goodman with Crew Twelve flew westward from Morotai on November 15, 1944, for a patrol which would continue southbound down the Makassar Straits, between the east coast of Borneo and the Celebes. Forty-five miles north of the Equator, he attacked a 500-ton Sugar Charlie (SC), strafing and dropping a string of six 250# bombs. The bomb explosions blew off the stack and main masthead. Four more strafing runs were made expending 2500 rounds of 0.50 cal. ammo. The ship went dead in the water and the crew were seen jumping over the side. Serious damage was assessed.

Continuing a very good day for VPB-104, Stan Wood and Crew Eight attacked a 900-ton SC 100 nmi southeast of Zamboanga, Mindanao, PI. Wood's crew scored a direct hit with one 250# bomb and strafed with 1200 rounds of gunfire. The ship was left burning fiercely and sinking.

PLAYING TO AN APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE - Stevens and Crew Two made November 15th even a better day on a patrol up through the Philippines to just south of Manila. The patrol of the day before had sighted a large FTB (later identified as the *Borneo Maru* of 5280 tons) anchored off the Bondoc Peninsula about 75 miles south of Manila. The PPC had started a run in but the ship was ready with intense heavy AA fire. The volume of fire was such that he broke off the attack.

Since it was reported that there were no escort ships and no known shore installations, I planned this patrol to achieve surprise and bag this prize. Completing the search sector, I flew on a course that would bring the PB4Y-1 over the Bondoc Peninsula below radar detection and make a surprise attack. What I did not know was that there were several U.S. Navy aviation personnel at a barrio just one mile from the FTB's anchorage. They had arrived at this tropical paradise after conducting a torpedo attack upon the Japanese Battleship *Musashi*. This warship was one of the world's largest battleships. Gunfire from the Japanese Task Force had downed this group of personnel into the Sibuyan Sea. Surviving, they had made their way to this location with the help of the Philippines in the area. These USN flight crews would prove to be a most appreciative audience to my attack.

Flying just over the tree tops and then dropping down to just over the wave tops, it appeared that surprise had been gained. Running at maximum power, the patrol plane was indicating 200 knots airspeed and thus far there had been no gunfire from the target. However, at about 2000 yards out, the ship opened up by laying a black wall of shells bursting just ahead of my airplane. The water was churning violently below the barrage from the shrapnel. Instinctively, I pulled hard on the controls and with the first upward movement on the airplane, pushed equally hard to start the airplane downward. The barrage was lifted and the PB4Y-1 flew under the bursting shells. Although our airplane was hit by many pieces of shrapnel, it was still flying. Continuing in on the attack, the top and bow turret of the airplane began firing. The range was so close now that many hits were scored with the 0.50 cal. machine guns.

At the bomb release point, Webber dropped the five 250# bombs in a string as I pulled back on the controls to clear the superstructure of the ship. All five bombs hit beginning at the waterline. The Crew of the PB4Y-1 was rewarded by the sight of a large explosion which indicated that they had scored well. It also meant that the 2000 Japanese troops, as had been reported by intelligence, would not be reinforcing the ground battle raging at Leyte.



Ens. Robert Frelich, USNR, was one of the Naval aviators at the barrio who witnessed the attack. His recollection of this incident many years later follows:

"I was aware that I was privileged to watch an actual attack in combat by one of our own planes and wondering at the same time if I would ever learn the details of the incident.

"Even after fifty years, I can see this four-engine, twin tailed plane with the U.S. markings coming in very low over the water toward the troop ship, pull up just enough to drop its bombs, and then exit at tree-top level. The bombs scored direct hits and smoke and fire were immediately evident from the listing target. It was a story-book performance, well executed. I also remember that we feared that the remaining Japanese troops would be coming shortly, so we went inland to hide from them until things cooled off. After a few days when they were gone we went out to the ship and got some souvenirs."

Departing the attack, all was not well aboard the PB4Y-1. There was a strong odor of gasoline in the airplane. This is a frightening situation at any time, particularly so after taking many hits from the intense gunfire by the ship. Very shortly it was discovered that the auxiliary power unit (APU) fuel tank had been holed. Once the fuel was emptied from the tank and evaporated there was a good deal of relief in the airplane. No critical systems had been hit nor had any of the crew been injured. Good luck had prevailed.

The following day, Goodman took photos of the ship which showed that the ship had been gutted by fires and explosions well beyond the bomb blast. It had settled on a reef and had been abandoned.



November 15, 1944, closed out with Wood and Crew Eight attacking a 900-ton SC off Zamboango, Mindanao, P.I. Strafing with 1200 rounds of 0.50 cal. and dropping one 250# bomb, the ship was left burning fiercely.

On November 17, Lt. Goodman, substituting as the PPC for Crew Six, sank a 300-ton SD off Masbate Island in the central Philippines using three 250# bombs and 1200 rounds of 0.50 cal. ammunition. He also seriously damaged a 200-ton lugger at the same position with 800 rounds of ammunition.

The same day Hagen and Crew Fifteen attacked three ships, an FTC of 1500 tons north of Mindoro and two 300-ton SDs off Marinduque Island. Both of these islands are about 70 miles south of Manila. The FTC was attacked with two 250# bombs and 1000 rounds of 0.50 cal. ammunition. One bomb fell 20' short and one bomb burst just off the stern. The ship was rocked but no debris was seen and no fire was started. Minor damage was claimed. The first SD was straddled with two 250# bombs and strafed. This forced the ship to beach itself. The second SD was hit directly with one 250# bomb and it sank, going down stern first.

Burton continued to meet Japanese fighters and escaped none the worse. On November 18, he encountered two Oscars over the northern coast of Borneo as he was beginning an attack on three luggers. The fighters made their attack from the five and seven o'clock positions. As they opened fire from 400 and 600 yards, the PB4Y-1 escaped into the clouds. There was minor damage to his airplane.

The tempo of operations against the Japanese forces had increased. The initial feeling out of the situation and tentative probes were behind us. The loss of Hill and part of the crew was not forgotten nor would it be. The squadron was flying their mission with aggressive intent. However, one PPC was simply not up to meeting the rigors of combat with the enemy and the operational hazards. He asked to be relieved and wished to turn in his wings. This was accepted and orders were written for his return to the States. The higher command did overrule the loss of his wings, however.

Wood and Crew Eight, on a patrol November 19th through the central Philippines, encountered 11 Oscars over Panay Island. Luckily, only one fighter peeled off from the enemy flight to attack the search plane. One firing exchange was made before the PB4Y-1

was able to duck into the clouds and elude the Oscars. No damage was done to either airplane.

Off the south end of Mindoro Island, Wood then attacked an 800-ton Sugar Charlie (SC) with two 250# bombs scoring one direct hit. The SC blew up and sank. Next he attacked the escorting gunboat (PG) and got a straddle with two 250# bombs and strafed with 1200 rounds of 0.50 cal. They left the ship smoking but still afloat and serious damage was claimed.

A DISAGREEABLE TASK - During the month of November, a number of leaflet drop missions were flown upon various islands of the Philippines and Borneo. These were thoroughly disliked by the crews. The drops required low-level runs over enemy bases as well as friendly areas. Identifying enemy areas from friendly areas was not feasible, so no bombs were dropped nor guns fired. Exposure to enemy gunfire without your own offensive action was not a desirable situation.

On November 20, 1944, Hemphill and Crew Seventeen, while on patrol through the southern Philippines and northern Borneo, made a low-level run over the Japanese base at Kudat, Borneo. There were no ships in the harbor but on the airfield, one Betty and two Sallys were sighted. The PPC made a strafing run on the Betty and one Sally, the second Sally appeared to be wrecked, but he could not burn either plane. Continuing his attack, he made a bombing run on the center of a barracks area and released six 250# bombs. The bomb explosions destroyed two buildings and started a large fire.

ROLLING INTO THE DEPTHS - Wright flew an armed reconnaissance and search mission on November 21, 1944, westward from Morotal to the northwest corner of the Celebes and then down the Makassar Straits. The takeoff was made at 0556(I) and they would return 12.5 hours later. His airplane was loaded with six 250# bombs, extra 0.50 cal. ammunition and 2900 gallons of fuel. Midway down the Straits he attacked a 1000-ton SC, making two bombing and strafing runs. On each run, two bombs were dropped, one of which was a dud and the other a direct hit. Each hit entered the ship at the waterline then exploded within the vessel. The ship rolled over and sank stern first. There was no return fire, as complete surprise had been achieved.

A second attack was made off Balikpapan on a 300-ton SC. Surprise was again gained and there was no return AA fire. One 250# high explosive hit slightly aft of midship and exploded, causing the ship to settle slowly below the surface. Each Sugar Charlie received 1000 rounds of machine gun fire from the patrol plane.

On the same day Sutherland and Crew Six (not his regular crew) flew a patrol through the central Philippines to attack a freighter (FB) of 5000 to 6000 tons off the lower part of Luzon Island. All six 250# bombs missed. Slight damage was claimed by 1200 rounds of strafing.

Still on the 21st, Adler and Crew Five missed with one 250# bomb on a run on a gunboat (PG) off Mindoro. The ship was strafed with 400 rounds but no damage was observed.

The statement that we flew our patrols regardless the weather is somewhat incomplete. At times the weather was more of a threat to us than enemy action. Ettinger and Crew Nine encountered a situation that, under darkness, would have destroyed the airplane and most likely killed all the personnel aboard.

VICIOUS WEATHER - Flying a patrol from Morotai up through the central Philippines, it was rough going due to the very heavy rain and turbulent clouds. The radarman called several strong returns on his scope beyond simply painting the weather cells. Knowing that the Japanese often used darkness and bad weather to move troops and materials, Ettinger judged that it was necessary to investigate. Straining their eyes to make a visual contact through the heavy clouds, they finally came into a thinning area in the weather. Three water spouts were then sighted coming out of the blackest clouds ever before seen. Off the sides of the water spouts area, it appeared as though the ocean and the black clouds were one and the same. All around the area of the water spouts, extremely heavy rain was falling; most likely from the tons of water sucked up by these spouts. It was a rare weather phenomenon and a killer storm for sure.

On November 22nd Heider and Crew Eleven took off at 0628 India Time Zone (I) with 2900 gallons of AvGas and six 250# bombs. Entering the port city of Tarakan on the northeast coast of Borneo, they sighted many small craft, one 200-ton Sugar Dog, and ten enemy aircraft, airborne some distance away. At minimum altitude the PPC made a strafing run, expending 600 rounds of ammo on the SD. Making a second run on the SD, two bombs were dropped which missed by only 20 feet. Slight damage was claimed. During the second attack, meager but accurate AA was fired at the PB4Y-1. One 20 mm hit was taken in the number four engine. The engine caught fire, the cowling was blown off and parts were seen to be falling off. Once the engine was feathered, the fire was extinguished. The crew then jettisoned the two bomb bay tanks and the remaining four bombs. It was a 700 nmi flight back to Morotai. Fortunately, throughout this incident, the ten enemy aircraft did not see the patrol plane.

Meanwhile at Busuanga Island, about 55 nmi southwest of Mindoro Island, Hagen made an attack on two 300-ton SDs. Busuanga Island has peaks to 2149', an indication of the mountainous terrain. Since these vessels were tucked-in alongside a cliff, the PPC was unable to make a masthead bombing attack. Denied the usual mode, he then made a level bomb drop of six 250# bombs from 1000' altitude guided by the Norden bombsight. The bombs fell wide but the ships were pounded with 925 rounds of 0.50 cal. machine gun fire for slight damage.

A BIG FIND BUT CONFUSION REIGNED - November 23, 1944, would be Burton's fifth patrol. Action had taken place on each of the previous patrols. As it happened, enemy action was taking place as the crew was attempting to man their airplane for this search

mission. Japanese bombers were conducting a raid on Morotai just prior to and after their four o'clock takeoff. They would be relieved to clear the airfield and get on with the patrol.

The flight would cover a total of 1800 nmi during the 11.7 hours airborne. Assigned sector "Y," they would cover the central Philippines. It was to be an eventful day, imperfect as it was to be. Such imperfection was not unknown during combat.

Cruising at 8000' just south of Marinduque Island, Burton noticed two very symmetrical islands close to the beach at Banton Island. One such symmetrically-shaped island was one thing, but two aroused suspicion. Both were covered with tropical island growth of trees and foliage. Continuing on his flight course, altitude, and speed, he feigned a failure to be alerted by this oddity. Once well beyond a visual observation by the "islands," the PPC reversed course, increased speed, and set up for a horizontal bombing run directed by the Norden bombsight. The attack would be from 8000', dropping all six 250# bombs with a 100' spacing. Flying a very steady and level course, Burton was closely following the Pilot Director Indicator (PDI). Approaching the targets, neither pilot could see the targets over the nose of the PB4Y-1.

The PPC was simply "on instruments" following the guidance of the bombardier operating the bombsight. Immediately after the bomb release, the airplane was rolled to the right and quickly back to the left to observe the drop. It was a clean miss. It would be back to the masthead bombing mode hereafter.

Since there had been no AA fire against the patrol plane during the bomb run nor while maneuvering overhead, Burton decided to descend to near sea level to examine these "islands" more closely. However, it was best to transmit the contact report while still at altitude by CW radio. This done, the PPC descended and flew alongside the obviously camouflaged ships or whatever to determine just what they might be. These two "islands" turned out to be two NACHI CLASS JAPANESE HEAVY CRUISERS! Such ships could have very easily blasted the PB4Y-1 from the sky during the level steady bombing run. Both capital ships were covered from bow to stern with heavy mesh wire from which tree branches and shrubs were attached. This also prevented the ship's guns from bearing upward to fire at the attacking Liberator.

It was noted that one of the cruisers was streaming a trail of oil behind it. Continuing to observe the ships, a flurry of small boats began running back and forth from the shore to the ships. One of the cruisers now got underway. No doubt these two major combatant ships were stragglers from the air-sea battle that had taken place a month earlier known as the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea.

The day of misadventures was not over yet. This was a major contact and it would be well to insure delivery of the message report. Burton set course for Tacloban, Leyte Island, to make contact by voice Very High Frequency (VHF) radio. After steadying up on course, they were attacked by an Oscar. On the very first firing pass by the fighter, the

PB4Y-1 crew laid on a heavy stream of 0.50 cal. machine gunfire. With the flow of tracers from the patrol plane, the Japanese decided this was too hard and fled from the scene.

Burton passed the voice message to the Tacloban fighter strip of the two Nachi heavy cruisers and their position in latitude and longitude. Pleased that the message was acknowledged, he could visualize that a bomber strike would be set up back at Morotai. There was adequate daylight for such a mission. However, after landing at Morotai and proceeding to FAW-17's camp, he was surprised to find that, no, a strike had not been launched. Inquiring as to why not, the Wing Air Intelligence Staff Officer said, "No, not at all. They were not going to respond to some Japanese trick, reporting two German Nazi heavy cruisers." It was just one of those days.

But there was one more incident while flying back to Morotai to contribute to a trying day. Cruising over the big island of Mindanao and in heavy weather, the number two engine failed. Fortunately, there was no fire and it was routine to feather the propeller, trim up the airplane, and continue on course. With most all of the fuel gone and all of the bombs dropped, flight on three engines was no sweat.

On November 23rd Wood and Crew Eight departed Morotai at 0411(I) for a patrol through the central Philippines. Off Negros Island, he sighted a silver Oscar with the usual red meatballs on the wings which was an unusual paint scheme. However, no engagement was made. Later an 800-ton SC was seen northwest of Mindoro Island. Attacking from 150' to 200', two 250# bombs were released. One bounced off the deck and exploded 50' from the ship. The other missed by 20'. Two more attacks were made, dropping one bomb at a time, but all missed. A total of 800 rounds were fired at the vessel and only slight damage was claimed.



Sugar Charlie (SC)
600 - 1,000 tons

Wood attacked a second SC near Marinduque Island. All bombs having been expended, Crew Eight strafed with 700 rounds of 0.50 cal. ammo for slight damage.

The Commanding Officer commented on the attack in the Aircraft Action Report. He concluded that the attack should have been conducted at a lower altitude and the bombs dropped shorter. As the Sugar Charlies were of steel construction, the attacking airplane must plan to drop short enough so as to have the bomb enter the hull. In addition, the standard bomb load for patrols should be changed to two 500# and five 100# bombs. Thus the bigger bombs could penetrate the hull of the larger steel-hulled ships and the smaller bombs would be adequate for the smaller wooden-hulled ships (Sugar Dogs, Sugar Puppies, luggers, and barges).

November 24th was not a good day for Ettinger and crew. Off the northern tip of Borneo they attacked three luggers. They dropped four 250# bombs singly and fired 1500 rounds of ammo but could only claim slight damage to the luggers. Dropping a single bomb at a very small wooden vessel just did not produce the desired results. The C.O. again

placed an endorsement on the AAR recommending the use of 100# incendiary clusters against small wooden craft. When released, the break-up of the cluster produced a spread of small incendiary devices. This would be sufficient to insure a hit or hits which in turn would burn the small vessels to the waterline.

The controversy regarding the most suitable bomb load for our missions would continue for the complete tour in the South Pacific. The PPCs' reluctance to drop a string of two or more bombs against a very small vessel prevailed. The desire and anticipation to save some bombs for something bigger and better later in the patrol simply could not be overcome. Also, the proven lack of effectiveness of the incendiary clusters against the steel-hulled ships would be cause to reduce their use.

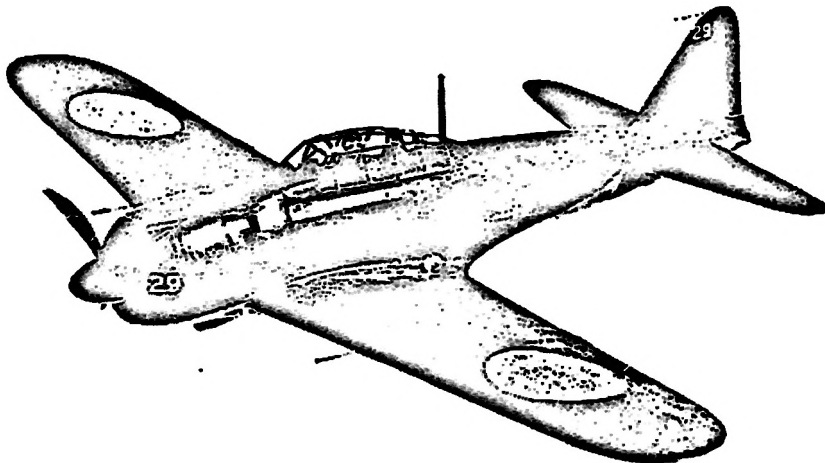
On November 24, 1944, Hemphill and Crew Seventeen attacked a SC of 1500 tons off Palawan Island. The ship was under the ASW escort of one Pete, a single-engine float biplane. Hemphill made two bombing and strafing runs dropping three 250# bombs on each attack. The second drop scored a straddle and seriously damaged the SC. During these masthead attacks, the Pete made ineffective runs on the PB4Y-1 but scored no hits. Once the Sugar Charlie was disposed of, the big patrol plane took on the Pete, shooting out its engine. The Japanese pilot then made a dead stick landing on the water. Both of the crew jumped from the airplane and started swimming for the shore. Additional strafing runs holed the float and the Pete was left drifting and probably destroyed. The Sugar Charlie was sighted the next day by one of our search planes, still afloat, dead in the water and very close to the position of Hemphill's attack.

PERSISTENCE IS REWARDED - Mail from home that we so eagerly awaited was slow and erratic. After a long dry spell of three or four weeks, a big load arrived. Unfortunately, this batch had been exposed to the weather and was a soggy mess. Authorized to salvage what we could, one young crewman picked up a foot-long can labeled "Spam." He opened it to find a mess of gooeey, rotting paper but apparently nothing else. Casting it aside, he looked for something better to examine. Later, he watched as another person thoroughly searched the Spam can, and, lo and behold, a bottle of good whiskey was pulled from the soggy debris.

Strong drink was very hard to come by. However, one of the men was observed receiving bottles of shaving lotion on a regular basis. It was soon learned that the contents of these bottles were not shaving lotion. Rather, the fluid within was good bourbon whiskey. A very devoted relative had emptied the small bottles and then, painstakingly, refilled the bottles through the small neck with an eye dropper. Great patience was required but well worth it.

AN ENCOUNTER OF THE WORST KIND - Waldeck and Crew Seven took off at 0552(I) November 25th for a patrol down the Makassar Straits. This would be an 1800 nmi flight of 12.4 hours. In the harbor at Balikpapan, East Borneo, George Waldeck sighted and reported one light cruiser (CL), two large freighter-transport (FTA) of 10,000 tons, and three Sugar Charlies. As he approached the harbor he was brought under attack

by two Oscars and three Zekes. Initially, the PB4Y-1 was at 6000' and the enemy fighters were sighted at 4000', climbing. Waldeck increased speed to 180 knots indicated airspeed (KIAS) and decreased altitude to 4500'. Throughout the engagement, one of the Zekes remained out of gun range and matched the patrol plane's speed and altitude. This fighter was obviously providing information to the two Oscars. These two fighters dropped a total of eight phosphorus bombs at the search plane. These bombs burst above and off the port wing, ahead and above the airplane, and some above and short. Some of these bursts were within 100' and were very scary but caused no damage. High-side gunnery runs were then made from three and nine o'clock followed by a flat head-on run. An Oscar bore in level and broke under the Liberator even though it was now at 200' altitude. The crew opened fire at 1000 yards and at 200 yards hits were seen on the engine, wings, and fuselage. This fighter was also smoking and left the scene. One Zeke orbited overhead while another Zeke and one Oscar joined the fight and began high side runs. Being not too eager, these fighters opened fire at long distances and broke away before coming into effective range of the PB4Y-1's guns.



This entire engagement had taken place on a bright clear day so the patrol plane had no option except to fight it out. In doing so they expended 1400 rounds of ammunition but suffered no damage. The final score was one Zeke and one Oscar probably destroyed and one very relieved flight crew.

It was about this time or perhaps earlier that Capt. Jones, Commander Fleet Air Wing Seventeen, established our own radio network. Equipment necessary to set up a "radio shack" in the FAW-17 headquarters within the Navy's camp was procured along with our own HF frequency channels. An immediate improvement was realized and we could now get our contact reports in far sooner and with a clearer channel. The CW network operated by the Fifth Air Force was simply overloaded.

On November 25th, off the lower peninsula of Luzon, two of our patrols attacked the same 100' gunboat. Adler and Crew Five made the first attack at 0940(I). Flying at 150', he dropped four 250# bombs on the first run; three hitting close and one hitting on the deck of the ship and bouncing off, exploding about 35' from the PG. On the next run, two 250# high explosives were dropped, one short and the other over for a straddle. Slight damage was claimed from the bombs and 800 rounds of 0.50 cal. gunfire directed at the PG.

Wright came upon the same gunboat anchored in a cove or perhaps aground at the bow. At 1015(I) the Skipper made the first of three bombing runs from 100' altitude. He dropped two 250# bombs each run, scoring three hits on the side of the ship which bounced off, exploding alongside. Two hit on the deck; one exploding and the other bouncing off. One bomb had missed and 500 rounds had been fired into the vessel.

Obviously the PG was well armored. Its armament was one 3" gun forward and twin 50-caliber machine guns aft the stack. There was no return fire though three crewmen were seen jumping over the side. Only little damage was claimed but the PG's crew must have been flattered by all the attention given it.



Sugar Baker (SB) 2,000 - 7,000 tons

Ed Hagen and his crew scored well during a patrol on November 26th. Flying in and out of clouds, they sighted a 2500-ton Sugar Baker (SB), a medium-sized tanker, at Balabac Island. This is located between Palawan and northern Borneo. While still in the clouds, they opened the bomb bay doors and then dove down to 150' above the water. Strafing as they came in on the tanker's port quarter, all six 250# bombs were selected for release. However, the bombs failed to drop and Hagen circled for another attack, approaching on the vessel's port beam. Again, the bombs failed to clear the bomb bay. On the third run, all six bombs released; two fell over, two fell short, but two hit on the deck and exploded. One thousand rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo was also fired into the ship, creating more damage.

The tanker returned fire with 7.7 and 20 mm automatic fire as well as from its heavy AA guns. Three 20 mm hits were made, damaging the airplane and injuring two crewmen, Jean D. Cramer and Charlie B. Johnson. The airplane was out of commission for a week. The two crewmen were treated locally and returned to duty.

Serious damage was done on the tanker as it was sighted by subsequent patrols as late as December 4th in shallow water.

Completing the attack on the Sugar Baker, Hagen then made strafing runs on a Sugar Dog of 300 tons. This wooden vessel was accompanying the larger stack aft tanker

and was most likely anticipating like treatment. Crew Fifteen obliged by firing 500 rounds into the smaller vessel. Sorry, no bombs available to complete the job, but slight damage was credited to Hagen and crew.

Goodman and Crew Twelve were assigned the patrol searching the Makassar Straits on November 27, 1944. Forty nautical miles north of Balikpapan, Borneo, he sighted two Tone-class heavy cruisers. Transmitting his contact report on these two Japanese capital ships, he continued on to Balikpapan. In the harbor he saw one large and seven small transport ships. While the PB4Y-1 was flying at 1000', two Oscars arrived and took positions at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock at the same altitude. Goodman turned to attack the Oscar at the 3 o'clock position. The other enemy fighter then started an attack on the tail of the patrol plane and Goodman immediately dove down to 200'. The Oscar at the tail feinted an attack as the other fighter made a determined head-on run. Firing steadily as he closed, his projectiles were seen to be passing below the search plane. The bow and top turret responded in kind as the Oscar passed closely under the PB4Y-1. Thereafter, and for five minutes, both Oscars made tail-on token passes but broke off as the tail turret opened fire. There was no damage observed or claimed by either combatant as the Japanese fighters departed.

MANY SHIPPING CONTACTS - This same day I had the west coast of Borneo search sector. This was a long haul, about 2100 nmi round trip, and no bombs were carried. As clouds covered most of this very large island, Mount Kota Kinabalu, at 13,455' elevation, created a bit of a hazard. But it was fertile territory. Just about every patrol covering this sector made a large number of contacts. The oil fields of Brunei were a great attraction for the Japanese Navy. En route, while over-flying Tarakan, on the east coast of Borneo, 12 small craft were sighted in the harbor. Over the northern part of Borneo, flying in and out of the weather, we only occasionally saw the jungle below. About 100 nmi east of Brunei, during a short break in the clouds, an airfield was seen deep in a valley. A thought was given on going down to strafe the airfield as a large number of Japanese aircraft were parked there. Safer thoughts prevailed, however, as it would be a let-down and climb-out in the clouds and the terrain surrounding this airfield was mountainous.

Just as the patrol plane was clearing the mountains and approaching Brunei, one Betty and one escorting Tony were sighted. Southbound, they were about 1000' below, and I was tempted to make an attack. Knowing that a long chase would be required, this was discarded as fuel was very tight on this sector. And I was not at all sure that tangling with the Tony voluntarily was such a good idea.

The clouds had cleared and the Brunei oil fields and other facilities came into view. The airplane was descended to treetop level as a defensive measure and the ship count began. Just off shore one destroyer (DD), one medium-large transport ship (FTB), one large transport (FTA), and five small steel-hulled tankers (SC) were sighted. At Tutong there were two SCs in the harbor and one destroyer escort (DE), two gunboats (PG), one medium large FTB, and one small transport (FTC) off shore. In Brunei Bay there were one light cruiser (CL), one DD, four DEs, two FTBs, one FTC, two medium tankers (SB), one

SC, and many small craft. These contact reports were encoded by the copilot at the navigation table and then transmitted by the radioman to the FAW-17 base radio. It did keep both busy for some time.

Flying northerly at low level and a bit inland from the coast, a seven-car train was seen. Applying maximum power to the engines, I began a strafing run on the defenseless target. The top and bow turrets opened fire and almost immediately steam poured from the locomotive. People were jumping and running as the train came to a stop. It was a sight to behold and I was so mesmerized by the scene that my pull-out was much too late. Fortunately, the section of the track was straight and the trees had been cleared back sufficiently to permit a recovery well below the treetops. We had fired off 300 rounds at the train.

Search sector two from Morotai extended northwesterly through the Celebes and the Sulu Seas, beyond Puerto Princesa on Palawan Island and onward to search the Palawan Passage. This long channel just to the west of Palawan provided good water for ocean-going ships. On November 28th Bittenbender flew this sector and carried a bomb load of two 500# and four 100# bombs. The patrol would require nearly 12 hours flight time. Cruising at 1500', the PPC sighted a 70' lugger just south of Puerto Princesa. A strafing attack was made, firing 200 rounds and Bitt estimated that about half hit the craft. Continuing the search sector, the lugger was considered to be damaged but not sunk (on the return leg they did sink it with a 100# bomb and more strafing).

Passing Puerto Princesa, Bittenbender saw a steel-hulled Sugar Charlie in the harbor. Assuming that the enemy forces there had been alerted, he passed on, planning to hit the vessel on the return leg.

Completing the search of the Palawan Passage, they approached Puerto Princesa through a valley, flying very low to achieve surprise. Attacking the 1500-ton freighter, they hit with two 500# bombs and strafed with 400 rounds. The ship blew up and sank. There was no return gunfire from the ship or harbor.

At Zamboanga the patrol plane's crew sighted a lugger in the harbor. Making two bombing and strafing runs on the small coastal vessel, all three 100# bombs missed but the 600 rounds of 0.50 caliber gunfire caused slight damage to the small open-hulled craft. Ground AA fire from the harbor consisted of 7.7 mm machine gun and rifle fire which failed to hit the PB4Y-1.

On the endorsement of the AAR, the Commanding Officer criticized the Patrol Plane Commander for dropping the two 500# bombs on the Sugar Charlie in the harbor at Puerto Princesa. Better to retain the larger bombs for possible larger targets later on. But, a score is a score.

TRAINS, PLANES, SHIPS, AND TANKS - On November 29, 1944, Wright and Crew One had the special search sector over Borneo to Brunei Bay. This was a very long day,

14.2 flight hours. No bombs were carried, but the maximum fuel load of 3400 gallons was on board. This patrol attacked a train only 15 miles down the track from where I bagged one two days earlier. Conserving fuel, Wright glided down from 1500' to 100' without adding power. The strafing produced a cloud of steam from the engine and it came to a stop. While the damage may have been repairable, the load of lumber carried by the six freight cars would surely miss the delivery date.

At Brunei, a 900-ton SC was sighted two miles off the coast, steaming to the southwest at 10 knots. Wright strafed the ship for 25 to 30 minutes, forcing it to beach itself and the crew to abandon ship. During this long period of firing, the bow turret jammed. Also, the K-20 camera failed, most likely due to poor maintenance. Accurate damage could not be determined but the SC was securely grounded on the beach.

The next target was a tank farm with seven tanks. Again conserving fuel, Wright circled at 1000', strafing with cruise power on the engines. One of the tanks caught fire and smoke rose three to four thousand feet. A second tank caught fire, burning as if it was natural gas, going out after a short time. The other tanks were either empty or constructed of heavy steel.

While in the Brunei area, five enemy aircraft were sighted and one identified as a Zeke. These aircraft failed to see the patrol. A total of 2300 rounds were fired during these attacks. The extra 0.50 cal ammo carried was put to good use.

LCdr. Whitney Wright, as Commanding Officer, had this to add to the AAR Report filed for this day's patrol:

"It is the opinion of this pilot that a belly turret has far more advantage than the radar-type nacelle which is in place of the belly turret. For strafing attacks the belly turret is needed, especially when being fired back on by unprotected guns. If attacked by aircraft at altitude the belly turret is definitely needed. This is the general opinion of all pilots in this command. The plane has been weakened offensively by the use of the new radar in place of the belly turret."

Adler had the Makassar Straits for his search sector this day. He departed Morotai at 0545(I) loaded with two 500# and five 100# bombs and 2900 gallons of fuel. As he entered the Straits for the southbound leg, he attacked two luggers. One he sank with one 100# bomb and 500 strafing rounds. The other was bagged with four 100# bombs and 1500 0.50 cal. rounds.

A BUSY BOMBER - The action continued on November 29th for Sutherland and Crew Fourteen searching a sector through the central Philippines. The takeoff was made at 0726 loaded with 2900 gallons, two 500# bombs, and five 100# bombs (this bomb load had now become the standard vice six 250# bombs). It would require 13.8 flying hours to cover the 900 nmi sector.

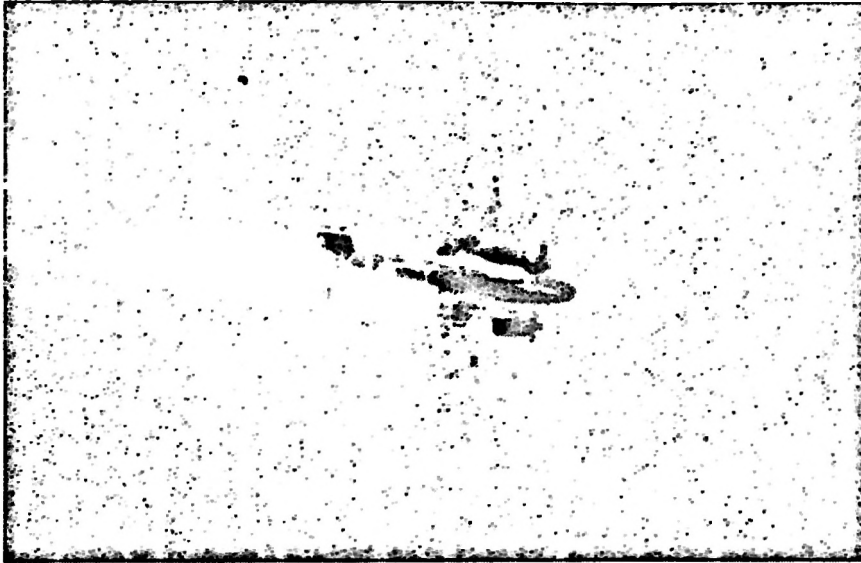
At 1215(I), located about 70 miles east-southeast of Manila, while patrolling at 1000', the crew sighted a 150' gunboat (PG) at ten miles. The PPC turned overland and circled in the clouds while letting down to 100'. Running for an attack, he began receiving medium and light cal. AA fire from the PG. Selecting five 100# bombs and a spacing of 100' on the intervalometer, he continued his run without damage as the AA fire was inaccurate. When releasing the bombs, the intervalometer faulted and the bombs were salvo'd, falling short by 100'. A second attack was made, coming in on the ship's starboard quarter, dropping one 500# bomb. Hitting amidships, there was a large explosion and the ship rolled over on its side and sank. A total of 1000 rounds were fired against this ship.

Flying to the south and still in the area, he came upon a 200-ton Sugar Dog at anchor in a bay. Immediately attacking, he fired 400 rounds into the SD and dropped one 500# bomb. The bomb fell over and exploded about 50' beyond the ship. Only slight damage was assessed.

Flying over a neck of land southeast of Manila, Sutherland came upon the main rail line running from the Japanese air base of Legazpi to Manila. At a marshaling yard, he made a strafing attack on one locomotive. Firing off 900 rounds, the boiler was riddled and a large volume of steam was emitted. Serious damage was believed to have been done to the locomotive.

Resuming his return leg southbound to Morotai, he next sighted two SDs just to the east of Marinduque Island. One firing pass was made at 100' and 400 rounds were expended. No smoke or fire was seen and only slight damage was claimed. It had been a busy day for Crew Fourteen but, unfortunately, the K-20 camera jammed so no photos were taken.

A TAME TESS - Of all the actions that took place on November 29, 1944, by crews of VPB-104, Waldeck and Crew Seven won the prize. Assigned the sector just to the west of Sutherland's this day, they too departed Morotai with the now standard fuel and bomb load. This search plane had not taken off from Morotai until 1130(I) and at 1545 it was northbound over the Sulu Sea. When passing about 85 nmi to the west of Negros Island and cruising at 7000', they made contact with a Tess, a twin-engine bomber, flying southbound at 3000', five miles, eleven o'clock.



Waldeck maneuvered the PB4Y-1 to approach directly behind and below the Tess and closed rapidly (the speed of the Tess was estimated to be about 130 knots). At no time did the crew of the Tess see the patrol plane nor take evasive action in any way. At 400 yards, Raymond Kelsey in the bow turret and Leonard Holtzman in the top turret were directed to open fire. The starboard engine immediately burst into flames and the Tess went into a diving turn to the right. It never recovered and, when steeply into the dive, the port engine also burst into flames. As the enemy airplane struck the water, a large fire ball erupted. A total of 100 rounds had been fired.

It was a spectacular finale for VPB-104's first month in action. Unfortunately and very sadly, we had also taken our losses.

Personnel losses for November 1944 were seven killed in action (KIA), five wounded in action and transferred to the United States, and four treated by the Medical Officer, HedRon, Fleet Air Wing Seventeen, and returned to duty.

During this period there were thirty enemy air raids and an additional seven Red Alerts caused by friendly aircraft failing to properly identify themselves. Two aircraft, BuNos 38814 and 38795, were destroyed by air raids and one, BuNo 38774, was shot down by enemy aircraft. Nine other aircraft were damaged to varying degrees during air raids on Morotai.

During the month of November 1944, the squadron's patrols sank one FTB, one FTU (either a FTA or FTB), five SCs, four SDs, five luggers, and one barge, aggregating approximately 19,500 tons. In combat ships, one 150' PG and two 90' armed patrol craft were sunk. Ashore, two barracks buildings and two oil tanks were destroyed. In the air,

one Tony and one Tess were definitely destroyed and one Pete, one Zeke, and one Oscar were probably destroyed. One Betty and one Sally were damaged on the ground. Ships damaged were one FB, one FTB, one FTC, one FID, one SA, one SB, eight SCs, nine SDs, and five luggers; aggregating 31,000 tons. Also damaged were three PGs and three locomotives.

The movement from Kaneohe to Morotai was made in 75 ferry flights totaling 520 hours. Operational missions from Morotai consisted of 101 patrols totaling 1157 hours. Also during the subject period 102,075 rounds of 0.50 cal. ammo, 45 100# bombs, 254 250# bombs, and 10 500# bombs were expended. For starters, it was a good month.

CHAPTER FOUR IN ACTION MOROTAI AND TACLOBAN

The squadron began the month of December 1944 below complement in airplanes, 13 instead of 15, and personnel. However, a replacement flight crew reported on board December 17, 1944, which brought the number of flight crews back up to full complement of 18. The inflow of replacement aircraft did not keep up with losses and we ended the month with 13 PB4Y-1s.

A more significant change took place during the month in the transfer of operations from Morotai to Tacloban, Leyte Island, located in the east central Philippines. This change was made in increments, the first two crews and one airplane transferring on December 9, 1944. On the 13th, four crews and airplanes ferried from Morotai to Leyte to join with VPB-117, operating PB4Y-1s in patrol missions. Thereafter, VPB-104 made many of the transfers of crews and airplanes by beginning a patrol from Morotai and terminating at Tacloban. By December 23rd the entire squadron had completed the transfer and operations were now under Fleet Air Wing Ten. There was no interruption to the squadron's commitment of six search missions each day during this shift of home base.

At Tacloban the squadron would operate as part of Task Group 73.6 conducting searches under Search Plan G (Revised), Commander Aircraft Seventh Fleet Operations Plan No. 8-44. This area of search missions included two sectors extending to Cape St. Jacques and Cam Ranh Bay, French Indo-China. Another sector searched was to the Balabac Straits then down the west coast of Borneo to 02° 30' north latitude. The most western sectors included an area from the Hainan Straits up the coast of China to Foochow and then eastward to include Okinawa and other islands of the Ryukyu Chain. The most eastern island was Oagari (Daito). Again, many additional special searches were assigned beyond our regular daily six sectors.

Our mission continued to be that as stated in Operation Plan Number 8-44 which was now to "support Southwest Pacific Ground Forces and Western Pacific Task Forces in the seizure and occupation of the Philippine Islands."

The Commanding Officer of Patrol Bombing Squadron One Hundred Four continued to interpret our mission as "search and offensive reconnaissance as the primary mission with a secondary mission of striking targets of opportunity." He further stated that emphasis was to be placed upon enemy shipping.

On October 24, 1944, the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea, also known as the Battle for Leyte Gulf, raged throughout the area. The following day a strong Japanese surface force, under the command of Admiral Takeo Kurita, broke through the San Bernardino Straits and fell upon six baby flat-tops (CVEs) along with their escorting destroyers and destroyer escorts. These CVEs, a part of "McArthur's Navy" had been providing close air support for the U.S. Ground Forces ashore at Leyte. Completely

surprised, this Task Group launched their Composite Squadrons (VCs) best they could. These torpedo bombers (TBMs) and fighters (FM-2s) courageously attacked the Japanese surface force. Unable to land back aboard their CVEs, many of these surviving carrier airplanes made for the airstrip under construction at Tacloban. Ready or not, the airstrip was "opened." TBMs and FM-2s were deposited all over the area. Six weeks or so later, as the airplanes of VPB-104 began arriving at Tacloban, the CVE carrier airplanes were still there, scattered around the airstrip.

At the time of our arrival, Tacloban airstrip was the world's busiest airport. Airplanes were parked wing tip to wing tip along both sides of the narrow runway. Ground support fighters, bomber strike airplanes, and transport C-47 and C54 aircraft kept up a steady stream of landings and takeoffs. Should an airplane blow a tire or lock a brake and be unable to clear the runway, it was quickly "bulldozed" off into the bay. And that anchorage was filled with transport ships and landing craft as far as one could see. The whole scene was a madhouse.

The runway was marsten matting laid on loose sand. The flexing of the steel planks made for a continuous uphill takeoff. While the landing rollout required little braking, such did not compensate for the uphill takeoffs with our grossly overloaded PB4Y-1 aircraft. Most all of our departures were predawn. The kerosene flare pots alongside the runway provided only little guidance for the takeoff roll. After a liftoff to the north, we were then over the black water of the bay with no visual references whatsoever. To the south we had to contend with palm trees a short distance from the end of the runway. Several pilots brought back palm foliage in the lower portions of the engine nacelles. A takeoff from Tacloban was no fun at all! It was frightful!

There was one very bright and cheery situation at Tacloban and a distinct change. Night air raids over Leyte did not occur with the frequency we had experienced at Morotai. An article published in the *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* of November 1996 entitled, "Lest We Forget" by Lieutenant Commander Rick Burgess, explained this dramatic improvement:

"Marine Night Fighter Squadron 541(VMF(N)-541) had gained combat experience at Peleliu, Palau Islands, beginning in September 1944. They flew the F6F-3N/5N radar equipped Hellcat fighters. After the October invasion of the Philippines, the Army P-61 night fighter proved too slow for intercepting the Japanese Oscar fighters then conducting night air raids. General McArthur proposed to Admiral Chester Nimitz that a Marine night-fighter squadron trade places with the Army's 421st Night Fighter Squadron then on Leyte. VMF(N)-541 arrived on Leyte on December 3, 1944, and downed an Oscar on the 5th. After five weeks of night operations over Tacloban they had run up their score to twenty-two enemy aircraft shot down. Little wonder the Japanese higher command decided to direct their night aerial attacks elsewhere."*

[*Excerpted from the *Proceedings* with permission; Copyright(C) (1996) U.S. Naval Institute.]

Our camp area was on a strip of land with rice paddies on both sides. There were no wooden floors for our tents so we were on ground level for sure. Initially, we ate our meals at an Army field kitchen. Our rubber boots were a must at chow time. It took a strong stomach to grab a collection of eating utensils and go through the line. One had to pass by the bubbling, boiling barrel of greasy dirty water that you dipped your soiled eating utensils into before hanging them up for the next client to use. Thank heavens for the boxed "ten-in-one" field rations. These were edible and, since a number of the crews had brought along Coleman cook stoves, there were a number of messes set up in our tents. Little wonder I only weighed 125 pounds.

Another bright feature at Tacloban were the very friendly and grateful Philipinos. We were all addressed as "Meestair Stebe," "Meestair Beel," "Jerre," and whatever. They spoke English far better than we spoke their Visayan dialect. Also, we now had much better laundry service. For a minimum price, a young Philipino girl would take our dirty clothes and bring them back shortly, quite clean. Acceptable payment was a can of any kind of food, a Navy issue undershirt, or even U.S. Script (play money). George Waldeck and I had just about a full case of anchovies left over from our purchases while at Kaneohe. Our laundry girls accepted a can of anchovies as payment only once.

Meanwhile, back at Morotai, the guys had tired of the good chow, relatively, offered by the camp run by FAW-17. Little did they know just what was in store for them. None the less, several of the ensigns decided to spice up their menu. Joe Wasneski and John Freeman tell of their adventure:

"With more than a month in the jungle fringes of Morotai and subjected to the GI food at the canvas wardroom there was concocted a plan to supplement our meals. We would tap the fresh seafood that appeared to be plentiful just beyond the reef. Frank Chase and John Freeman traded a can of beer for some explosives at the adjoining Army Depot. John doesn't recall what the explosives were, but he did recall they were about the size and shape of a stick of margarine with a hole in one end for inserting the fuse. The sergeant involved in this transaction also provided a coil of fuse and some cursory instructions to caulk the fuse joint to keep it dry. Information regarding burn rate of the fuse was either omitted or not thought to be important since all of us had experience with firecrackers.

"John and Frank had been to the beach previously where they befriended the local chief who told them we could use one of their outrigger canoes. Buzz Gibb, who was always able to get a jeep, was recruited for the drive to the beach. Joe Wasneski wrapped the explosives in a field jacket and held them in his lap as Buzz sped down the bumpy road despite our pleas to drive slowly. Gibb let out with a string of profanity and threatened

to drop us off immediately when he was told the reason to slow down was because of the unknown sensitivity of the explosives.

"There was a small outboard motor that we attached to the flimsy strut of the outrigger. None of the survivors ever figured out how the motor got out to the war zone. Fortunately, it was a bright sunny day and the sea was calm as the canoe was not load certified. Once we were beyond the reef the 'fun' began. It was centered around the question of what the sergeant had said was the burning rate of the fuse. John thought he told us it burned about one foot per minute so it appeared reasonable to use one foot so that the charge would have sufficient time to sink. Our lead 'sapper,' John, used chewing gum to caulk the first charge. The absolute climax of the fishing trip occurred within the next few seconds when he lit the fuse and casually tossed the charge to the right side of the canoe. Opinions vary but I thought the charge exploded just as it hit the water. It did give us quite a shower.

"This was followed by an emergency meeting at which time we all decided we were not experienced sappers. John recalls that our threatened assault on the environment yielded one five-inch tropical fish. At this time several bullets whizzed past us and we weren't sure if they were the enemy responding to the explosion or if it was from GIs target practicing along the beach. Anyway we made it back despite the port list of the dugout that developed following the futile blast. Survivors cannot recall what happened to the outboard motor or the unused ordnance. We did agree that Navy chow was great and that we would leave the provisioning to the PATSU or whoever operated the canvas wardroom."

TRANSPORT TERROR - The "Fox Hole Christians" at Morotai continued to tolerate the nightly pyrotechnics and a great many by now had acquired 0.30 caliber carbines. Somehow the continual firing on the perimeter induced an unease that could only be lessened by the feel of an automatic rifle with a big ammo clip. Also, the predawn takeoffs occasionally trapped the flight crews between their fox hole at camp and the wrap-around comfort of an airborne PB4Y-1 clear of Morotai. While leaving one's tent to walk to the pickup point for a six-by-six truck ride to the airstrip, an open tree trunk often served as a shelter when the red alert sounded. During the truck ride you were, well, vulnerable. On one such trip and while the truck was approaching the strip, the red alert sounded. We came to a stop and doused the lights. Next, a six-by-six truck came careening off the airstrip at maximum speed. The road that led off and on to the strip was a one-lane dirt/muddy one and a head-on collision became imminent. The opposition's headlights were off also so our driver wisely (?) flashed our headlights on. The head-on was avoided. BUT, the low-level Japanese bombers had just begun their run in! On the blacked-out airfield we now became a target for strafing. I was the first one to the floor of the truck as any number of frantic passengers piled on. The strafing gunfire passed overhead a bit long but it had been a frightful experience.

A LARGE LUGGER - On December 1, 1944, Wood and Crew Eight departed Morotai at 0524(I) with a load of two 500# and five 100# bombs. Just off the north central coast of the Celebes, Wood found, attacked, and destroyed a 200-ton lugger. Five 100# bombs and 1000 rounds insured the job. This was an unusually large vessel for its class. These small craft were of wooden construction and with an open cargo hatch or hatches. The engines were aft which contributed to the large cargo area. Together with other small wooden coastal vessels, the Sugar Dogs, Sugar Puppies, and barges collectively provided a great amount of sea transportation of war materials. Some were armed with 7.7 mm, 12.7 mm, or 20 mm rapid-firing guns. Usually they were an easy kill and often the crew jumped over the side at the first sight of a PB4Y-1.

SWIM CALL - Burton and Crew Ten took off only a few minutes behind Wood. He carried the same bomb load but had a full load of fuel, 3400 gallons, as his patrol would be for 1000 nmi through the central Philippines. It would take 14.0 flight hours to cover this sector. At 1040(I) he came upon a 1500-ton freighter (FTC) off the north coast of Panay



Island. Burton quickly began a run in at 100' for a low-level masthead bombing and strafing attack. A total of four runs were made, dropping all bombs and strafing with 2000 rounds. One 500# bomb landed at the bow and skipped towards the stern, blowing off the masthead. A second 500# bomb entered the water 10' aft the stern and exploded under the stern, setting the ship on fire. With this, about 100 men were seen to abandon the ship by jumping over the side and starting to swim for the shore.

During this attack, the freighter-transport ship returned fire with two 12.7 mm machine guns. The PB4Y-1 took eight hits which required substantial repairs. However, upon the return leg of the search, four hours later, the FTC was sighted, still burning. As

the patrol plane approached the ship it was seen to explode, disintegrating and sinking. It left a ring of fire as it sank.

Stevens and Crew Two drew an 850 nmi sector around northern Borneo on December 1, 1944. Off Kota Kinabalu we attacked a 200-ton Sugar Dog and sank it with three bomb hits and 400 rounds of 0.50 caliber gunfire. At the same location a lugger was strafed with 200 rounds and missed with one 100# bomb. Continuing the patrol, we made a low-level run on Kudat, Borneo. In the harbor two luggers were strafed and a low pass was made down the runway. Photos were taken which later showed two Bettys hidden under the trees. Complete surprise was achieved on all runs and no return gunfire was observed. The patrol on this sector the following day sighted the SD with its stern resting on the bottom and the bow protruding above the waterline.

Flying by Sandakan during the return leg, I sighted one FTC, an armed patrol boat (PG), two 1500-ton freighters, and numerous small craft in the harbor.

On this day Didier covered his 850 nmi sector in 12.0 hours carrying the now standard bomb load of two 500# and five 100# bombs. Off the east coast of Mindoro Island he made three bombing and strafing runs and then an additional three strafing attacks on a steel-hull Sugar Charlie of 1000 tons. First sighting the SC at 15 miles while cruising at 4000', he passed on by and proceeded over the island. Reversing course, he made a high speed run in from behind a hill descending to 100' for the attacks. A number of hits were made with the 100# bombs and a total of 2000 rounds were fired into the ship. The SC caught fire and was left burning and sinking. There was no return gunfire.

The 1000-mile sector searches were becoming more commonplace. Bittenbender and Crew Thirteen flew one up through the central Philippines on December 2, 1944, and logged 13.4 flight hours. Mostly in the weather during this patrol, he did break into the clear over Zamboanga to receive a dose of anti-aircraft fire. However, no hits were made on the PB4Y-1. No contacts were made.



OBNOXIOUS OSCARS - Also on December 2nd Ettinger and Crew Nine were assigned the 900 nmi sector to Balikpapan, on the east coast of Borneo. Just north of there, he came upon a Japanese convoy of one DD, three PGs, one very large freighter-transport of 8000 tons (FTA), and one large tanker (SA). Closing to four miles to confirm numbers and types, the DD opened with 3" AA fire. These bursts fell one-quarter mile short. As the PB4Y-1 was turned away from the convoy, it was attacked by three Oscars. These fighters were painted a dull green and decorated with the bright red "meatball." Coordinated attacks were made from three, five, and nine o'clock positions. The Oscars opened fire at 600 yards and from 800 feet above the patrol plane. They continued closing to 200 yards, breaking away as the twin 0.50 caliber gun turrets of the Liberator began hitting near them.

The attackers then climbed to 1500' above and dropped four phosphorous bombs which exploded at the eight o'clock position 200 feet from the search plane. The running fight then continued for 30 minutes as the Oscars made high side and tail runs. For whatever reasons the fighters made no head-on attacks. Most of their 20 mm and 7.7 mm gunfire fell short. Ettinger finally managed to escape into the clouds with no damage received. His crew had fired 1500 rounds at the fighters with no damage claimed.

Not all hands on board the search plane had access to a gun to join into the fray. Fred Himsworth, a radioman-gunner, was manning the radio circuit during this engagement. His personal observations follow:

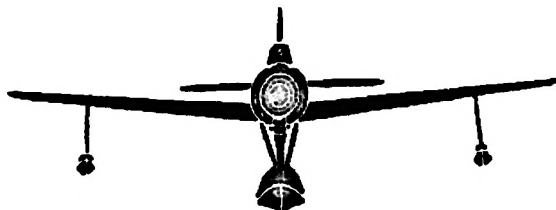
"I was on the radio watch at the time and suffered the frustration of all radiomen as I was not able to listen to the intercom to keep on top of what was happening. As interested (and as scared) as I was in what was going on, my responsibility was to send a contact report to base as quickly as I could. Then intelligence would know about the convoy in the event we were shot down. I was having a very difficult time contacting the base because of static and was concentrating so hard on it that I lost track of the time. I found out later that the fighters made runs on us for half an hour and, at one point, one of them climbed 1500 feet above us and dropped four phosphorus bombs in our path. I happened to look out of my window at just the right (or wrong) time to see one of these bombs explode just off of our right wing. Then I became more frightened than I had been previously.

"I don't think they were really serious about shooting us down or they would have pressed their attacks more closely after their initial run. Most of the time they hovered just out of range of our guns, sneaking in once in a while to try to catch us off our guard. Every time one of them did, our tail gunner would fire a short burst and he would back out. They were probably more interested in chasing us away from the convoy than they were in taking the risk involved in getting close enough to do us any damage. Luckily, we eventually found some cloud cover and evaded them without doing damage to us."

On December 3, 1944, Wright and Crew One departed Morotai at 0655(I) with a standard bomb load for a patrol down the Makassar Straits. This 900-mile sector would require 12.3 hours flight time. In the general area off Balikpapan they engaged three Japanese surface vessels. The first attack was against a 400-ton Sugar Dog at 1347(I) and a string of 100# bombs were dropped. One bomb exploded under the stern and the SD sank almost immediately. A second run was begun to strafe but there was no need and only a few rounds were fired.

Continuing the patrol, a second attack was made upon a 1500-ton Sugar Baker. On the first run, two 100# bombs were dropped which straddled the ship. The next run scored a hit amidships with a 500# bomb and the ship burst into flames.

NEXT! At 1430 an attack was made upon a gunboat/armed patrol craft (PG). This naval vessel was sighted while searching at 8000' altitude and two circles were required to get down for a low-level attack. By then the PG was making tight circles and had all guns manned. The first masthead bombing run was made and just prior to release point for the 500# bomb, numerous 20 mm and 7.7 mm hits were taken in the bomb bay and wing area. The C.O. jinked and started a pull-up which made the bomb overshoot the target. A second strafing run was made and only light damage was made on the naval vessel.



En route to home base while passing the Japanese seaplane base of Tawi Tawi, located on the northwest corner of the Celebes, two Rufes came out to look the PB4Y-1 over. No attack was made although these seaplane fighters were capable of creating a real problem for a single patrol plane.

The airplane was out of commission for two to three weeks for repairs. The C.O. again commented upon the lack of a belly turret, quote; "This plane without a belly turret loses much in offensive operations. On masthead attacks, concentrated fire forward is necessary to clear their gun stations."

Sutherland and Crew Fourteen had the northern Borneo search sector on December 3rd. It would not be a good day as the assigned airplane was over-age and war-weary due to having been in the forward area for a year. The airplane would show an indicated airspeed of only 126 knots at normal cruise power of 32" MAP and 2200 RPM. Normally, a speed of 135 to 140 KIAS would be obtained with this power. After five hours of flight, the PPC jettisoned all except two 100# bombs to improve the airplane's performance.

Anchored in a cove near Kota Kinabalu, Borneo, Sutherland sighted three SDs. Making a low-level bombing attack was very difficult due to the high cliffs along the shoreline of the cove. Two 100# bombs were dropped, one for a near miss off the stern of one SD. Two more strafing attacks were made and 1200 rounds were fired into the SDs. However, no damage to the ships was apparent. The PB4Y-1 received hits from 20 mm and 7.7 mm gunfire, but the damage was minor.

Despite the complaints, this PB4Y-1 had led a charmed life during its tour in the forward areas of the South Pacific. One must assume that due to its poor performance, the powers that be decided that it was not capable of a TransPacific flight back to the Training Command in the States.

On December 4, 1944, Bittenbender, flying with Thompson's Crew Six, had the 1000 nmi sector to Brunei. In the Brunei area they found one SC and one FTC. At Miri, the airfield serving Brunei, four Zekes and four Nells were seen. Offshore there were two Sugar Charlies and several luggers.

On the following day I had the long haul to Brunei. For whatever reason it was a later than usual takeoff this day, 0855. No bombs were carried and the fuel load was shown as 3200 gallons after takeoff. I carefully maintained my pilot's logbook in which I recorded the date, model airplane, BuNo, duration of flight, character of flight (virtually all "J" for scouting and sometimes "Y" for night), name of pilot and passengers (the crew), and most informative, the remarks section. Here I entered the happenings of the day; kills made, kills missed, and the enemy ships and aircraft sighted.

During the patrol flights in the combat area, I also maintained a little black book for the purpose of fuel planning, consumption, and performance. Here I logged the designated sector, geographical area, initial cruise altitude, time of arriving at cruising altitude with fuel on board, and initial power settings. I continued throughout the flight with hourly entries of time, fuel on board, power settings, carburetor mixture, indicated airspeed, and fuel flow for each engine. Entering combat at high power settings, I could only make a guess of the fuel expended. Combat did tend to blow my fuel plan.

On this day I flew at a 10,000' altitude cruise all around the circuit and completed the patrol in the record time of 11.7 hours. I chose not to make any attacks although many enemy ships were sighted. However, with no bombs, it did not make sense to tackle most of the sightings seen this day. Besides, I wanted to get back to Morotai before the nightly bombing raid.



At Brunei I saw one 10,000 ton large tanker (SA), one large transport ship (TA), and three Sugar Charlies (SC). At Jesselton, just north of Brunei, there were seven SCs and SDs offshore. Four aircraft were seen on the airfield. Continuing around the northern corner of Borneo, I did go in close enough at Kudat to confirm our sinking of the SD on December 1st. All of the shipping contacts were encoded and reported on our keyed transmission (CW) circuit to the base radio at FAW-17 Headquarters. A worthwhile patrol.

On December 5, 1944, Wood and Crew Eight took off from Morotai at 0620(I) with a standard bomb load and 2900 gallons of fuel. His patrol was to cover the northern portion of Borneo. Off Kota Kinabalu he sighted a 400-ton Sugar Charlie and quickly made an attack. The bombs hung on the first run due to bomb bay door creep which nullified the electrical release system. On the second run, one 100# bomb scored a direct hit. The SC

blew up and sank immediately. A total of 500 rounds were fired into the ship during the two bombing runs.

Continuing the patrol, as Wood rounded the northeast corner of Borneo, he came upon a 2500-ton tanker code named a Sugar Baker. He made a total of three bombing and strafing runs, dropping two 500# and two 100# bombs and expending 800 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. One of the 500# bombs hit and passed through the hull but failed to explode. Another 500# bomb exploded under the stern of the ship but no apparent results were seen. The ship put up a lot of light and medium AA fire from its 16 portholes. However, Wood's airplane was not substantially damaged. Perhaps a limited field of the AA fire resulted from firing out of portholes and, therefore, no or few hits were scored upon the PB4Y-1.

December 5th was a very good day for Goodman and his crew. They were assigned a short sector, 675 nmi through the central Philippines, and made the round trip in only 9.3 hours. The Aircraft Action Report, number 47, filed by the squadron as a Search and Offensive Reconnaissance Mission, does not state the reason for the short flight. However, the route and area covered strongly suggest that this was a special patrol to examine Ormoc Bay on the west coast of Leyte. This bay was still being used by the Japanese to reinforce their ground forces fighting on Leyte.

At 0800(I), at an island only 180 nautical miles north-northwest of Morotai, Goodman sighted a 500-ton Sugar Charlie and a 150-ton lugger moored together. Bill immediately began a run-in at 100' for an attack. Three masthead bombing and strafing attacks were made. On the first, two 100# bombs were dropped, exploding just short of the SC's stern. The next attack resulted in one 100# bomb going wild for no damage. The final run was fatal for the two ships. Two 100# bombs hit and exploded amidships, starboard side, of the SC which blew out the side of the ship. The two ships rolled apart from each other and sank. One thousand rounds of 0.50 caliber were fired into these two ships.

Continuing the patrol and now cruising at 9000', Crew Twelve made contact with a 2500-ton Sugar Baker at 0933(I). The SB was anchored in the Harbor of Davao, Mindanao, a strong Japanese base. Goodman circled down and made an approach on the ship at 50' and from behind a spit of land to avoid detection. Attacking the ship from the stern, the PPC dropped two 500# bombs and pulled up to barely clear the ship. Both bombs entered the ship at deck level on the starboard side, amidships, and exploded. The hull was blown out and debris flew in every direction. The ship sank very quickly.

The K-20 camera jammed after taking one picture of the first victim, the 500-ton SC, prior to the bomb hits. None the less, credit was given to Crew Twelve for these kills.

As the search proceeded and while passing Bohol Island, just 80 nmi northwest of the big island of Mindanao, an Oscar was seen. The fighter tracked the patrol plane for about ten minutes but no attack was made--just admiring the beauty of the blue B-24!

TENACIOUS TONYS - Didier and Crew Sixteen also had a short patrol this day. They would search for 650 nmi in the sector just to the west of Goodman's. At 1100(I) while cruising at 8500', Didier sighted four Tonys at six o'clock high, about seven to eight miles distance. The enemy fighters were flying in two sections of two planes each. Painted brown and olive with the bright red meatballs, they appeared menacing. The patrol plane was deep in enemy territory, just off the north coast of Negros Island, and the closest cloud was 15 miles away. Not a good situation.

Didier began running for the clouds as the Tonys started attacks from six o'clock, then breaking left and right with the two sections. As the PB4Y-1 was descending, the Tonys stayed high, weaving back and forth, making firing runs from the three and nine o'clock positions. These attacks were not coordinated and were interrupted as the patrol plane entered a cloud at 6000'. All too soon, they exited the small cloud and the fight resumed. As one of the fighters broke to starboard after a firing pass, the tail turret gunner, Grover C. Combs, scored hits into the engine of the Tony. This fighter left the scene smoking, not to be seen again. The three remaining Tonys continued their attacks until Didier again entered a cloud bank. Now well concealed, he made it to the deck and eluded the enemy aircraft.

A total of 1000 rounds were fired at the fighters, mostly by the tail turret gunner. Luckily, there was no damage to the PB4Y-1 though a number of faults developed during the battle. One of the 0.50 caliber guns in the tail turret failed due to a stoppage of a booster motor in the feed tray. The bow turret fogged over and the gunner was unable to get off any rounds due to lack of vision. The intercommunication system failed, probably because of the moisture that developed during the high rate descent from the colder altitude into the humid lower elevation. Poor gunnery by the Tony pilots saved the day.

The disagreeable tasks of dropping propaganda leaflets continued. Just who made the judgment that the Japanese fighting man could be induced into surrendering by reading a few good words had to be weak in the head. There were any number of the variety of leaflets, but for effectiveness, it just was not there. And we did not like "hanging it out" to deliver them.

But occasionally there was good work to be done. Allie Lymenstull, Plane Captain for Ettinger's Crew Nine, reported a good deed as follows:

"Coming back from a patrol we were somewhere in the Celebes area and we had seen the natives out fishing in their outrigger canoes and boats. We would drop hardtack to them or as we called it, dog biscuits, and wave to them. This time there were several boats close together. About 1/2 mile away there was a huge school of fish, probably the tuna or albacore type. I suggested to our PPC that we drop a 100# bomb at the edge of the school. The natives would then have more fish than they could handle.

"So we flew over the natives, waved, and pointed out to the school of fish which they could not see. We dropped the bomb at the edge of the area of the fish. The 5-second delay fuse allowed the bomb to get down into the water before it detonated. After it went off there were hundreds of stunned fish floating. We went back over the native canoes and pointed out to where the bomb had exploded. They paddled out there and seemed really excited, throwing fish into their boats. They had probably never seen so many fish before, I'm sure. We flew around for awhile and watched them gather the fish. They had boats full of fish, fish in nets, and fish on stringers. It had to be the best day ever for this group of fishermen."

The Screamers of 104 did not always win. Challenged by the best the Army could muster, an "Army-Navy World's Championship" softball game was set up. But we'd had too long a layoff. The Army won 9 to 4. How very humiliating!

December 6, 1944, the Skipper and Crew One patrolled Sector Four which covered northern Borneo and the Balabac Straits. They flew in the war-weary PB4Y-1, BuNo 32273, for 12.9 hours but made no contacts. A very unusual patrol for the Commanding Officer of VPB-104.

Shea and his crew did a little better this day. Patrolling the north Borneo sector, they found one small Sugar Dog (100 tons) between Brunei and Kota Kinabalu. Making two bombing and strafing runs, the SD was damaged sufficiently that the crew beached it. Two crewmen aboard were then seen to be hit by 0.50 caliber gunfire.

The second target was a 75-foot lugger just south of the SD. It was brought to a stop by strafing. One seaman aboard the lugger was hit by one or more of the 1300 rounds fired at the vessel.

A ROUGH TIME FOR CREW SEVENTEEN - On December 6th Hemphill and his crew departed Morotai at 0600(I) for a 1000 nmi patrol up through the central Philippines. While passing Zamboanga, Mindanao, several ships were sighted in the harbor. Being such inviting targets, the PPC decided to make an attack on the return leg. When 100 miles out from Zamboanga, Hemphill let down to minimum altitude to achieve a surprise attack. Running in at 100' and maximum speed, they saw two 500-ton Sugar Charlies at anchor and tied together in the harbor. Strafing with 1200 rounds, five 100# bombs were dropped in salvo. They squarely hit the two SCs amidships and one blew up and sank. The other ship was left burning and sinking.

Accurate 20 mm and 40 mm automatic gunfire from the ships and shore guns devastated the PB4Y-1. The starboard aileron and flaps were disabled, number three and four engines were set on fire, the hydraulic system and auto pilot were knocked out, aileron and elevator control cables were cut, and large holes were blasted in the vertical stabilizer. It was a desperate situation.

Ensign Joe Wasneski, a copilot in Crew Seventeen, tells the following story of the harrowing flight to Tacloban airstrip and of the events there:

"Returning from a 1000 mile patrol we went into Zamboanga Harbor and sank two SCs and damaged the pier. Just as our bombs were released we were hit with heavy and medium ack-ack, which nearly shot us down. A 40 mm shell entered the nose compartment two feet behind the bombardier. This caused about 100 shrapnel holes just in front of the pilot's windshield. Hydraulic lines were broken and the fluid was coming out of the holes and covered all the cockpit windows. This same shell knocked out the airspeed indicator and all gyro instruments. Number one, two, and four tachometers were reading zero. Number three engine was on fire and number four prop governor ran away to 3000 RPM. It was brought back to normal with the toggle switch. Number three engine, still on fire, had to be feathered. We sent a message that we were ditching. We all thought that this was it!

"We jettisoned every loose piece of gear and we began to gain altitude. We found that we were flying 100 degrees to the left of our planned course but luckily were on a course towards Leyte. Our aileron controls were very loose due to a hole in our wing just beyond number three engine. The hole was so big I could crawl through it without any trouble. What caliber gun caused it I don't know. There was also a 20 mm hit which came through the tunnel hatch door and exploded in the after station. No one was hurt!

"We had 5000' of altitude when we approached a guerrilla held crash landing strip on Mindanao. We decided to take a chance and make Leyte even if it was still being captured. We were then going to land at Dulag strip on Leyte but decided to go further to Tacloban. Fortunately for us, because Jap paratroopers landed there that night and really made a mess of everything. We arrived Leyte about an hour before dark and the red alert was already sounded. Our landing gear was lowered manually and the nose wheel had to be tied down to keep it locked. Leyte was just a small fighter strip with short marsten matting and planes parked on both sides. There was just enough room for a big plane. Lt. Jeff Hemphill, our PPC, made a perfect landing without any airspeed indicator or any flaps. It was almost a miracle on such a runway without an airspeed indicator and flaps. I guess we hit at about 110 knots. Our brake pressure accumulator had enough fluid to stop us. Our left brake finally froze but the airplane was under control.



"It was just getting dark as we were leaving the plane. The red alert was still on and the ships were firing at planes out in the dark bay. We were going down the runway in a truck when ack-ack guns at the end of the airstrip started firing. Just then we saw the Jap plane coming right for us, strafing. We jumped from the truck and scattered amongst the parked planes. Someone steered me to the right and that's why I'm here today. The Jap plane [a Betty] was hit and crashed into the parked planes. Ensign Madsen [copilot] was killed instantly when the plane hit him. Don Holton, a mechanic and belly turret gunner, was also killed instantly. Walter Cavinee, our Plane Captain, was injured seriously. Also injured seriously was James Harlan, a mech-gunner. Less seriously injured were Robert Golden and Jack Saunders."

What Ens. Joe Wasneski did not include in his statement was his actions immediately after the crash of the Betty. In the confusion of the fire and explosions, he picked up the injured members of his crew, one by one, and removed them from danger. He then sheltered them the best he could with his own body. It was judged that his actions saved their lives. It was an act of bravery to expose himself to the fire and explosions in this rescue. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his courage and devotion to duty.

On the 9th of December a flight was made from Morotai to Tacloban for the purpose of delivering personal belongings to Hemphill's crew. Those that were physically able were flown back to Morotai. Hemphill and Wasneski would join Thompson's crew and resume flying combat patrols. PB4Y-1, BuNo 38816, damaged beyond repair, was surveyed and stricken from the records. Jack Saunders eventually would join my crew as bombardier and a good one he proved to be. The war continued and our shipmate losses came no easier.

BLUE LIGHTNING - Sutherland and his crew had the 1000 nmi patrol to Brunei on December 7, 1944. Loaded with five 100# bombs and 3400 gallons of AvGas, they got airborne at 0600(I). Cruising at 7500', the patrol plane crew sighted a Val flying on an opposite course well below at an estimated altitude of 500' to 1000'. The enemy dive bomber was painted a sky blue and was very difficult to see initially while flying over the water. Sutherland reversed course and dived on the Val with the patrol plane, making 260 KIAS. The Val's speed was estimated at 220 knots and it was first believed to be a fighter. Because of this, the PPC ordered "open fire" early with the bow and top turrets and starboard waist gun. The enemy aircraft dived to 100', made a few mild evasive actions, then continued flying straight and level, pulling away from the patrol plane. The speed of the Val was very surprising. The bow and top turrets' gun barrels burned out after 100 rounds and then jammed. Tracers had been seen hitting the Val in the engine and fuselage.

Approaching Jesselton airdrome, the attack was broken off. Only slight damage was claimed.

During this patrol the PB4Y-1 was having electrical problems. The IFF was inoperable for several hours and the APS-15 radar and radio compass had failed completely. However, the LORAN was doing exceptionally well, receiving Australian stations four and five. This must have been some sort of a test installation as there are no other references to LORAN nor any memory of such.

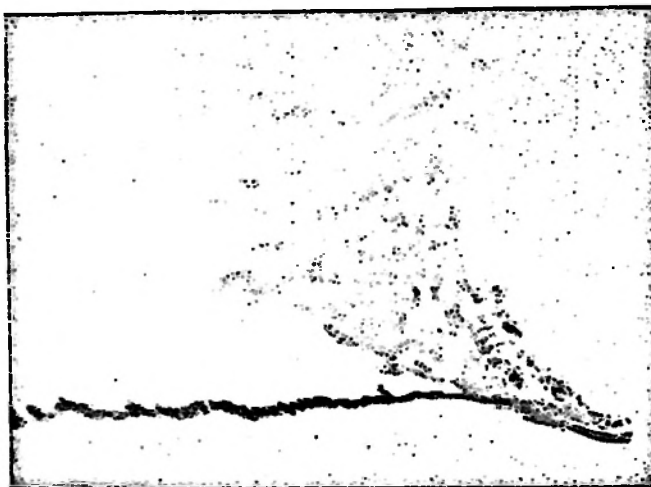
Endorsing the AAR again, the C.O. commented on the lack of a belly turret; "Belly turrets badly needed in this area even if necessary to remove the APS-15 radar entirely."

Bittenbender was assigned sector A on December 7th. This 850 nmi sector would require 12.0 hours flying time. At 1345(I) just off Sandakan, Borneo, Bitt came upon a large Sugar Dog of 700 tons. This vessel was classified as an SD rather than an SC as it was of wooden construction. On the first low-level attack, the bombs failed to release. A second run was made strafing, firing a total of 900 rounds into the ship. There was no return fire from the vessel and only slight damage was assessed by the strafing.

At 1430 they came upon a 7000-ton Sugar Able near the northeast corner of Borneo. Attacking without delay, they strafed with 300 rounds and dropped one 500# bomb. Hits were scored with the strafing but the bomb fell short by about 75 feet. After a close look at the large tanker, it was decided that the ship was beached and most likely a derelict.

On December 8, 1944, Goodman, the PPC for Crew Twelve, made a 1000(I) takeoff from Morotai. He would search outbound for 770 miles. His aircraft was loaded with five 100# and two 500# bombs and 2900 gallons of AvGas. It would be a 10.7 hour mission.

HARBOR HAVOC - AT 1600 Goodman made an attack against two 400-ton Sugar Dogs in Sandakan Harbor. Three bombing and strafing runs and two additional strafing attacks were made, sinking one and damaging the other. Later, during the return leg of the sector, additional strafing runs were made on ships in this harbor. All told, one 500# and five 100# bombs were dropped and 1500 rounds of ammo were expended. During the second attack the PB4Y-1 was hit by 12.7 mm gunfire in the number one engine and fuselage, causing slight damage.



At Kudat, Borneo, Goodman attacked a 750-ton steel-hull Sugar Charlie, dropping one 500# bomb and strafing with 500 rounds. The bomb fell short but the strafing set fire to the vessel from stem to stern. The ship burned furiously and a tall column of smoke arose. The SC was totally destroyed.

PISTOL PETES - There is considerable detail of my patrol on December 8th recorded in my pilot's flight logbook, Aircraft Action Report Number 53, and my cruise control notebook. One page in my cruise control notebook was devoted to making a diagram of the ships in Balikpapan Harbor at 1445 this day.

The usual load of bombs and fuel (2900 gallons) were on board for takeoff. The fuel load indicated that our two self-sealing forward bomb bay tanks were empty or very nearly so. Though not needed for the "short" patrols, they were left in the aircraft as it had been proven that continual removal and installation would generate fuel leaks in the bomb bay plumbing.

Takeoff was made at 0630(I) and a climb was made to 1000'. After level-off, I judged that 2800 gallons remained on board and a power setting of 32" MAP and 2200 RPM was set. The carburetors were left in "auto rich" to help cool the engines down a bit and boost the airspeed somewhat. We were showing 142 knots indicated air speed and the fuel flow was indicating 360 pounds per hour on each of the four engines.

These fuel flow indicators were quite accurate but not so the fuel gauges. The four glass sight gauges mounted on the forward bulkhead of the bomb bays were overly affected by minor changes in the airplane's attitude. The only way to get an accurate fuel reading was by a graduated "dip stick" placed into the fuel filler neck prior to takeoff or after landing. But "dipping" the tanks after a patrol did confirm the accuracy of the fuel on board computations based on the fuel flow gauges.

At 0700 I figured we had 2680 gallons on board, we had shifted to "auto lean" but left the power as initially set. We were now maintaining 140 KIAS and the fuel flows were indicating 300, 330, 330, and 320 pounds per hour.

Due to a mechanical failure of some sort (not recorded), we returned to Morotai after a short period airborne. The next takeoff was at 0810 in PB4Y-1, BuNo 38927, and with the same standard load. However, I was flying with Crew Six (Thompson's) and it should be noted that 38927 was a newly delivered replacement airplane. This was to have some considerable effect upon the action later this day.

My first cruise control entry was at 0815 and leveled at 1000'. The figures were essentially the same as the earlier short and aborted flight. In contrast, an entry nearing the end of our patrol shows the following; Time 1800, altitude 5500', estimated fuel on board 720 gallons, power 31" and 2000 RPM, auto lean, 145 knots, and 250 pounds per hour on all four engines.

Further remarks regarding fuel control, fuel loading, and search sector mileages are appropriate. On many sectors it was necessary to climb to altitude (8000' to 10,000") to clear the mountains en route to the search areas. Engaging in combat invariably meant running at maximum power for varying time periods. Drag factors such as open waist hatches, radar or belly turret extended or retracted, and time of bomb release all added to the "estimate" of fuel remaining. It was not an exact computation.

I was assigned the Makassar Straits/Balikpapan sector. I would fly low level all the way, 1000 feet or so. Should an increase in radar coverage be desired, a higher altitude could be selected. Whether we flew the sectors clockwise or counter-clockwise was determined by the Wing. Just what difference it made I'm not sure. But we did get this information during the pre-takeoff briefing at the Wing Headquarters (a tent). In addition, the search sectors were assigned, code books and navigation charts were issued, and any special information was given. Little attention was given to the weather briefing as we were going to fly regardless.

While the pilots attended the Wing briefing, the crew proceeded to the airstrip to ready the airplane. This was a very important task as, to no small degree, our lives depended upon this pre-flight inspection. At times we were able to select our own bomb load. It was our choice to add extra bombs to stow in the airplanes for an in-flight reload. We always made sure that there was additional 0.50 caliber ammunition and gun barrels on board. Flight rations for the long flights were the "C" rations and/or the "ten-in-one" rations. Hot coffee was made on a hot plate and due to the iodine-treated water, the coffee was terrible! Such did put us in the proper mood for the Offensive Search and Armed Reconnaissance Missions.

Our sector initially took us along the northern coast of Celebes for about 350 miles. After passing Manado, located on the northeast tip of the island, we saw three Japanese fighters. They seemed uninterested in us which was perfectly acceptable to me. Rounding

the northwestern corner of the Celebes, I stayed on the eastern side of the Makassar Straits as we were flying the search clockwise this day. I also now flew quite low on the water for good reason. It was my intent to do a ship count in Balikpapan Harbor. There had been a good deal of fighter activity at Balikpapan so low altitude flight to evade enemy radar was well advised. About halfway across the Straits westbound, I told the copilot to "crack" the engine cowl flaps, set auto rich, and give me full power on the engines. I let the speed build up to about 180 knots and then made a zoom climb to 1500'. Then I told the radarman to give a good look around on his scope. Nothing seen, I made a rapid descent to 200' and resumed cruise power and speed. At this time we were about 100 miles south of Balikpapan.

Approaching the east coast of Borneo, I made the turn to head north. When about 50 miles from Balikpapan, I laid on maximum power again and dropped down to 50 feet altitude, planning to do a pop-up maneuver for the ship count. It was a "slick calm" and we were leaving a wake on the water with our down wash. Not necessarily an unusual phenomenon.

The oil fields and storage tanks came into view and very shortly the opening to the harbor was identified. I pulled hard on the elevator and shot up to 300 or 400 feet and gained a clear view of Balikpapan, the harbor, and shipping. My push-over back down to the surface of the water began simultaneously with the ship count. I made an easy turn to the right to distance us from Balikpapan as soon as possible. Full power was retained until I was reasonably sure that we had not stirred up the hornets' nest of Zekes, Oscars, and Tonys. It didn't take long to recognize that we had gotten away cleanly or they were all out to lunch and couldn't be bothered. We stayed low but reduced power and resumed our search.

Our position for the ship count was well within good visual range. One very large freighter-transport (FTA), estimated to be 10,000 tons, was seen. It had three goalpost masts forward and two aft. It was a beautiful, modern ship. Another freighter-transport seen was either a FTB or FTC. It could be classified as either as I estimated it to be 4000 tons and had two masts, one forward and one aft. Three destroyer escorts (DEs) were positioned near the two freighter-transports, apparently for air defense. A tanker (SB) of 4000 tons appeared to be very low in the water and the bow was nosed into the shore. It may have been damaged and resting on the bottom.

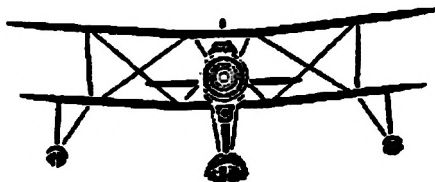
There was no AA fired at us nor any other acknowledgment of our presence. The scheme of very low-level flight and the pop-up maneuver had worked.

Now we would set to work with the navigator encoding the contact report to be transmitted by CW back to our base. This was the accomplishment of our primary mission.

I knew of the Japanese seaplane base located at Toli Toli, on the northwestern corner of the Celebes. I would pay them a visit during our return leg with intent of doing hurt. And the same tactic would be used to gain surprise by avoiding radar detection.

However, the terrain was quite different from the flat coastal plain at Balikpapan. The area around the seaplane cove at Toli Toli was mountainous. One peak rose to 9430 feet. My approach was planned to pass over a neck of land about 1500' high and swoop down on the base unannounced. This would work just fine so long as there were no radar stations set on the high ground nearby. Surprise was essential but I would take a chance in order to bag some Japanese seaplanes.

Running low over the water with full power on, I saw what I believed to be the ridge of land key to my arrival plan. Beginning a climb to just clear the terrain of my initial point, I was betting on the competence of our navigator to a large degree. Since our copilots traded their days on the navigation table, I'm not sure just which one was my "Prince Henry" for this day. But it was either Art Cheroske or John J. "Jocko" Mahoney. Whoever, he had done a great job. Reaching the crest, there below lay the seaplane base and four Petes toed into the beach wing tip to wing tip. The time was 1645(I) on a beautiful clear day.



Well positioned, we dove down, lined up to sweep over the four seaplanes. Passing over the single engine biplanes, we were in a left bank following the curve of the beach. The bow and top turrets had excellent firing angles and quickly one Pete blossomed into a ball of flames. Pulling up to reverse course for another firing run, a large burst of a phosphorus bomb appeared just under our airplane. Looking up, I saw a number of enemy seaplanes above us and the fight was on!

The Petes were slower than our PB4Y-1 but they were far more maneuverable and had a greater rate of climb. They were armed with two 20 mm guns firing forward and one free 20 mm mount for the rear-seat man. I cleared the land mass and got low over the water, ready to fight it out. There were six Petes altogether but only two made aggressive high-side and head-on firing runs. The other four stayed high and lobbed aerial phosphorus bombs.

Our fighting ability and gunners were severely hampered by our guns jamming. Only one gun in the tail turret would fire due to a feed motor failure. The bow turret experienced one jam after another. The only well-operating turret was the top turret and it did all of the effective gunnery. As our guns jammed, I would turn away to make a run for it, but when it appeared that the guns were cleared, I would reverse course and have at the Japanese again. This tango lasted for 20 minutes, at which time one of the Petes left the scene smoking for a probable kill. Shortly thereafter the other "fighter" made his last pass

with his rear-seat man missing and his gun sticking straight up. The plane made a run for it also and disappeared in a cloud. We had not been hit.

The top turret gunner was Harold Whist, by rating, a first-class aviation radioman. He scored hits on the "smoker" from below on the fuselage and wings during the head-on runs. On the other player, he scored hits into the fuselage from below also during the head-on attacks.

Upon return to Morotai, I vowed that there would be no more patrols with replacement airplanes until they had received the VPB-104 treatment. It had been a busy day and, at times, very frustrating. Had we not had the guns jamming, we surely would have bagged a couple of the airborne Petes. As it was, we were credited with one Pete destroyed and one probable at Toli Toli. In the air it was one probable and one damaged.

At Morotai the nightly pyrotechnics continued. As the Wing Commander complained to the higher command while requesting Navy night fighters, "The Japanese bombers fly over nightly, dropping bombs and undergoing no risks other than the ordinary hazards of flight." His request was not approved.

However, on one night there was a moment of hope. The searchlights had a Japanese bomber squarely in their beams. From the sound, we recognized a P-38 racing in at full bore. The fighter let go with a long burst of four 0.50 caliber and one 20 mm rapid-fire high-velocity gunfire which produced a flow of tracers clearly visible to us. We all cheered lustily but it was a clean miss. There was apparently no damage to the Japanese bomber whatsoever. But the Japanese bombers would soon begin to pay dearly for their nightly soirees. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) arrived with a squadron of Spitfires and they scored. Into December, the rate of nightly bombings dropped off, much to our relief.

On December 9, 1944, the C.O. and Crew One utilized their ECM equipment to destroy a radar station on a small island off the northeastern corner of Borneo. The rugged terrain with one peak of 1800' created turbulence during the very low altitude (50') bombing and strafing runs. The radar station was detected initially at 100 nmi and the PB4Y-1 was homed in until it was visually identified. Three bombing and strafing runs and an additional three strafing runs were made. Three 100# bombs and 500 rounds silenced the station's emissions. This was the beginning of a "sideline" of destroying and/or the pinpointing of a substantial number of Japanese radar stations throughout our search areas.

There were only two other actions that took place this day. Waldeck attacked a tugboat anchored closely alongside a cliff. Seven bombing and strafing runs were made but due to the tug's position, hits were made only by strafing. Slight damage was assessed.

Shea and Crew Eighteen attacked five small luggers (50') off Bohol Island by strafing. After four strafing attacks, the score was major damage to two and minor damage to three.

In addition to the search missions flown on December 10th, LCdr. Whitney Wright, Commanding Officer, flew to Tacloban, Leyte Island, and returned the same day. He made the flight in my airplane, BuNo 38889. Ever mindful of the job at hand, he made the trip to check in with the higher command and become knowledgeable of the situation there. Whit Wright knew his business.

TROPICAL PROTOCOL - It was about this time that I experienced a challenge in protocol that was handled improperly. I excuse my inadequacy to youth, inexperience, and awe of high-ranking officers. Besides that, this Wing Commander put the fear of God in all subordinates by his mere presence.

Our head or latrine, depending upon your military orientation, was an eight-holer. It was enclosed in a framed canvas and screen affair to protect our nudity from the multitudes of ever-present insects while answering nature's call. Usually a pleasant morning ritual, terror soon struck deep into my heart. Marching directly for the facility and dressed in the uniform of the day for this activity (one towel, soap, and sandals) came the Wing Commander and his Chief of Staff! My first thought was to rise to attention, hand salute and shout, "Good morning, Sir!" It seemed hardly a military courtesy thing to do under the circumstances. I would sit quietly and hope for the best. Maybe I could shrink down into the hole. No, I would feign total concentration on the task at hand. There was no exchange between the lofty Wing Commander and the meek lieutenant.

The following day, after Wright returned from the Wing morning briefing, laughing his head off, he relayed to me that the Wing Commander did not expect rigid military courtesy, just acknowledgment of his presence. Just how to accomplish this was never explained.

HEAVY ODDS AND A GOOD SCORE - On December 10th Noon departed Morotai at 0623(I) for a patrol down the Makassar Straits and to conduct a ship count in Balikpapan Harbor. It was to be a very busy day. The PPC had let down to 200' and was westbound towards Balikpapan when he made contact with three destroyer escorts. These ships were in column on course 240 degrees, speed ten knots.

At 1230 and about six miles out from the harbor, he was attacked by eight Zekes and two Tonys. Noon immediately set maximum power on the engines and let down further to 50' as he made an 180-degree turn to distance the PB4Y-1 from the fighter base. The bow turret was manned by Joseph P. Devins, the top turret by George B. Johnson, and the tail turret by Norman G. Baxter. It was a clear day with a few small cumulus clouds and 30-mile visibility. There was no place to hide the big patrol plane.



Quickly the fighters made attacks from three, six, and nine o'clock. This was followed by two head-on attacks. One Zeke remained at two o'clock and seemed to be directing the fight. All attacks were determined and the firing passes did not break off until within 200' of the patrol plane. The head-on passes were very close before passing below the Liberator; so close that Noon had to pull up to avoid collisions with the fighters. Throughout, the Zekes and Tonys alternated climbing to 1000' and each making a drop for a total of eight phosphorus bombs. All exploded close and two very close. The engagement continued for one hour (or so it seemed?). The final tally was one Zeke destroyed (it hit the water) and two were probable kills. The PB4Y-1 took 7.7 mm hits in the number one and three engines, bow turret, wing spar, waist hatch, after station, and tail. These hits caused only minor damage. Both the Zeke and the Tony fighters were equipped with 20 mm cannons. It is surprising then that no hits were recorded by these harder-hitting, bigger guns. The Japanese 20 mm cannons were reported to have a relatively low muzzle velocity and often our crews reported that the Japanese fighter's gunfire passed below our aircraft. However, their 20 mm guns did fire quite reliably. Very often we observed a steady flow of black smoke over their wings during air combat. **Fighting!**

The two single 0.50 caliber machine guns in the waist hatches also joined in with the firing against the fighters. It was judged that most of the damaging hits on the enemy fighters were made by the powered turrets and their computing gunsights. All guns of the PB4Y-1 performed very well except for a brief stoppage in the bow turret. The ship count in the harbor was given up as it seemed too hard this day.

Continuing the action on December 10th, Bittenbender and his crew flew the 1000 mile sector to Brunei. They made their takeoff at 0607(I) and would return to Morotai 12.9 hours later. Even though bombs were not normally carried on this long and difficult search, five 100# bombs hung in the racks in the after bomb bay this day. After letdown from over the Borneo mountain range, Bitt made contact with one large tanker, a Sugar Able of 8500 tons, escorted by one gunboat (PG). These ships were close to the shore about 40 miles north of Brunei Bay. After exiting a rain squall, the PPC began a bombing and strafing run on the bow of the SA. Both the tanker and the PG opened fire with medium AA. As the patrol plane made its run, the tanker made a hard turn to the left which then converted the run into a beam-on attack. Three 100# bombs were dropped at 40' intervals, the closest hitting the water 75' over. On the second run, again the tanker maneuvered effectively and one of the two bombs exploded within 25' of the ship. The PB4Y-1 was not hit. Only slight damage was claimed by the 963 rounds of ammo fired at the tanker. A disappointing encounter.

Heider and Crew Eleven had moved up to Tacloban on December 9, 1944, to begin operating with VPB-117. They flew their first patrol the following day. It would be a 700 nmi patrol and would take 9.5 hours to complete. The PB4Y-1 was loaded with 2700 gallons of AvGas and ten 100# incendiary clusters (a VPB-117 concept). This would also be a two-plane section led by a VPB-117 PPC. Takeoff time was at 0710(I) and after join-up at 1000', the flight headed westward on their sector search. When passing the Japanese airstrip at Bacolod on Negros Island, they observed an Oscar taking off. The fighter climbed up to 1000' and flew behind and to the port side of the patrol planes for a short period of time. It then climbed to several thousand feet above and ahead of the flight. The Japanese pilot then put on an acrobatic show for five to ten minutes before peeling off to make a head-on run level with the patrol planes. The Oscar opened fire and both Liberators began firing VERY soon thereafter. Hits were seen on the fighter in the fuselage as he passed under Heider's airplane. The VPB-104 airplane was hit by a 7.7 mm bullet on a propeller blade of number one engine and four hits on the port vertical fin and port rudder. The Oscar then pulled up into a right chandelle and paralleled the patrol planes for five to ten minutes before departing. Only slight damage was claimed on the Oscar.

POUNDING PUERTO PRINCESA - December 11th began poorly for me. Scheduled for an 1035 nmi patrol, we departed just before 0600 in the Skipper's airplane, BuNo 38869. An engine oil leak developed and we returned to Morotai for another try. This time we took off at 1016 in BuNo 38801 which turned out to be a big plus. It had a belly turret vice the APS-15 radar. We were fully loaded with 3400 gallons of AvGas and five 100# bombs. At cruising altitude, I could not get a satisfactory fuel flow with airspeed so I jettisoned the bombs. Later, I would utilize a higher power setting of 35" and 2300 RPM in auto rich when this heavy. The fuel specifics were poor but acceptable and after an hour or two I could ease back on the power.

Our search would take us by Palawan Island and well out into the South China Sea. As we passed by Puerto Princesa, I noted one Pete anchored in the harbor and ten airplanes on the airstrip. It was tempting but best to cover my sector before sporting events. Getting shot up prior to searching your sector was a no-no. Do understand that the higher command was very pleased for us to run up the score, but the search mission came first.

Returning over the high terrain west of Puerto Princesa I flew closely to the ground and followed the valleys insofar as practical. As I approached the Japanese base and was letting down through the clouds, I felt certain that I would gain surprise. Breaking into the clear beneath a 1000' overcast there was no AA fire to greet me. In very good visibility, I saw two Jakes about to land at the seaplane base. No airborne fighters were seen as I started my strafing attack on the Jakes. Both of them bounced their landings and were coasting along on the water when the bow, belly, and top turrets opened fire. As one Jake quickly began burning, I pulled to come



around for another firing run. Slowly coasting now after the landing, the crew of the second Jake jumped over the side as we opened fire. It too blossomed into fire as we had closed to point-blank range.

I now positioned the airplane for a run along the curving beach where a number of seaplanes were toed into the shore at their service and base facilities. I flew very low along the shore and all four turrets and the waist gunners let go at six Japanese float planes. Two Petes burst into flames with only a few rounds fired into them. Making the shortest turn possible, the next and final firing attack would be perpendicular to the beach. This pull-out would take us right over the airstrip. Not necessarily what I wanted but as yet there had been no gunfire directed at us. Again, as we ran into the beach, all guns were firing well but the targeted Jakes seemed harder to burn. As we pulled away, Marx Stephan, starboard waist gunner, saw a fire break out where one Jake was sitting. I then flew very low across the airstrip and saw one Nell and 14 other unidentified airplanes. We did spray the area but made no claim for damages there. Throughout this final action, the tail turret was jammed due to the charging cables breaking and fouling the system.

Summarizing, we had fired on ten seaplanes at very close range and the score was two Jakes and two Petes definitely destroyed, one Jake probably destroyed, two Petes and one Rufe (a Zeke float plane) damaged. I may have been able to increase our score had our K-20 camera not run out of film after the first two strafing attacks. Fifteen hundred rounds had been fired during these runs. We landed back at Morotai at 2242(I) after a 12.4 hour flight.

Wood and Crew Eight had departed Morotai on the same day at 0637 for a long search sector also. He carried the same fuel and bomb load to patrol the sector just to the southwest of my sector. He would log about the same flight time, 12.6 hours. At 1430(I), while approaching Balabac Island, off the south end of Palawan Island, he sighted one Sugar Baker estimated to be 2500 tons. This ship had been previously hit by Hagen on November 26th. Nonetheless, the ship, along with shore batteries, returned light and heavy machine gun fire which failed to hit the PB4Y-1. The SB appeared to be resting on the bottom but Wood made one bombing and two strafing runs anyway. One of the 100# bombs, dropped in string, entered the hull but failed to explode. The other four bombs went over and the closest one exploded 100' from the ship. One thousand rounds were fired at the ship during the two strafing runs and slight damage was added to the already beat-up ship.

A Pete was tied up to a jetty across the bay from the SB and Wood made one strafing run, firing 200 rounds. The float plane was hit but would not burn as most likely the fuel tanks were empty.

BLASTING BRUNEI - On December 12, 1944, Shea and his crew were assigned to the long haul to Brunei. Their takeoff was at 0618(I) and the PB4Y-1 was loaded with 3400 gallons and five 100# bombs. It would be a memorable day and can best be told by directly

presenting the narrative from Aircraft Action Report Number 61 of this date. However, to more easily follow the action, it is well to first list the targets hit and ordnance delivered:

Target #1	Steamroller, airstrip, and truck	500 rounds
Target #2	Motor convoy of three trucks	450 rounds
Target #3	Sugar Charlie of 1500 tons	Five 100# bombs, 800 rounds
Target #4	Sugar Dog of 300 tons	500 rounds
Target #5	Riverboat of 50 tons	300 rounds
Target #6	Seven luggers of 50 tons each	300 rounds
Target #7	Warehouse, 50' x 300'	300 rounds

The narrative follows:

"Lt.(jg) Joseph D. Shea, at the end of search, carrying only five 100# bombs due to length of search, went in to look over shipping at Brunei, Borneo. He came in over a new airstrip west of Brunei Town flying at 5000'. Let down for closer observation, finding work on strip in progress, making two strafing runs, he hit a steamroller which exploded when hit by tail gunner Owen P. Dailey. A gravel truck, also hit, turned over on its side.

"Lt.(jg) Shea then circled in south of Brunei Town and strafed a motor convoy of 3 trucks loaded with troops. Tracers went into all the trucks which pulled off the road into the trees which prevented observation of results.

"Continuing into the harbor area at Brunei Town a 1500-ton freighter and a Sugar Dog were observed pulling up toward a dock. A riverboat was observed about two miles away. 7 luggers were anchored in the bay. 3 bombing and strafing runs were made on the freighter; 2 x 100 pounders being dropped on first run, the bombs being long, 10 and 30 over; 3 x 100# bombs were dropped on the second run for a straddle, the first bomb exploded on starboard bow, the other two exploding 10 and 30 feet over. Freighter was strafed with 800 rounds on the 3 runs. It caught fire and was left burning and smoking. Six crewmen aboard were shot, four falling on deck, two falling overboard. Plane was hit on second and third run by light AA from ships and shore. Medium AA was being fired, bursting close but no hits from it entered plane. Some of the AA was coming from a large warehouse back from the pier (target #7). Target #4 was also strafed

with 500 rounds during the runs on target #3, the tracers going in but no fire or smoke were observed. Two men were knocked off the dock.

"Lt.(jg) Shea then flew down over the riverboat, a white flag being waved on deck as he approached, and air crewmen were ordered to hold fire. As plane passed over the boat at 500 feet altitude the riverboat began firing light AA. Plane then circled and let down to 50 feet for final strafing run on the harbor area, firing 300 rounds into the large warehouse (target #7), which had fired AA on previous runs, setting it on fire, and then strafed the 7 luggers (target #6 which also fired AA) sinking 1 and damaging the others. Returning to the riverboat, 300 rounds were fired into it, a fire breaking out in the after part of the ship. It was left aflame, sinking stern first. The plane was hit by 6 x 7.7 mm and 3 x 13.2 mm during the attack, the AA coming from ships, luggers and shore positions. Heavy gas fumes were noticed as the attack was completed. Bomb bay doors were opened and all electrical was secured, including inter-plane communications. Gordon Martin, the plane captain, William E. Abbott and Otto Adams, mechanic-gunners, rushed to the bomb bay to check the damage. Gas was pouring from several hose connections between number 2 tank and number 2 selector valve. Number two engine was feathered. After word was received to feather there was no further communications between the cockpit and other stations. Pilot could not leave station to check damage because of danger of one or both copilots being overcome by fumes. Abbott attempted to transfer gas from number 2 tank to number 3 tank by holding hoses together by hand. Gordon Martin was overcome by gas and crawled back to the after station because of the fumes. They continued to transfer fuel until Abbott became unconscious. His feet slipped off the catwalk and Adams caught him and attempted to pull him back into the plane. At that time Adams became unconscious and fell onto the catwalk. Abbott fell through the bomb bay from 1500 feet. At this time James Harrington, radioman-gunner, went into the bomb bay to rescue Adams from the catwalk but he was overcome by fumes. All others aboard were fighting to maintain consciousness. About 100 gallons of fuel were saved by Abbott and Adams actions in transferring fuel to number 3 tank. The remainder of fuel in number 2 tank leaked out. Number 2 engine was started up again in about an hour and a half. The plane landed back at base with less than ninety gallons of fuel left.

"In addition to the hits in the bomb bay; the bow turret, leading edge of starboard wing and wing root and tail turret were also hit. The airplane was out of commission five days for repairs."

William E. Abbott, from Peoria, Illinois, was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions this day, posthumously.

Also on December 12th, Ettinger and Crew Nine had a short sector, 650 nmi, through the central Philippines. Takeoff time was 0701(I) with a standard bomb load of two 500# and five 100# high explosive bombs and 2900 gallons of fuel. At 1115 off Bacolod airstrip, Negros Island, the PPC made an attack against a 400-ton Sugar Dog. Three bombing and strafing runs were made, dropping five 100# bombs and firing 400 rounds. One bomb made a direct hit in the stern and the SD was left burning over the entire deck and in a sinking condition.

On the same day Burton took off at 0629 with the standard fuel and bomb load. They were assigned sector "C," the Balikpapan run. Covering the sector would take 12.1 hours of flight time this day. At Manado, located on the northeast tip of Celebes Islands, Burton made a strafing attack on the airstrip. He fired 500 rounds at an Oscar and a building, scoring many hits. The Oscar may have been previously damaged but Crew Ten added to the holes in the fighter, although it refused to burn. Gunfire was received from the airfield and one 20 mm hit was taken near the starboard waist hatch.

Watching the strafing attack, three luggers nearby expected the "Low Level Liberator" treatment and "Genial John" was happy to oblige. Three runs were made on the first lugger (80') and it was left burning and sinking. It had been hit by one 100# bomb and strafed with 500 rounds. Three runs were also made on the second lugger (100') and it was rocked by a near miss with a 100# bomb. Though it could not be set afire, it was seriously damaged by the bomb blast and 500 rounds of 0.50 caliber machine gun fire. Lugger number three (50') was strafed by 500 rounds creating slight damage. John decided that it did not rate a bomb expenditure.

On December 13, 1944, Waldeck and his crew made a 0540(I) takeoff bound for the 960-mile search sector across Palawan Island. Flying their own PB4Y-1, BuNo 38754, it was loaded with 3300 gallons and five 100# bombs. Patrolling at 6000' as they approached a cove on the southeastern coast of Palawan, they sighted a 7000-ton Sugar Able and one gunboat. When the tanker saw the search plane, it got underway. Waldeck turned towards the SA and began a level bombing run guided by the Norden bombsight. Five 100# bombs were dropped with 40' intervals. All bombs fell short with the last of the string exploding 100' off the bow of the SA.

The Liberator was then descended to a low level and five strafing runs were made. The gunners fired 750 rounds against the tanker and 250 rounds at the PG. The gunboat returned 20 mm fire and four hits were taken into the after bomb bay and fuselage. Minor damage was made to the airplane. The waist gunner, Lazarus De Vartanian, received facial wounds from 20 mm shrapnel. No problems affecting the flight were generated by the exploding 20 mm hits. They landed back at Morotai after the 12.4 hour flight. Only minor damage was inflicted upon the two vessels.

A POOR PURSUIT - VPB-104 flight crews and airplanes continued to stagger into their new home at Tacloban, Leyte Island. Stevens and Wood, with their crews, flew the 5.0 hours from Morotai to Tacloban on December 13, 1944. Flying together in a loose

formation at 1500', we were startled to see a Zeke fly between us on an opposite course at the same altitude. I whipped around quickly, adding full power and diving down to about 500 feet in hot pursuit. Woody was a little slower turning around and I began to anticipate an easy \$50.00. Stan and I had made a bet as to who would bag the first airplane. Since I was ahead in the race to catch the Japanese fighter by about one half mile, this would be a quick fifty dollars (real \$\$ not 1997 play money). I gave the order to open fire too soon. We were at extreme range and our stream of tracers passed mostly below the Zeke. The enemy pilot dropped a wing to look back and, now alerted, added power and rapidly pulled away. He chose to keep going and faded away in the distance. Greed and poor judgment spoiled my attack. Why he failed to reverse course and make a fight of it, I don't know. Most likely he appreciated the fire power of two PB4Y-1s or simply wasn't feeling strong on this day.

By now we had five crews at Tacloban; Stevens, Wood, Heider, Sutherland, and Didier. We would continue to operate with (under?) VPB-117. At this time we saw the "117" folks only when they had a flight as they were living aboard the USS *Currituck*, a large seaplane tender anchored in the Bay. This ship was also the Flagship of Commander, Aircraft Seventh Fleet (heap big medicine!). The command relationship would be firmly established on December 23 when Whitney Wright would shift the base of the squadron officially from Morotai to Tacloban. At this time VPB-104 would begin operations under Commander, Fleet Air Wing Ten, Captain Reynard, USN. His Chief of Staff was Commander Isenbach. Both of these senior naval aviators had been members of Patrol Wing Ten based in Manila Bay, Philippines, when the war began. The story of PatWing 10 was one of danger and sacrifice as they fought a retreating action from the Philippines to arrive at Perth, Australia, in April 1942. They had now returned, as had General MacArthur.

Another "returnee" was the USS *Heron*, a seagoing tug converted into a seaplane tender. It too had made the long retreat from the Philippines to Perth. I was surprised to see the *Heron* anchored in the bay as I circled down into the traffic pattern at Tacloban on December 13th. I, along with six other PPCs, had based aboard the *Heron* from time to time while serving with VP-101 much earlier in the war.

But the search missions for our squadron continued uninterrupted. On December 13, 1944, Didier, the PPC for Crew Sixteen, departed Tacloban at 0710(I) for a patrol westward through the central Philippines. The 700-mile sector would be flown in 9.6 hours and his bomb load was three 500# and ten 100# incendiary clusters. Five of the ICs were carried and stowed on the catwalks for inflight reloads. This would be a two-plane section for mutual gunfire support. The other PB4Y-1 was a VPB-117 airplane and the PPC was leader of the flight.

Fifty miles west of Tacloban and while making a join up, an Oscar was sighted three miles ahead. For a short period the Japanese fighter flew in and out of the clouds, feinting attacks. The patrol planes were climbing in order to clear the mountains of the central Philippines and had reached 4000' when the Oscar made a head-on run. Passing well below

the leader of the flight, he then made a climbing bow-on attack against Didier's airplane. The PPC pushed over hard, diving for the water, as this appeared to be a determined attack by the Oscar. All six guns of the fighter, two 20 mm and four 7.7 mm, were firing well, as were the bow and top turret guns of the patrol plane. Didier's gunners saw tracers enter the Oscar but there was no evidence of damage. No hits were scored on the PB4Y-1 even though the Oscar closed to point-blank range. After this attack, the Oscar trailed the search planes for 15 minutes but made no other firing runs.

Didier stayed very low during this time as his tail turret was out of commission and the VPB-117 airplane rejoined on him. The tail turret had failed due to poor maintenance. There were many faults that Crew Sixteen had worked to correct as they manned the aircraft and continued to work on while airborne. The situation highlighted the dissension that had developed between the two squadrons ever since the VPB-104 flight crews had first arrived at Tacloban. The crossover of 117 crews flying 104 airplanes and vice versa was intolerable. Protesting strongly of this practice from the beginning, it would not end until the arrival of the VPB-104 Commanding Officer. However, the bad feelings between the two squadrons would continue.

DUMPING ON DAVAO - On December 14, 1944, Goodman and his crew achieved an early departure from Morotai, 0415(I). They would carry the standard bomb and fuel load for this patrol. They were assigned a 600 nmi search up and over Mindanao Island and continuing to the west of Leyte. Many of the search sectors through the Philippines from Morotai had been shortened due to operations of the long range search group now flying out of Tacloban. This was a big break as now the crew did not have to "sweat" the fuel and could utilize maximum power uninhibited while in combat on these patrols.

The Gulf of Davao, located in the southern part of Mindanao, opened to the south and extended northerly for about 50 miles. Well inside of the gulf an excellent anchorage was formed by the 20-mile-long island of Samal at the port city of Davao. The Japanese utilized this natural anchorage extensively. Goodman while cruising at 3000', heading for Davao City and at 60 miles distance, was picked up by the radar station there. He immediately began a descent and at 50 miles, the Electronic Counter Measures Equipment (ECM) indicated the radar station had lost contact. Continuing inbound at very low altitude, the radar station failed to lock on nor did it during his shipping attacks in the harbor and while he departed the area.

Entering the harbor at maximum speed and very low on the water, they sighted many small craft and luggers. Selecting a 750-ton steel-hull Sugar Charlie as Goodman's first target, his bombardier dropped two 500# and one 100# bombs getting one direct hit (size of the bomb not recorded). The ship was also strafed with 400 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo and it quickly sank.

The next target was a 500-ton Sugar Charlie and a 300-ton Sugar Dog tied together at anchor. Three 100# bombs were dropped and 600 rounds were fired at the ships. One

bomb hit the larger ship directly and one was a very near miss on the other. The smaller ship exploded and both ships sank.

As an added comment on the AAR, it was stated that there were so many ships in the harbor that the photographer could not identify the targeted ship until the bombs exploded.

On December 14th Bittenbender and Crew Thirteen were assigned sector C, the Makassar Straits and Balikpapan patrol. They flew PB4Y-1 BuNo 38842, and logged 10.8 hours this day. Although they made no kills nor made any engagements with the Japanese, an important sighting was made. In the harbor at Balikpapan, the PPC saw and reported one Sugar Able two stack, a super-tanker of about 40,000 tons, and one very large Tare Able, a transport vessel. Also, while passing Toli Toli, the enemy seaplane base on the northwest corner of Celebes, they were met with three Jakes and one Pete. No gunfire was exchanged and therefore no AAR nor entry in the War Diary was made.

SOOTHING SUBMARINERS - Sutherland and Crew Fourteen, flying a patrol from Tacloban on December 15, 1944, had a very interesting experience generated by the PPC's own initiative. First, it should be explained that we had trained both at San Diego and Kaneohe in anti-submarine warfare. However, once arriving in the combat zone, we were ordered that there was to be **NO ATTACKS UPON ANY SUBMARINE AT ANY TIME ANY WHERE!** There were two reasons for this. First, the U.S. Submarine Forces were highly effective in sinking Japanese shipping, thereby choking off supplies to the Japanese homeland. Secondly, there had been entirely too many attacks by friendly aircraft upon our submarines. The submariners were adamant, no more harassment by our own aircraft! Sutherland was to mollify at least two C.O.s of our own submarine fleet this day.

He was assigned a 900 nmi sector northwest from Leyte into the South China Sea and would carry no bombs. As he approached Scarborough Shoal, located 200 miles west of Manila, he made contact with a large Japanese convoy cruising in two elements. The first consisted of two very large freighters (FA) of 8,000 to 10,000 tons, escorted by four destroyers and two destroyer escorts. The other element was made up of one very large freighter-transport (FTA) and one very large freighter (FA) escorted by two DEs. This convoy was on course 320 degrees, cruising at 6.5 knots.

Sutherland sent off the contact report of this force on the CW frequency and at the same time began calling on the emergency VHF voice frequency for any "Bluefish," the call sign for any U.S. submarine. At this time our patrol planes used the voice call sign of "Scottie" plus the number of the search sector. Very shortly he made contact with two U.S. Navy Submarines, numbers S-319 and S-366.

The PPC reported the details of the enemy convoy and offered to provide vectors for the submarines to make an intercept. The submarine C.O.s accepted the offer with keen anticipation. This convoy could make for a great coup! Sutherland then began flying back and forth, directing the intercept for the convoy and around Scarborough Shoal. The

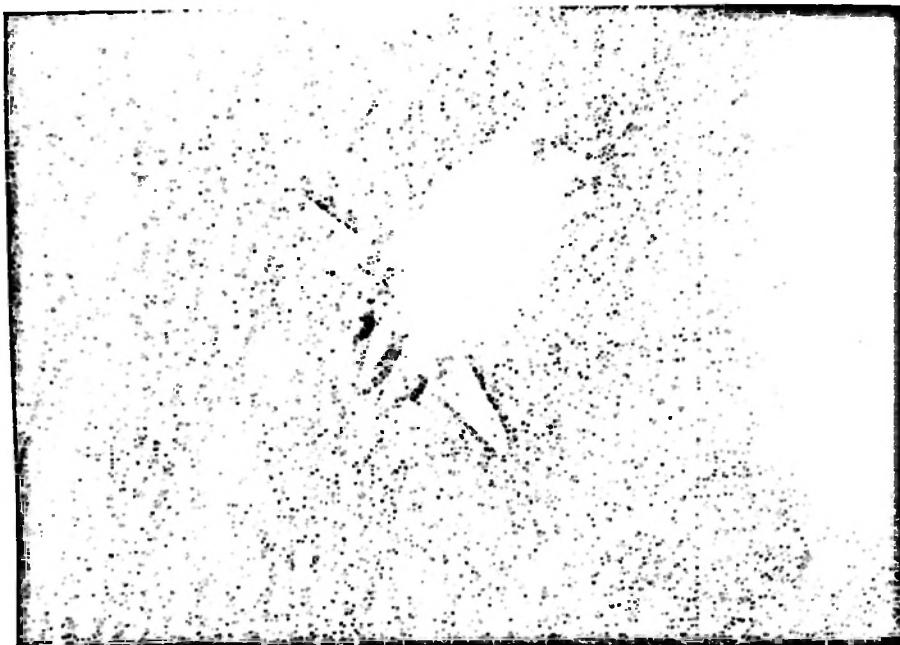
Bluefish proceeded at 17 knots, just below maximum speed. The patrol plane's radar technician utilized the ECM gear to locate the submarines as their VHF transmissions were within the frequency spectrum. However, bearings could only be made by changes of the airplane's heading.

After two hours of directions to the undersea craft, fuel limitations forced the PB4Y-1 to depart the area for home plate. The submarines were only 30 miles from the Japanese convoy at this time.

Two days later the USS *Currituck*, anchored in the bay at Tacloban, sent the following message to the Navy Long Range Search Group; "For delivery to Lt.(jg) Sutherland, 'sank one destroyer, Matsu Class, and one destroyer probably sunk. Attack on other ships unsuccessful.'" This incident had provided a step in the right direction for a turn around in the relationship between the U.S. Submarine Forces and the Navy's fly boys.

While Lt.(jg) Woodford W. Sutherland's innovative action was very significant, there were other actions this day of lesser importance. Burton and Crew Ten made a well executed shoot-down of a Sally. Departing Morotai at 0552(I) carrying 3400 gallons of AvGas and five 100# bombs, they were assigned sector two, a 1000 nmi search that would take them 200 miles westward beyond the island of Palawan. Flight time for the day would be 13.3 hours.

A SPECTACULAR SALLY SHOOT-DOWN - At 1100(I) and still outbound as they approached the west coast of Palawan, the PPC was flying the airplane at 7500' heading west-northwest. Ahead off the port bow, distance four miles, a twin-engine bomber, a Sally, was seen. It was cruising at the same altitude on a course to the west-southwest. Apparently seeing the big patrol plane, the Japanese pilot made an 180-degree turn to starboard and began diving for sea level. Burton, knowing that the Sally was faster, turned with the enemy but maintained his altitude. Very soon the Sally was heading into the high terrain of Palawan and was forced to begin a climb. Now, the Navy search plane PPC knew that he had him and began a high speed descent at full power, the belly turret lowered and all gunners ready. At 300' range, the bow and top turrets and port waist gunners began firing. The Sally's top turret and starboard waist gunners returned fire but no hits were scored upon the PB4Y-1. As the patrol plane slid by the enemy, the tail gunner also fired into the Sally.



During this pass, 0.50 caliber gunfire was poured into the Japanese bomber's port engine, gas tanks, top turret, and cockpit. Fire broke out in the port engine and below the top turret. It is believed that the pilots were killed as the Sally then turned into the burning and dead starboard engine. It continued its turn with the nose falling through and a death dive ensued with the Sally a mass of flames. It exploded as it hit the ground. This was not a "cold turkey" kill as the Sally was a fast, well-armed bomber. It had a number of 20 mm, 12.7 mm, and 7.7 mm machine guns mounted throughout the airplane.

Manning the gun stations this day aboard the PB4Y-1 were Robert Beck from Dayton, Ohio, in the bow turret; Albert Fleeman from Independence, Missouri, on the port waist single 0.50 caliber; and Gilbert Baker from Auburn, New York, in the tail turret. The AAR does not list the gunners who manned the other gun stations. It also added that the belly turret guns failed to fire well, one gun jamming due to a broken link in the ammo belt and the other gun barrel burned out due to old age (?). Even so, a total of 1400 rounds had been fired at the Sally.

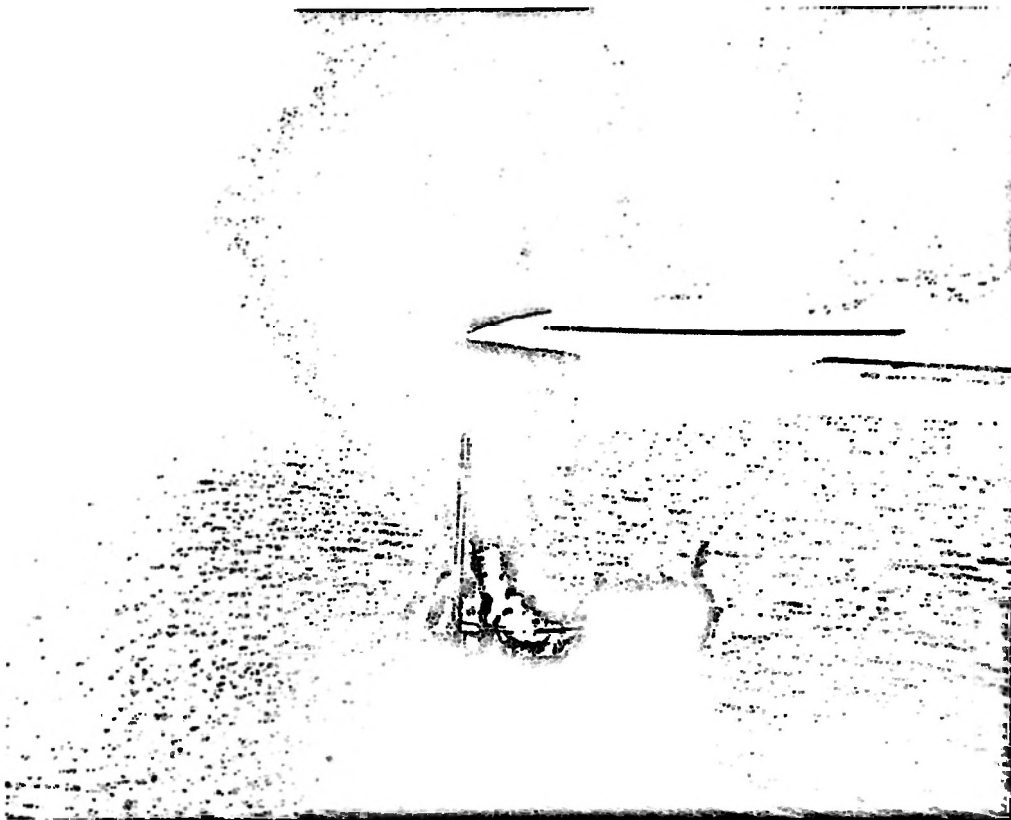
However, the shooting was not over for Crew Ten this day. On the return leg at 1600 just off Basilan Island, located 25 miles south of Zamboanga, western Mindanao Island, Burton found a 60' lugger and a 1500-ton freighter-transport (FTD). Big John made one run on the lugger at 100' altitude, dropping one 100# bomb and strafing with 600 rounds. The vessel caught fire and sank.


Three runs were made on the FTD, dropping three 100# bombs and strafing with 1000 rounds. The closest bomb exploded within eight to ten feet of the ship, but the small

freighter-transport did not catch fire nor did it appear to be sinking as the PB4Y-1 left the area.

On December 15, 1944, Stevens and Crew Two took off from Tacloban at 0715(I) for a 750 nmi patrol through the central Philippines and on out into the South China Sea. We were flying our own airplane, BuNo 38889, and carried five 100# incendiary clusters, fueled with 3100 gallons of AvGas. It would be a 10.5-hour flight. This light bomb load for such a short sector illustrates the servicing problems at Tacloban. It was very difficult to accomplish anything on this jammed, busy, and hazardous airstrip.

When 120 miles out of Tacloban, cruising at 500' altitude, Lee Little, in the starboard waist hatch, called out two "suspicious-looking" islands to the north. I was reluctant to investigate, being eager to get on with the search. However, I had learned to trust the judgment calls of the oldest guy in the crew (28 years old and ten years or so in the Navy). I finally saw just what he was looking at about five miles to the north. This placed the contacts just off the southeastern point of Masbate Island.





A STORY FOR THE GRANDCHILDREN - These two "islands" soon became two Sugar Dogs of 200 tons each. Both were heavily camouflaged with palm branches from masthead to water line. I immediately turned the initial approach into a bombing and strafing run. Lee Webber, our outstanding bombardier, laid a 100# incendiary cluster squarely in the center of the deck of one of the SDs. With a short reversal of the airplane and at very low level, we gave the same treatment to the other SD. Both began to burn very satisfactorily. Making a third run to properly hose down the two small vessels, I saw that two men were swimming for the shore while a third was standing in the stern of a small rowboat, sculling frantically. This appeared to me to be very comical and I decided to give my gunners a pinpoint target to practice on. Diving in on the one Japanese seaman, sculling as though his life depended on it, I banked the airplane slightly left so the top turret gunner would have a better line of fire. Very close in the 0.50 caliber bullets were kicking up geysers all around the little boat. I'll swear one tracer went right between his well-spread legs. But he was still standing and propelling his boat as I pulled up from the firing practice. My first inclination was to go back and finish him off but second thoughts prevailed. Let him go, as he would have one helluva story to tell his grandchildren!

After dusting off the two SDs, we began a climb in order to clear the mountains ahead. The island of Mindoro had a peak of 8415'. As we topped Mindoro, we were startled to see an amphibious landing in progress on the southwestern end at San Jose. There were many ships of all sorts and Combat Air Patrols (CAP) saturated the area. Coming upon "friendly" forces of this magnitude was a real hazard. The hungry fighter pilots and trigger-happy gunners aboard the combatant ships were very quick to fire and/or their recognition was very poor. We had not been briefed on the event as it was obviously too secret for us to know about. I did transmit in the blind on the emergency VHF voice frequency that we were passing through the area. I described ourselves as a blue-painted Boxcar. At this time, all heavy bombers were referred to as Boxcars. It worked, as we continued without molestation and headed into the South China Sea.

The patrol outward netted no contacts whatsoever. On the return leg and about eight hours after the attacks on the Sugar Dogs, we flew over the position where we had left the sculling yachtman. Here we saw that one SD had burned and sank with only the frame of one side showing slightly above the water. The other vessel was still burning as it had been filled with 50-gallon steel drums. Obviously, these had been filled with fuel of some sort. Its wooden hull had been burned down to the water line. Hopefully, a number of Zeke pilots would now have to husband their AvGas very closely.



I was very unhappy to have been loaded with the 100# incendiary clusters even if they had done a job on the wooden-hulled Sugar Dogs. But the effectiveness of these bombs against the larger steeled ships was very questionable. The explosion of the general purpose (GP) bombs would not only blast a hole in the ship and/or wreck the superstructure, but they also generated very intense heat for a short period of time. This almost always started a fire aboard the larger ships which eventually destroyed them, even if the blast did not open holes sufficiently to sink them. Very soon, this fact would become apparent and we returned to the GP bombs with their high explosive content. Later, as the larger ships became almost non-existent, we carried a mix of incendiary clusters and the GPs.

It was about this time that our load in the 0.50 caliber machine gun belts was changed to one tracer and four armor-piercing incendiary bullets (API). Prior to this, our mix had one tracer, two balls, and two armor piercing. The API projectiles seemed to go right through an aircraft without doing too much damage. I really preferred the old mix. But I must have been wrong about this one, as we continued to use the APIs as the standard loading.

One last kill on the 15th was made by PPC Stan Wood and Crew Eight. Flying from Morotai, they had an 875 nmi sector and carried the standard bomb and fuel load. At 1230(I) they came upon a "sea truck" off the northern tip of Palawan Island. A vessel was designated a sea truck when it did not fit the classic description of the other small powered intercoastal vessels. Wood made five bombing and strafing runs on the 300-ton ship, sinking it.

On December 16, 1944, Adler and Crew Five departed Morotai at 0543 with a standard bomb and fuel load. They would fly a shortened patrol of 690 nmi and log 9.8 flight hours. At the entrance to the Gulf of Davao, two 100-ton luggers were found.

Serious damage was inflicted on the vessels after two bombing and strafing runs, dropping all of the bombs and firing 1400 rounds of ammo.

On the same day, Didier and Crew Sixteen made a 0650 takeoff from Tacloban loaded with only three 100# incendiary clusters and 3100 gallons of fuel. Another odd load for a search of only 800 nmi. Servicing the aircraft at Tacloban was extremely difficult (as everything was). In addition, it was a rainy overcast day, adding to the difficulty of the two attacks that Didier made this day.

At 1520(I) he located a 150-ton Sugar Dog moored in a cove on the east coast of Mindoro Island. This SD was so close to a cliff that a low-level bombing run could not be made. Yet they did make two strafing attacks, firing 400 rounds of API bullets at the SD and damaging it slightly.

At 1550 Didier found a 1000-ton steel-hulled Sugar Charlie off the northern tip of Masbate Island. A bombing and strafing run was made, dropping three incendiary clusters, scoring one direct hit with an IC. This hit failed to set the SC on fire or cause any other damage. A second run was made, strafing, but only slight damage could be claimed for the 500 rounds of ammo expended.

On December 16, 1944, Wright and Crew One flew the long search sector to Brunei and the northwest coast of Borneo. They flew PB4Y-1, BuNo 38994, and logged 14.2 hours. In addition to the long day in the airplane, they had to contend with a thunderstorm upon return to Morotai. Making a landing at home base during darkness and/or bad weather was difficult. There were no electronic landing aids in the combat zones. The on-board radar, in this instance the APS-15, was a big assist. It did provide some guidance and the rest was "by guess and by God."

The patrol was worth it though, inasmuch as the Skipper made contact with and reported a convoy of four destroyers (DD) and three large tankers (SA) off Brunei. Crew One also got in some gunnery practice upon a number of small vessels. However, Whit chose not to file an AAR, most likely to save wear and tear on the one Air Combat Intelligence Officer and our two overworked yeomen. Since no Aircraft Action Report was filed, this sighting and gunnery was not entered into the Squadron's War Diary.

On December 17, 1944, Lt. William Fulwider and crew arrived as replacements for Lt. Hill and Crew Three (lost on November 11, 1944). The other members of Fulwider's crew were:

Lt.(jg) Lawrence Cook
Lt.(jg) Harry Nagle
Apalategui, Michael AOM3c
Buckland, William S. ARM3c
Burton, John AOM3c
Elston, Verner E. S1c

French, John W. S1c
Ketusky, Henry A. S1c
Opie, Jennings R. AMMF2c
Richards, William D. AMM3c

This replacement crew was designated as Crew Twenty. With the arrival of this first replacement crew, an indoctrination flight was established for the PPC and several crewmen. A decided nicety. An easing into the combat patrols proved to be very worthwhile.

On December 18, 1944, Lt.(jg) Ed Hagen and Crew Fifteen departed Morotai at 0650 for a 600 nmi sector into the central Philippines. They carried the standard load of 2900 gallons of fuel and two 500# and five 100# GP bombs. At the entrance to the Gulf of Davao they sighted a 900-ton Sugar Charlie. Hagen executed three bombing and strafing runs and an additional three strafing attacks. All bombs on board were dropped and 2100 rounds of ammo were fired. The ship was holed and left sinking.

Also this day, Wood and Crew Eight were assigned a long sector, 1000 nmi, covering the northwest portion of Borneo. They departed Morotai at 0550(I) with a full fuel load and five 100# bombs. Anchored in a cove at Kota Kinabalu, Wood found one 700-ton Sugar Charlie, two 400-ton Sugar Dogs, and four 150-ton luggers. The vessels were close to a 700' cliff which denied the usual masthead bombing attack. Still, all five bombs were dropped but no hits were made. However, 1000 rounds were fired into the ships for minor damage. Later in the Balabac Straits, Wood made three strafing attacks on a Sugar Baker of 2500 to 3000 tons. A total of 1000 rounds were fired, causing minor damage.

AN EFFECTIVE RENDEZVOUS - On December 19, 1944, Stevens and Sutherland teamed up to wreck a large freighter-transport ship, estimated to be 6000 to 8000 tons, in the South China Sea. Both patrol planes took off from Tacloban just prior to 0700 for a 750 nmi search. Each airplane was loaded with 2900 gallons of fuel. Stevens was carrying ten 100# bombs and Sutherland had three 500# bombs on board. The weather was rainy, with frequent squalls, and a northerly wind of 35 knots on the surface. The seas were rough.

While about 300 nmi west-southwest of Manila, Sutherland let down through the weather to investigate a radar contact. Peering through poor visibility, he sighted one FTB and one FTD escorted by one DD and one PG. The small convoy was on course 360 degrees, speed eight knots. Sutherland immediately pulled back up into the clouds and maneuvered to make an attack, utilizing the strong wind. Using his radar to align his airplane to attack the large freighter-transport ship bow-on, he dived through the clouds, obtaining 260 KIAS. Combined with the tail wind, his attack ground speed was about 300 knots. One 500# bomb was released from 150' altitude which hit into the water 40' beyond the stern. No AA fire was received from the convoy while dropping the bomb and strafing the escorting ships.

Sutherland again flew upwind to position himself for another downwind attack. This run-in and attack was made at 100' altitude and about 200 KIAS while the escorts opened fire with intense heavy, medium, and light AA. However, this AA fire was inaccurate due to the pitching ships. Two 500# bombs were released with the first entering the FTB at the base of the bridge and the second entering and passing through the after part of the ship to explode ten feet off the stern. Serious damage was done to the ship by the first bomb as it exploded within the superstructure, blowing off the stack. The ship was left dead in the water, listing, leaking oil, and with smoke pouring from the hull. There was clear evidence that the crew was abandoning ship.

Sutherland then sent out a contact report by CW and at the same time made transmission, in the blind, by voice on the VHF radio. I received both transmissions, although I was two sectors north of Sutherland's. At this time the search sectors were staggered between VPB-104 and 117. Sutherland was most eager to have another search plane join with him as his K-20 camera was inoperative (a photo would confirm the kill and ship's tonnage). I was most pleased to assist with this kill and we set our plan via VHF radio. I also took bearings on his VHF transmissions with our on-board ECM gear to confirm my course for the intercept.

Jock Sutherland would leave the scene to cover the remainder of his search assignment. I was on the return leg of my sector so I would set course for the convoy at this time. It appeared that we would both join at the convoy's position at the same time. We would then make a joint attack to insure the kill. There was nothing heard from the two search sectors adjacent to Sutherland's.

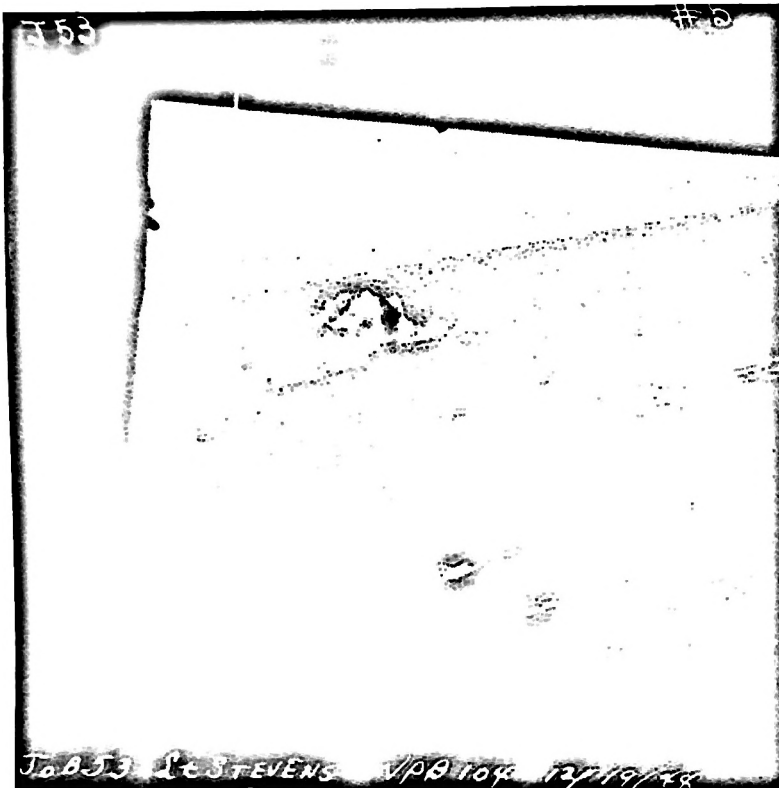
To say that Jock was eager for me to join for another attack and to obtain photos was an understatement of some proportions. Every PPC wanted to score a kill upon a large Japanese ship. It was the equivalent to shooting par on the golf course, a home run with the bases loaded, or bagging an Alaskan brown bear with one round from a 30.06. A photograph of the ship exploding would insure bragging rights forever!

I took up a southerly heading for the intercept, bouncing along in the weather. In this instance, the weather was made up of light rain and squalls with no heavy thunderheads to obscure the radar scope. I was flying my own airplane this day and the APS-15 radar was doing a good job. After making radar contact with the convoy, I let down to about 100' to set up for a masthead bombing attack. By VHF radio, it was determined that I was early and Sutherland would not be back over the convoy until ten or fifteen minutes after my arrival. Having a good deal of respect for the gunnery of the Japanese destroyers, I decided to run straight in for my attack. As yet, I was not aware of the inaccuracy of the escort ships AA fire due to the rough seas. Surprise was all important when going against any and all well-defended targets. I would go in for my attack at maximum speed and minimum altitude.



Passing over the FTB, it was clear that Jock Sutherland had wrecked the ship.
Note stack lying over the side.

Making visual contact at about three or four miles, I saw that the FTB was broadside to me and the DD and PG were off to my left a mile or so. Both ships opened fire on us and, of course, we began firing at them about the same time or perhaps earlier. Our intervalometer was set at 20' so as to gain maximum effectiveness from the smaller (100#) bombs. Close in, I could see that the stack was laying over, the ship was streaming smoke steadily, and, as we passed directly over the ship, it appeared thoroughly wrecked. Jock had really done a job on this big freighter-transport ship. There were lines and two life rafts draped over the sides that confirmed that the crew had gone over the side. Because of the rough seas, I doubt very much if any of the crew survived.



The column of black smoke indicates a magazine explosion.

Just after bomb release, the first bomb was seen to hit just short of the hull and the last three enter the superstructure. Though not seen, the other six bombs must have hit as none of the bombs went over the target. A very satisfactory explosion was seen and recorded by our K-20 camera. There was no gunfire from the FTB and the firing from the DD and PG was ineffective.

I made an 180-degree turn to proceed upwind and await Sutherland's arrival. There was very little wait and we joined in a loose formation for a strafing run. This was not a very good idea, as the FTB was a done deal and we were only exposing ourselves to AA fire from the two (angry?) escort ships. However, another run was made but the gunfire from the DD and PG seemed to have been reduced considerably. Between the two PB4Y-1s, 4700 API rounds had been fired at the escort ships and the FTB. Due to the range of firing at the DD and PG, only slight damage was claimed. The freighter-transport had been well hosed down but the real damage had been done by the bombs. This ship was identified as the *Panama Maru*, weighing in at 5280 tons. There were two happy flight crews at Tacloban this night. Jock Sutherland was exultant.

PPC Burton and his crew were assigned a short patrol on December 19, 1944, from Morotai. Taking off at 0710, he had a load of two 500# and five 100# bombs. The patrol would cover 690 nmi and take 9.6 hours.

Flying northward over Mindanao at 8000', Burton sighted five luggers, each about 80' long, at the north central shore. Two were anchored just off shore and three were tied up at a dock. He continued his patrol and planned to attack the luggers on the return leg.

As he approached the north shoreline of Mindanao Island on his return, the PB4Y-1 was let down to 50' and a run-in began for an attack. The first targets were the two luggers at anchor. One 100# bomb was dropped, exploding 25' from one lugger, and 500 rounds were fired. The other lugger caught fire and was destroyed. The first vessel was only slightly damaged from strafing.

Four bombing and strafing runs were then made on the three luggers tied to the dock. Two 500# and four 100# bombs were unloaded and 1500 API rounds were fired during these attacks. One of the big bombs made a direct hit on one lugger, which disintegrated, and caught the lugger alongside on fire. Both sank and the third lugger was seriously damaged. No gunfire was directed toward the patrol plane during these attacks. Well, you would not want Big John to carry his bombs back home would you?

The anchorage at Kota Kinabalu, North Borneo, continued to be a favorite location for Japanese shipping. The high cliff alongside the cove apparently provided a sense of security for the crewmen aboard many coastal vessels. On December 20, 1944, Adler and Crew Five departed Morotai at 0550(I), fully loaded with fuel and with an unusual bomb load of two 500# bombs. The bomb load for the 1000 nmi patrol across Borneo had crept up from no bombs to now, a 1000# load. The long patrol this day would take 12.5 hours.

After searching the Brunei area, Adler headed northeasterly along the Borneo coast. In the familiar cove at Kota Kinabalu, Vance Adler found six luggers of about 100 tons each. Making the difficult bombing and strafing run, he released one 500# bomb from 500' altitude which missed by 150'. Five hundred rounds of 0.50 caliber API were fired into the luggers with only slight damage inflicted.

Continuing the patrol, the PB4Y-1 rounded the northern tip of Borneo and headed eastward. About 50 miles east of Kudat, Borneo, and just off shore, the PPC sighted a 150-ton Sugar Dog. One bombing and strafing run was made, scoring a direct hit with the last big bomb. It blew the SD into small pieces. One thousand rounds were fired at the hapless wooden vessel. Though not needed for the kill, it did serve to suppress any AA fire that might otherwise have been offered.

AN EXPLOSIVE CARGO - Hagen and Crew Fifteen flew a patrol from Morotai on December 21, 1944, to cover the same sector as that flown by them December 18th (how did you arrange that, Ed?). As they approached the mouth of Davao Gulf, a search was



made to locate the Sugar Dog previously attacked. Not only was it found and confirmed to be destroyed but another 300-ton Sugar Dog was located nearby. Two bombing and strafing and six additional strafing runs were made against this large SD. During the first attack, five 100# bombs were dropped as the ship made a turn which resulted in a miss of about 50'. On the next bombing and strafing run, two 500# bombs were released with the closest exploding 50 feet from the SD. Thereafter, six more strafing runs were made, firing a total of 2000 rounds. On the third such attack, a fire was started and continued to spread. An explosion occurred which generated a column of black smoke extending 4000' into the sky. The vessel was definitely destroyed and proved the worth of the armor-piercing incendiary projectiles against wooden ships.

The 1000-mile sector searches were more than a bit of a chore. Given a hazardous takeoff at an aircraft weight of 68,000 pounds, a long hard climb to 8000' to clear the high terrain of the area, and the higher power settings required for the initial cruise, the fuel on board at the end of the patrol was minimal. Add to this situation a period of combat at maximum power. Then getting back to home plate was often very critical. But somehow we did it. No small part of this extra effort was due to an all-pilots meeting. Here, the Commanding Officer, Whitney Wright, made his dictum in reference to the long sectors, "Give it an extra 50 miles, that's where the stuff is." He would lead regarding this concept.

Wright flew round trip Morotai to Tacloban and back to Morotai on December 21st. This was a further liaison trip as the final movement of the squadron to Tacloban would take place two days hence. It also served as a maintenance/logistics mission as he flew BuNo 38993 to Tacloban and returned to Morotai in PB4Y-1 BuNo 38789. In addition, on the return leg he brought back Lt.(jg) Edward M. Hagen.

At this time and for some time to come, there was no PATSU maintenance unit at Leyte. For work requiring any substance, the airplane was ferried back to Morotai. For engine changes, the airplane was ferried all the way back to Owi, Biak Island, 550 nmi from Morotai and just over 1000 miles from Tacloban. For much of December, a considerable amount of maintenance on our PB4Y-1s was accomplished by the flight crews. It was not unusual at all to see the flight crew that flew a 12-hour patrol yesterday sitting on the engines of a blue-painted Liberator parked on a hardstand, changing spark plugs or whatever was necessary. Wherever and whenever, you would see our flight crews giving very close attention to the care and feeding of our 0.50 caliber machine guns. All our lives depended upon those guns firing well and accurately.

The predawn takeoffs from Tacloban continued to be downright scary. On December 21st, Jack Augsback entered in his flight logbook, "hit trees on takeoff." From time to time, one would see a PB4Y-1 returning from a patrol with palm foliage in the engine cowling.

About this time, orders were issued by ComAirSeventhFleet that we were to carry no bombs and make no attacks. This irritated all of the flight crews a great deal. If we were to live in tents, exist on dried rations, be on the receiving end of bombing raids, and, more importantly, survive the ordinary hazards of flight in the combat areas, then let us strike the enemy at every opportunity. It didn't take much thought to realize that a big Japanese fleet movement was about to take place. Of course, just what to expect or where and when we were not advised--much too secret for flight crews.

However, if bombs happened to still be hanging in the bomb bay, they were not off-loaded at the hard stand. Better to off-load them on a Japanese ship or shore installation. I do clearly recall making one attack after these orders were issued and receiving no reprimand. However, I was to make this mistake once too often. Other crews also made attacks, scoring kills on aircraft and small vessels by strafing. The "no attacks, no bomb loads order" was to be in effect until January 30, 1945.

It was not clear why these attacks were sanctioned by the C.O. of VPB-104 and ComFAW-10. Aircraft Action Reports and entries into the War Diary were made during this time. Yet it was made very clear to me, personally, by RAdm Frank D. Wagner, USN, on the morning of December 27th, that he meant "no attacks and no bombs." A question yet to be answered.

On December 22, 1944, Burton had one extra-long patrol. Scheduled for 1025 nmi, his sector would cross Borneo and continue on westward into the South China Sea. All wing tanks, auxiliary wing tanks, and the two forward bomb bay tanks were filled to capacity. In addition, the usual extra 0.50 caliber ammo and five 100# GP bombs were still on board. The flight would take 14.2 hours.

At 1330(I) and 120 miles northwest of Brunei, Genial John located a 600-ton steel-hulled Sugar Charlie. Immediately attacking, two masthead bombing and strafing attacks were made, dropping three 100# and then two 100# high explosive bombs. On the first run, two of the bombs exploded alongside the ship. On the second attack, the two bombs made a straddle. Eight additional strafing runs were made and a total of 2000 rounds were fired into the ship. At the end of this affair, after slowly circling, the freighter was dead in the water, trailing oil and settling by the bow. The SC was judged to have been sunk.

On this same December day, Wood would fly an extended Makassar Straits patrol of 950 miles. The PB4Y-1 was loaded with the standard 2900 gallons and two 500# and five 100# GP bombs. It would take 12.9 hours to cover the sector and the associated activities. At the west side of the entrance to the Makassar Straits and 150 nmi north of

Balikpapan, Borneo, Wood attacked ships in a harbor which serviced a lumber mill. Here he found a 2000-ton Sugar Baker, two 80' barges loaded with oil drums, and one 40' riverboat. The tanker and two barges were tied to the dock and the riverboat was anchored nearby. Four bombing and strafing runs and an additional three strafing runs were made against all targets since they were in such close proximity. All of the bombs were dropped at the medium-sized tanker; also, 2000 rounds of APIs were fired into this ship. Two 100 pounders were direct hits and one 500-pound bomb exploded very close to the hull. The ship caught fire below decks and in the superstructure. It settled to the bottom of the harbor.

The two barges were readily set afire after receiving 1000 rounds and very soon were burning furiously and completely destroyed. The riverboat did not burn but was sufficiently shot up with 300 rounds to settle into the water and sink.

While passing by Balikpapan, Wood's patrol plane was greeted by two Zekes, one Hamp, and one Tojo. The two Zekes and Hamp made attacks while the Tojo positioned itself to follow up. These were high-side passes but were not pressed home as Chester Osiecki in the bow turret fired 300 rounds and William Finady in the top turret got off 650 rounds. Aiming for their engines and firing at 45 degrees upward, some 0.50 APIs must have hit or, perhaps, it seemed just too hard for these candy-ass Japanese pilots. They all turned away and headed for home.



Tojo

Lt. Stanley A. Wood had experience in the trucking business prior to entering naval aviation. Therefore, his next adventure this day gave him a good deal of pleasure. On the return leg and only 350 miles from Morotai, the PB4Y-1 was cruising alongside the north coast of Celebes. Traveling on a road that paralleled the coastline, Woody found a large three-ton, ten-wheeled truck. Ten strafing runs were made, firing 800 rounds of 0.50 ammo. Although it did not burn, it came to a stop, very well shot up. At the end of the day Crew Eight had fired a total of 4700 rounds. There was no report of the number of gun barrels burned out and replaced.

AN ALL-WEATHER JAPANESE FIGHTER - Heider, the PPC for Crew Eleven, did not have as much excitement as Wood this day but certainly had a bigger surprise. They departed Tacloban for a 975-mile patrol and a 12.5 hour day loaded with 3100 gallons of AvGas but carried no bombs. It had been a tiresome flight beginning with the dark takeoff at 0523 from the marsten matting airstrip. It was very bad weather for the entire trip. No enemy contacts had been made up to this point.

Heider had let down to 100 feet altitude due to poor visibility and was picking his way along the islands, navigating into home base. While following the southwestern

shoreline of Masbate Island and only about 90 miles northwest of Tacloban, he suddenly saw gunfire splashes in the water just ahead of the patrol plane. As he added full power to the engines, the tail turret gunner reported a Zeke making a firing attack from seven o'clock. Heider pulled up slightly and turned to port, then resumed heading. The Zeke was then at the five o'clock position, a little high, and the Japanese pilot made a right turn that exposed his belly. This was a big mistake. Earl Henning, in the tail turret, shot off 200 rounds; Robert Beovich, in the port waist, got off 50 rounds; and Xavier Yuzapavich, in the top turret, got in a short burst of ten rounds at the black-painted enemy aircraft, complete with the usual red meatballs. Many tracer flashes were seen on the underside of the Zeke and he burst into flames and exploded, falling into the Visayan Sea. There was no sign of the pilot getting out of the airplane.

This kill had not been for free. The PB4Y-1 had taken a number of 7.7 and 12.7 mm hits. Fortunately, only minor damage was incurred. All hands agreed that this Zeke pilot was good and plenty aggressive. This patrol plane crew was also good and their rapid response saved the day. No photos were taken due to the quickness of the action. However, Crew Eleven was credited with the shoot-down.

Flight crews had been dribbling into their new home base of Tacloban ever since the first contingent had arrived on December 13th. Some had made direct ferry flights from Morotai and others had terminated a search sector from there to land at Leyte. The move became official and all hands were on board by December 23, 1944, when C.O. Whitney Wright arrived. As Executive Officer and Officer in Charge of the VPB-104 detachment at Tacloban, I was very pleased to be relieved of the chores there. I had not done at all well dealing with VPB-117 nor the Wing. Things would change for the better once Wright arrived.

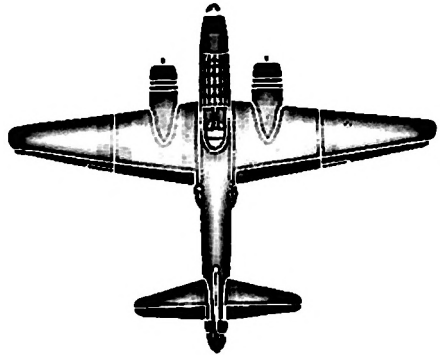
Operations were initially under Search Plan G which provided sectors extending northeast from Tacloban for 1000 nmi to Oagari (or Daito Jima), an island about 200 miles east of Okinawa. The area searched then extended westward, passing 100 miles north of Okinawa to the Chinese coast at Wenchow. Our sectors then covered the Chinese coast southwestward and the cities of Foochow, Amoy, Swatow, Hong Kong, and the Portuguese Colony of Macao. The limits of the sectors then followed the south coast of China, over Hanian Island to the French Indo China coast to Cam Ranh Bay and Cape St. Jacques. There were a total of 17 designated sectors in the search plan. In addition to the daily patrols, many night flights and special tracking missions were assigned.

Our primary mission, as set forth in Commander Aircraft Seventh Fleet Operation Plan 8-44, remained as previously stated.

It is noted that the vast western Pacific Ocean area to the east of our search sectors was covered by Navy search planes operating from Tinian, Saipan, and the Palau Islands. Their cross-legs overlaid our most eastward outbound tracks.

As one PPC noted in his aviator's flight logbook in the remarks section for his December 23rd flight from Morotai to our new base on Leyte Island, "Tacloban = Turmoil." A very apt description. The air traffic was hectic and continuous. The landings and takeoffs would be made to the north for one batch of fighters. Then the next group that had been holding overhead would land to the south. There were very few hard stands or parking revetments available and airplanes were parked wing tip to wing tip on both sides of the only runway. As the runway (if it qualified to be called a runway) and shoulder were only about 100 feet wide and the PB4Y-1's wing span was 110 feet wide, our takeoffs and landings were, to say the least, tight. Our Liberators, responsible for the long-range search missions, were the first heavy bombers to be based here. Sometimes our bulky bombers were also parked alongside the one runway. By today's "new speak," it was a stressful environment.

BATTLING A BETTY - On December 23, 1944, Ettinger and his crew flew their first patrol from Tacloban. It was very dark for the 0500(I) takeoff with the PB4Y-1 loaded with 3400 gallons of fuel but no bombs. AT 0815, while cruising at 8000', they saw a Betty crossing below them at 4000' and three miles distance. The position of the encounter was just west of the lower tip of Luzon Island. This Japanese twin-engine bomber was fast, well armed, and respected as a tough customer. Ettinger knew he had to plan his attack carefully. The weather allowed him to wait until the Betty had crossed under the patrol plane, at which time a diving attack was initiated. The gun stations in the PB4Y-1 were manned by Fred Himsworth, top turret; Clifford Batton, bow turret; Allie Lymenstull, port waist gun; and John Osteen, tail turret.



At 300 yards from the Betty, the PPC gave the order to open fire to the top and bow turrets. Fred Himsworth, an eighteen-year-old radioman third class, relates the story of the gunnery duel:

"Betty's were faster than we were in level flight but we had the altitude advantage in this case and were able to catch up to him from behind because of the speed we gained in a shallow dive to his altitude and using the clouds to conceal our approach. I was in the top turret and Batton was in the bow. Our guns were the only ones that could bear on the Betty in a diving attack of this type. We held our fire until we were within three hundred yards before opening up.

"Finally, I had the chance to put all my gunnery training to use. I gave the Betty a short burst to check my lead and watched him fly right into my tracers. I could see them hitting the fuselage and wing roots, making little flashes of light where they hit. I continued to fire, hitting with almost every burst. I saw some lights winking on the tail and fuselage of the enemy

and didn't realize what they meant for a few seconds. Then, I remembered this bomber had a top turret and tail turret and both were equipped with twenty millimeter cannons. I then knew the flashes of light were their gunners returning fire. However, they missed us and we knocked them both out as the Betty twisted and turned, trying to get away from us. We closed to about 150 yards, putting long bursts into the cockpit, wings and engines. Soon his left engine began to smoke and the propeller started windmilling. We thought we had him for sure when that happened, but, before we could do any further damage, he went into the clouds and we lost sight of him."

Before they lost sight of the enemy bomber, both the port waist and tail turret gunners were also able to score. Last seen, the Betty was descending with the port engine smoking heavily and the propeller still not feathered. Ettinger firmly believed that there was no way the bomber could have made it back to land. It was thoroughly shot up as 1000 rounds had been fired during the encounter. A probable downing was scored.

The following day Goodman with Crew Twelve had the 975 nmi patrol from Tacloban to Cam Ranh Bay, French Indo-China. Again their load was 3400 gallons of AvGas with no bombs and the flight would take 13.7 hours.

ENEMY COULDN'T OUT-MANEUVER A GOOD MAN - When approaching Cam Ranh Bay and cruising at 1000', Goodman sighted a Jake, a twin-float seaplane scout, on an opposite course at 2500', five miles distance. The PB4Y-1 was not seen by the Japanese three-man crew and Bill Goodman maneuvered onto his tail and closed to within 200'. Upon opening fire with the bow turret, the Jake made a sharp left turn and continued to make two complete turns while maintaining the same altitude. The PB4Y-1 was hauled around deftly, staying inside the turns, and closing to 150' as the top turret joined into the firing. The Jake then straightened out and began a descent zigzagging left and right with the patrol plane pilot staying with him and the gunners firing all the way down. A piece of the starboard wing fell off as the Japanese airplane made a final circle and the engine stopped running. It then landed hard on the water and began sinking. The pilot did not or could not get the canopy open and the crew sank with the airplane. Although a Japanese airfield was within five miles of this action, the poor Jake received no help at all.

Goodman's gunners this day were: Samuel Newell, top turret; Lloyd Howard, bow turret; Vernon McCoy, waist gun; and Alvie Harris, tail turret. All banged away at the Jake after the initial firing by the bow turret. A total of 1200 rounds were fired during the engagement. There was no return fire from the enemy even though the Jake mounted a 20 mm gun aft and two forward. This engagement illustrates the relatively good maneuverability of the Liberator at high power settings and airspeeds. It does require a good deal of muscle but can be done. As a final note, although the crew took photos, they were lost in the photo lab!

THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS 1944 - Burton and Crew Ten flew a 1050 nmi patrol on Christmas Day which took 14 hours. About 100 miles west of central Luzon, he came upon

his Christmas present in the form of a Tabby, a Japanese twin-engine transport airplane that looked very much like a Douglas DC-2 or C-47. John was cruising at 8000' above a solid cloud layer with the tops at 6500'. The Tabby was sighted cruising at 7000' and ten miles distance. Since the enemy transport plane could escape quickly into the clouds, the PPC immediately turned his PB4Y-1 toward the Tabby for a bow-on attack. Robert Beck in the bow turret also recognized the situation and let go with 600 rounds during the rapidly closing firing pass. After this passing encounter, Burton quickly turned around for another attack but the Japanese pilot put his airplane into a steep dive into the clouds below. Burton likewise made a steep dive into the clouds and broke out at 500', just in time to see the Tabby crash into the water with a burst of flames. Very good reaction time by John Burton and excellent shooting by Beck gained the prize. They were also fortunate to have caught up with the rapidly descending Japanese aircraft just at the right time to confirm the kill.

Lt.(jg) Jeff Hemphill and his Crew Seventeen also collected a Christmas trinket off the east coast of Formosa. A 50-foot lugger was damaged by 400 API rounds which brought it to a dead stop in the water.

A NEAR DISASTER - The weather had been particularly bad during most of December. We all spent many hours in the soup during our patrols and getting back into Tacloban was often difficult and, sometimes, just real hazardous. Returning from one search, I was approaching the airstrip from the northwest at 8000' and in heavy weather. I decided it was time to begin my letdown even though my APS-15 radar was not presenting a clear picture of the situation. I accepted the fact that we might very well be over high terrain but did not have enough fuel to delay much longer. Still engaged on the auto-pilot, I was pressed closely to the windshield, seeking a break in the visibility and "flying" the airplane with the automatic pilot with my right hand. Suddenly, I made the decision that this was enough, low fuel or not, I simply could not continue without better knowledge of my position to insure clearance of the high terrain. As we had an excess of airspeed due to our descent, I simply cranked the auto-pilot elevator control knob full up with a quick hard twist. At that very moment I saw rocks!

I had very nearly flown us into a mountain top. A split second later and our PB4Y-1 would have been splattered all over those rocks and our fate would have been unknown for weeks or, more likely, months, perhaps much longer. I continued the climb until assured we would clear all the mountains in the immediate area. Setting a course to take our flight out over the water to the east of both Samar and Leyte Islands, I finally stopped shaking.

Soon it was time to begin a letdown again, reverse course, and try to find Tacloban airstrip. Flying at 200' in rain on a westerly heading, all I could hope for now was to see the coastline of Leyte soon enough and before we would come upon the rising high ground. I had set a course for what I believed would place us south of Tacloban. I was ready then, when we did see the coast and palm tree line, to quickly make a right turn to fly towards the airstrip. Inasmuch as I was flying with the power set for maximum endurance, we were at a

relatively slow airspeed and could quickly throw the landing gear and flaps down when I picked up the runway. For the good news, the weather was so poor that there was not all that much competition in the landing pattern. We did have enough fuel after landing to taxi off the runway and to a hard stand. I did not stay around for Gleason, our Plane Captain, to dip-stick the fuel tanks.

The takeoffs from Tacloban were just very trying. Allie Lymenstull, Plane Captain on Crew Nine, tells of one:

"This is my third Christmas overseas. The first was at Pearl Harbor in 1942. The next at Gaudalcanal in 1943. Now my third at Leyte and surely things will improve after 1944. Enough is enough.

"And what a way to earn a living. Up early and to the airstrip to check the airplane. The pilots arrive after the airplane is ready and we taxi slowly to the end of the steel mat strip. Rev up the engines and away we go. We have a full fuel load and ten 100# bombs in the after bomb bay, the forward bomb bays have the two 400-gallon fuel tanks. At 1000' after takeoff, I begin to relax a bit as we've made it one more time. Then, an oil line on the number three engine lets go. The oil hits on the hot turbo and we now have an engine fire. The pilots feather the engine but the airplane is sinking. The PPC shouts to salvo the bombs. I, in turn, yell to Dixon who is near the emergency bomb release lever to pull the lever. Once the bomb bay doors open, to pull again to release the bombs. He does, the bombs fall out but the airplane is still sinking. I yell to the cockpit, shall I dump the bomb bay fuel tanks and get an immediate response, dump'em. This is touchy. Sometimes when attempting to salvo the fuel tanks, they stick half way out of the bomb bays and hang there. This is a very bad situation but since the tanks are full, I believe they will fall out. I pull the pins and they drop out cleanly. That is about three tons out of the airplane and it starts to fly again.

"The oil is finally emptied and the fire goes out. We circle and make an overweight landing, no easy task. This short trip has made me very nervous. However, we get the standby airplane ready and off we go again to fly the patrol. When we get back much later and after dark, an engineering officer meets us and asked me if we were the crew that dropped the fuel tanks earlier. I reply yes and he then begins to give me a hard time about it. About his time Lt. Ettinger, our PPC, comes up and wants to know what's going on and I tell him about the dressing down. He then blasts the engineering officer and as Ettinger was six feet four and about two hundred pounds that is the end of that."

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER - While our families and friends back in the States were opening presents and preparing for a big Christmas dinner, here in the eastern longitudes it was December 26th. VPB-104 would report a big day for two of its crews.

Crew Nine, with Ettinger as the PPC, departed Tacloban at 0645(I) for a 1090 nmi patrol which would require 13.8 flight hours. No bombs were carried but 3100 gallons of fuel were loaded on board, a short change of AvGas for this long sector. Returning from the China coast and while northwest of central Luzon, they came upon a Japanese convoy of four large transport ships, two destroyers, two destroyer escorts, and three smaller gunboats. But what really got their attention was the air cover of nine Tony fighters and one Betty bomber. The convoy was on course 170 degrees, speed ten knots. This indicated that a strong reinforcement effort was being made to counter our upcoming invasion of Luzon. It was most important that the contact report be sent as quickly and as accurately as possible. Ettinger closed to within six miles of the convoy to confirm the composition and the fight was on.



Freighter Transport Able (FTA)
8,000 - 10,000 tons

The PB4Y-1 was at 2000'. As the fighters began a rapid climb, Ettinger dove his airplane down just as quickly. Being low on the water would prevent the enemy from making steep diving attacks from an overhead position; a tactic that gave the fighters a decided advantage. There was only about three-tenths cloud cover so there was no option for the patrol plane to hide. The first attacks were bow- and tail-on and pressed in to 300 yards. John Osteen, in the tail turret, got in a good blast on one attacking aircraft, hitting on the fuselage from the engine to the tail. That Tony left the scene, not to return. The other fighters began making runs from three o'clock through nine o'clock. The fighter passes continued, but the crew of the patrol plane managed to take every attack under gunfire. This counter machine gun fire discouraged the Japanese pilots and they broke off their runs at ever-widening ranges.

As the fight progressed, Ettinger continued southbound and, as he approached Lingayen Gulf, another convoy was seen. This group was comprised of three large transport ships and four medium-sized tankers of three to five thousand tons. Here an additional four Zeke fighters joined into the fray. The Betty appeared to coordinate the attacks, unsuccessfully, and an attempt was made to box-in the PB4Y-1. However, "Stretch" Ettinger maneuvered his airplane aggressively and continued to discourage the fighters from pressing home their attacks beyond 600 yards. Accurate gunfire at relatively long range contributed to the patrol plane not suffering any damage. After about an hour of gunnery practice, the Japanese fighters declared victory and left for home. Or they could have run short of fuel or simply recognized a lost cause.

Crew Nine would have felt a little better regarding their trials and tribulations had they known of the subsequent actions taken against these two convoys. The Fifth Air Force had established the 310th Bomb Wing at Mindoro Island shortly after the landings there on December 15, 1944. Units of this wing responded to the contact report radioed in by Ettinger. The wing's attacks were made late that afternoon. Since it was only 250 miles from the San Jose airfields on Mindoro to Lingayen Gulf, it was most likely that fighters accompanied the attacking B-25s on this effort.

One more thrilling moment awaited Crew Nine and is told by Fred Himsworth, a radioman-gunner:

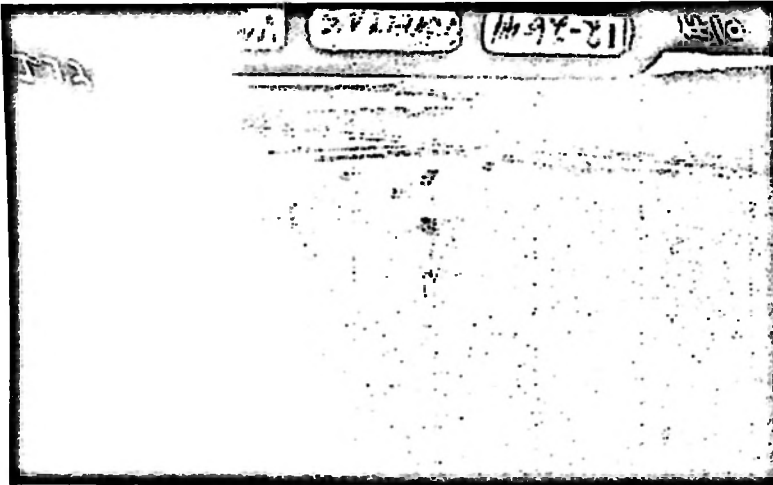
"Following the fighter attack, I was relieved from the radio watch and went to the starboard waist hatch to stand watch for the remainder of the flight. Shortly after taking over the single 0.50 caliber machine gun, we were passing the island of Mindoro. It had been invaded a few days earlier and our invasion force was still battling the Japanese there. A flight of twelve P-40s appeared to be providing ground support but when they saw us they must have assumed that we were a Japanese aircraft. They lined up on my side of our airplane, one behind the other in trail, and began a perfect pursuit curve. In a situation such as this, we had decided long ago to defend ourselves, friendly aircraft or not. I was actually starting to squeeze the trigger on my gun when they pulled up and broke off the attack. In another split second I would have been shooting and it's hard to say what would have happened. It turned out all right though and ended up being just another incident of a scared crew."

Even after 50 years, the events of December 26, 1944, remain very clear in my memory. Fortunately, I hold a good copy of Aircraft Action Report Number 87, filed by Lt. Travis E. Baker, USNR, the ACIO for VPB-104, and approved by LCdr. Whitney Wright, USN, Commanding Officer. This does contribute to the facts where the memory may drift a bit. Also, I have visited at the Maxwell Air Forces' Historical Research Agency, Montgomery, Alabama, which added to my knowledge beyond that known from my myopic view of the action that night.

The day began with the usual departure from my cot at 0200, arising for a patrol, the briefing at the wing's operations tent, and the truck ride to the airstrip. I would have several changes to my crew this day. Copilot Robert McKinley was felled by a misbehaving belly (dengue fever or some such thing) and Ens. Garner T. Culpepper would fill in. William Mathison would fly with us this day as our radar technician. A member of the usually non-flying Crew Nineteen, he was a prized member and an expert on our electronics gear. Jack Saunders, an aviation ordnanceman, would also join us for this lively day.

After the run down the runway at Tacloban and pulling up at the end, whether there was adequate airspeed or not, we were flying, however slowly. Our takeoff time was noted as 0600 and we were fully fueled with 3400 gallons for the 1000 nmi sector to Cam Ranh Bay, French Indo-China. The "no attack and no bomb load" order was in effect. It would have considerable impact upon the aftermath of this patrol. Approaching Mindoro Island, I set the VHF voice radio to the fighter controller frequency for this area. I identified myself as a "blue nose interceptor" in hope of getting a vector and perhaps bagging an enemy straggler from the nightly bombing raid on our new piece of real estate. The controller declined my services. But not to worry, I had 12 hours of search ahead of me.

It was heavy going all the way across the South China Sea and I knew that our APS-15 was being blanked out. Heavy storm cells covered the radar scope and any shipping targets would most likely be hidden. About 50 miles from Cam Ranh Bay, a strong Japanese base and fleet anchorage, I let down into clear weather with good visibility. I would fly at near wave-top height and make a high-speed run in to examine the anchorage and just, incidentally, be in a good position to strafe any targets of opportunity. Entering the outer harbor, we came upon an escort vessel. With no bombs on board, it was advantageous to pass him by. He had more fire power than I, even though it appeared that we had surprised him.



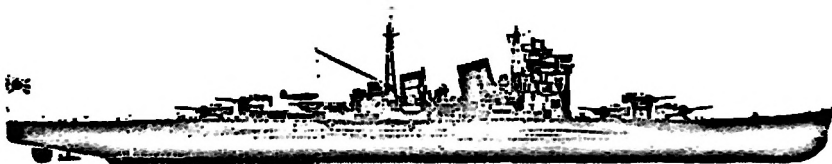
Entering into the inner harbor, I sighted nine Jakes, one taxiing out and the others at anchor. It was obvious that we had achieved complete surprise as we opened fire on the Jake underway. Immediately, the three-man crew of the scout/ASW airplane jumped over the side and the twin-float seaplane continued along without a crew. Our gunners were in hog heaven. The Jakes presented themselves as juicy targets. All 0.50 caliber machine guns were firing well, though some gunners could not resist firing at the large white French colonial administration and barracks buildings. But this PPC chose not to interrupt their sport and let them fire where they wished. Besides, there had been no return gunfire from the shore. This did place me in a happy frame of mind.

The first run completed, I banked sharply to come around quickly for another firing pass. The buildings were not targeted this time as our relative position made the Jakes the more attractive targets. Two enemy aircraft were listing and many tracer flashes, indicating hits, were observed on the other seaplanes. Completing this run placed us upon the shore over a ridge just beyond the buildings. About to reverse course again for another strafing pass, I saw that there were a number of gun emplacements with many Japanese scrambling to man their battle stations.

"Quit while you're ahead" is a very good rule for most all situations. Resuming our patrol, we flew northward over the coastline at low altitude, just enough to clear the hilly terrain. About 60 miles north of Cam Ranh Bay, we came upon one large tanker of 10,000 tons, two Sugar Charlies of about 1500 tons, and one Sugar Dog. These ships were at anchor in a large cove. There was a great amount of traffic on the Great Wall of China, all of the two-footed coolie type. Many looked up in seeming wonderment. At Nha Trang Air Base a number of Japanese, dressed in white, were in a military formation. A personnel inspection or awaiting to render honors to a visiting dignitary? I had not approached this airfield with intent and actually was surprised to see it, hence no attack.

After completing the cross-leg of my search sector, I asked the copilot on the navigation table to give me a course for home. I soon found that the weather over the South China Sea had not abated one bit. However, I decided to try a tactic given to me by Whit Wright. This was, when cruising in heavy weather at altitude, 8000' to 10,000' or so, head for the dark areas. That is were the rain is falling and will be smoother, rather than the light areas where the storms are building and much, much more turbulent. It worked.

At 1610 in the afternoon and about 170 miles west of Mindoro Island we broke into the clear. I then sighted a Japanese surface force that shook me terribly. Initially judged to be one battleship, one heavy cruiser, one light cruiser, and five destroyers, this task force could create a disaster for the logistics shipping off the beach at San Jose, Mindoro. Later, from intelligence sources, I learned that actually the force consisted of *Ashigara*, a heavy cruiser; *Oyodo*, a light cruiser, and six destroyers, one of which was a new class of 2100 tons.



Overestimating the class and size of enemy vessels was a common mistake. One factor was that the enemy always appeared to be bigger, faster, and more heavily armed due to the fright factor. Also, and in my defense, the Japanese heavy cruisers were far bigger than our heavy cruisers. The Japanese had cheated on the Washington and London Naval Limitation Conferences of the 1920's and 1930's. The *Ashigara* weighed in at 13,287 tons versus our heavy cruisers at about 9,000 tons. The *Oyodo* was also deceiving as a light cruiser. Its overall length was about the same as the *Ashigara*'s, some 590'. But the heavy cruiser held a preponderance of armament and armor.

I told my radioman to send a message in the blind (just send it, never mind radio procedures) to our base communications to standby for a flash precedent message. This would also keep other stations off the circuit until we could get our message on the air. While our copilot-navigator was fixing our position and would prepare a plain language

message, I searched overhead intently, looking for enemy fighters. We were very vulnerable being at 8000' and close enough to Manila for this force to be well covered by protective fighters. Seeing no airborne opposition, I turned back to further examine the task force at about eight miles distance.

By this time the heavy cruiser had turned broadside to us and then disappeared in a huge blossom of fire and smoke--she had fired her main batteries as well as the anti-aircraft big guns at us. My first thought was one of extreme flattery quickly replaced with stark terror! A great amount of steel and high explosives were coming our way. I executed a violent diving turn. This maneuver was of such magnitude that the explosions of the shells were not seen (and just as well from my point of view).

Approaching Mindoro, I made contact by VHF voice radio. The command there expressed great concern and questioned me closely as to whether amphibious craft were with the enemy task force. This concern may have been due to the convoy of transport ships and their escorts approaching Lingayen Gulf reported earlier by Ettinger (see previous pages). Directed to land and confirm my report, I began a landing approach. I now fully appreciated the concerns expressed by the ground forces there. While there were a number of logistics vessels at anchor off San Jose (Liberty/Victory ships, LSTs, and other smaller landing craft), no combatant ships could be seen. The only U.S. Navy presence that could be classed as approaching a combatant was what I initially thought to be a seaplane tender (AVP). Later, I learned that this was a motor torpedo boat tender, an AGP of about 2600 tons. This also served as the flagship of Commander Task Force 70.1.4 overseeing the operations of the MTB squadrons. One of the Liberty ships was burning, most likely due to earlier air attacks by Japanese bombers. Mindoro had received numerous air attacks since the amphibious landings on December 15th.

Close in on the final approach the airstrip was found to be a dirt surface. This could be a real problem for my heavy bomber. And indeed it was, as my airplane's wheels sank into the dirt as it slowed during the landing roll-out. It was necessary to use high power on the engines to taxi clear of the runway.

Leaving the cockpit, I proceeded to the operations tent and reported in to Col. Wilson, Commander of the Bomb Wing. He again questioned me regarding the make up of the enemy task force. I assured him that no amphibious ships were with this group. It was not necessary to discuss the threat to the shipping and the beachhead. He then directed me to takeoff and make an attack against this strong force. My efforts to establish my mission as "search only" failed with his reply, "It's either them or us, go out and pick off a destroyer." This would have been amusing had the situation not been so grave. The chance of a single airplane surviving an attack against this sort of odds was nil-to-zero. Resigning myself to an attack, I requested he provide me with four 500-pound bombs as quickly as possible. This the colonel seemed pleased to do.

While I was gone from the airstrip, my crew had begun fueling the airplane with 2700 gallons from 55-gallon steel drums. This was accomplished by rolling the barrels off a

truck and then to the PB4Y-1. Then, using a hand-cranked pump, the AvGas was transferred into the wing tanks. Luckily, as we soon found out, no additional fuel was readily available. During the final fueling, I was guided over to a camp of sorts where a group of soldiers had an open campfire. Here my hosts offered up a less than gourmet dinner of cold beans and lukewarm coffee. A condemned man should rate a better last meal than this!

Walking back to the airstrip I was surprised to see 13 B-25s parked near our airplane. Up to this time I had seen no other airplanes nor aviation personnel. A red alert was on and Japanese bombers were making intermittent air attacks. Given the current circumstances, the airstrip was no place to be. This situation was obviously in the minds of the ordnance gang. They came roaring up in their bomb-handling truck, skidded to a stop, kicked off four 500-pound bombs, threw the tail fins and fuses to the ground, and roared off. This annoyed me considerably. Since they had no respect for the nature of explosives, at least they could have handled the fuses more gently.

I stood looking at the bombs lying on the ground, knowing that no bomb hoist was available nor likely to be found. What to do? I simply said to the three crewmen standing there, "load the bombs." Lee Webber, bombardier; Garner Culpepper, copilot; and Lee Little, ordnanceman, leaped to the task. They rolled a bomb to underneath the aft port bomb bay (the two forward bomb bays had fuel tanks installed). With Webber grasping the nose of the bomb and Little on the other end, Culpepper placed himself alongside on his hands and knees. Webber and Little lifted the bomb up about two feet. Culpepper then slid underneath and held it while the other two reset their grip. Now with a great combined effort, the three heaved the bomb into the upper bomb bay shackle. My utter amazement continued as our other crewmen joined in to load the rest of the bombs in a similar manner. The 500-pound bombs have not grown a single pound since 1944.

While the crewmen were bolting on the tail fins and installing the fuses, I walked over to the B-25s, arriving at the same time as their squadron leader. He had just returned from the same colonel and had received the same attack order. As he gave the order to launch for an attack on the enemy task force, his pilots and crewmen made a number of moans and "oh nos." They had started an attack on this enemy formation a short time ago but had broken off because of the very heavy gunfire from the big guns of the combatant ships. Their original mission had been for attacks against airfields in the Manila area.

I told the young captain that I wanted to join them in the attack and would be ready to go in just a few more minutes. The squadron leader said that they were leaving now, and if I was ready, fine, but they would not wait for me. As they taxied out and took off, I felt that I was seeing our chance for survival leaving with them.

Very soon we were ready to go. I called the entire crew together and told them that I needed only a copilot and a bombardier, the rest could stay behind or go with us, it was their choice. It was not stated, but they knew our chances as well as I. To my surprise,

they all decided to go and even seemed very eager to make the attack on this major enemy force.

As we were loading aboard and readying the airplane for takeoff, a P-38 crash-landed just in front of our parking area. This reduced an already short runway. Dusk was setting in and there was no wind to assist with our takeoff. Given the soft runway surface, I seriously questioned whether we would be able to get airborne. Thankfully, no more than 2700 gallons of fuel had been loaded aboard. Any more fuel would have substantially reduced our chances to get off the ground. Had a defueling truck been available I would have off-loaded some gas. But the Japanese were rapidly approaching and the airstrip would be under fire from their big guns very soon.

There were no flare pots to mark the runway. It was now dark but a bright full moon had started to rise. We applied full power to the engines and released the brakes. The airplane moved forward and the left wheel sank into the ground. Right brake was applied and the right wheel sank. We staggered left and right but slowly accelerated. Finally beginning to gain some lift, the airplane steadied and we slowly increased our airspeed.

I saw the scrub trees at the end of the runway but had no idea of whether we had flying speed or not. I pulled back hard on the elevator controls and we cleared the trees by inches. We were flying, barely, and slowly gaining altitude and airspeed. The landing gear was retracted and the flaps were "milked" up.

The moon was beginning to illuminate the area well and the visibility was unlimited. Heading to the north along the coast of Mindoro, I could see that tracers were flowing every which way, indicating lots of action. Continuing to climb, I saw the B-25s attacking the task force at masthead level. They were strafing with their forward-firing 0.50 caliber machine guns. As they made their bombing runs one at a time, they were being shot down one at a time. One of the attacking Mitchell twin-engine bombers was hit in the starboard engine and it became a mass of flames. The courageous pilot dove his airplane into a Japanese destroyer. There was a large explosion. This destroyer was later confirmed as having been sunk.

A number of PT boats began a torpedo attack on the column of enemy ships. The *Ashigara*, in the lead, trained a powerful searchlight at the speedy boats. The other ships in the formation then opened fire. The PT boats appeared to be taking many hits and broke off the attack. Rear Admiral Masatome Kimura, Officer in Tactical Command, was fighting his surface force very well. He was an experienced Imperial Japanese Naval Officer of considerable reputation in night torpedo actions.

All of the B-25 attacks had been made down moon and from the Mindoro side of the enemy ships. I decided to make my attack from the other side of the column and up moon. I flew well around the action. Due to being provided instantaneous fuses rather than the 4-5 second delayed fuses, we would make our bombing run from 8,500' vice a

masthead run. During positioning, there were many other low-level attacks and, at the time, I believed these to be by PBY Catalinas and PBM Mariner Black Cats only. This later term applied to night operations of U.S. Navy flying boats. Subsequent research indicates that about 100 fighters from the Fifth Air Force participated, in addition to the B-25s. Mostly from the Eighth Fighter Group, they included P-38s, P-47s, P-40s, and P-61 night fighters. It is no surprise then that I was observing so much gunfire directed at low-level attackers.

I directed Anania, who was operating the radar, and Webber, our bombardier, to pick out the largest ship and set our bombs for 60-foot drop intervals. Also, should our bombing run not look good for hits, Webber was to announce this, and I would break off the run and try again. We turned inbound towards the task force from about 20 miles out. I maintained a cruise power setting on the engines. By doing so I could stay in a lean fuel mixture and eliminate any flare from our exhaust.

Almost immediately, Anania called that he had the force on his scope and began giving me small heading changes and distances to the target. Our approach was on the starboard quarter of the *Ashigara*. I was reminded that this would be the first Norden bombsight release for Webber since our training back in the States. To this point, all of our attacks had been made as very low-level masthead bomb releases by visual judgments (seaman's eye). Just after the call "eight miles," Webber stated, very authoritatively, "I have him, follow the Pilot Director Indicator." Again, there were a few very small corrections to our heading. We were indicating 140 knots airspeed in stable level flight.

The anti-aircraft fire was still being directed at low levels. I wondered when the enemy ships would begin firing at us. There was no question that we would be shot down. I just hoped we would be able to get our bombs away before we were blasted from the sky. I could see the largest ship in the lead of the column, running fast, and leaving a long and very bright wake. In close, the target disappeared under the nose of our airplane. Webber suddenly called, "bombs away." I rolled the airplane quickly to the right and just as hard and quickly back to the left. Most of the crew were then rewarded by the sight of one explosion close to the stern and then, very rapidly, two, perhaps three, beautiful bomb bursts on the after deck of the *Ashigara*. These bursts were so quick that it was difficult to distinguish whether there were two or three. And now the flow of tracers began streaming towards us. I really rolled hard to the right to exit this gunfire and distance ourselves from the task force.

We had done it! And there had been no hits on our PB4Y-1. Webber was beside himself with joy, having hit a major unit of the Japanese fleet. He repeatedly shouted over the intercom, "Lets go back and get more bombs." This, of course, was not possible given the big shells soon to fall upon the beachhead.

There was neither a fire nor any other indication of much damage to the *Ashigara* at this time. The ships continued to steam at high speed toward the Mindoro beachhead and

airfields. We retired to a safe distance and began to shadow the force. There continued to be occasional attacks by what appeared to be Black Cats.

Looking up moon as we approached the San Jose area, I could see that all of the allied supply ships, except the burning Liberty ship, had moved out. They were now anchored only several miles away in a protected body of water between the south end of Mindoro and Ilin Islands. I can only assume that LCdr. Burt Davis, in command of the MTB squadrons and torpedo boat tender (AGP), had gathered the supply ships together and led them out of harm's way. At my altitude, I could see both the Japanese task force and the vulnerable logistics ships. I prayed that the enemy would not be able to see them. Should they locate these defenseless ships, it would be a massacre. Although the PT boat tender and the supply ship were lightly armed, they would not stand a chance against the Japanese big guns.

The enemy surface force entered the beachhead area at a very high speed and began firing star shells over the area in an attempt to illuminate targets. There was no return fire from the batteries of our forces on the ground. I well understood this to be the best course of action, given that the Japanese vessels heavily "out-gunned" our U.S. Army's artillery pieces. To return fire would only have served to generate aiming points for the enemy.

Finding no targets, the surface force turned away from the beach and started what was to become a square for another run along the beach and anchorage. By this maneuver, I concluded that the Japanese gunners could not see our supply ships. I was greatly relieved!

During the second run, the Japanese again fired star shells but still they found no aiming points ashore. However, nearing the end of this run, all of the ships of this force fired a volley into the previously damaged Liberty ship. It exploded with a large burst of flame and smoke and disappeared from my view. Completing this square, the task force departed the area on a westerly course. One destroyer was missing from the formation. I could now clearly see that the *Ashigara* was trailing oil and had slowed. Soon it was the last ship in the column. There was no question that we had hit the lead ship and, in addition, a PT boat reported a flash in the area at the same time we reported our bomb drop.

Sporadic attacks by Black Cats continued. These PBY and PBM aircraft were probably attached to Patrol Bombing Squadrons Four, Twenty and/or Twenty-Five. One PBM contacted us by VHF radio and asked that we report their position on our CW long range radio. They had been shot down but were still afloat on the water. We did so.

At 0400 we were getting low on fuel. I knew relief tracking airplanes would soon be coming. Later I learned that, indeed, Cdr. McDonald of VPB-117 picked up the force about this time. We set course for Tacloban.

Upon landing just as dawn was breaking, the Wing Commander met us at the airstrip. He stated that I was to proceed right now to the USS *Currituck* (AV-7) and report to RAdm Frank D. Wagner, Commander, Naval Air Forces, Seventh Fleet. I took my two copilots with me and our charts and navigation logs. Upon boarding, the Chief of Staff took us to his cabin and suggested that we freshen up. Could it be that we had a bit of body odor?

RAdm Wagner was very interested in all details of the patrol. He asked very specific questions as to why we did not make contact with the Japanese force during our outbound leg. I fully explained our search radar's shortcomings during heavy weather. However, he seemed doubtful. In hindsight, I wish very much that we had called in his staff electronics officer to further discuss this issue. He also questioned our staying within our sector to insure complete coverage. I contended that we had done so, but true, we had gone beyond our sector when examining Cam Ranh Bay. He was not at all pleased with our attacks upon the Jakes. However, in the end, he gave us a "well done." He did very firmly direct that I make it very clear to my C.O. that he meant exactly what he ordered regarding "no bombs to be carried and no attacks to be made" during our search missions.

My tent and cot had never looked so good as that mid-morning when we finally got back "home." Sleep came quickly and very soundly. During the afternoon I was awakened by a major and lieutenant colonel, USAAC. They wanted to know just what had happened to their B-25 squadron. Sad to say, none of them had returned to base. Other than their attacks that we had witnessed, I could offer no help. However, my research indicated that three B-25s had been shot down but apparently the others survived. Just how and under what circumstances I did not find out.

Much later, after we had moved to Clark Field, Luzon, I was advised that preliminary proceedings pursuant to my court martial were taking place. The charge was direct disobedience of orders. Strafing those Jakes had been great fun, but a big mistake! Ordered to report to the Flagship USS *Currituck*, now anchored in Manila Bay, the threatened legal proceedings were moving toward reality. Our Wing Commander, Captain C. B. Jones, USN, had always strongly supported his flight crews. In this instance, he voluntarily accompanied me to the flagship. Once aboard, he directed me to wait in the wardroom while he interceded on my behalf. Soon, a Marine orderly appeared with a message from my Wing Commander to relax, as all had been forgiven. Assisting with the appeal had been a recent and important kill by Crew Two. Surprisingly, and many years later, I learned that knowledge of my pending court martial had spread widely about the USS *Currituck*. Attending my 50th high school class reunion in Joplin, Missouri, a classmate approached me and said, "Oh yes, I remember the day you were brought aboard my ship, the USS *Currituck*, anchored in Manila Bay, to be court martialed." Never underestimate the dissemination of the scuttlebutt aboard U.S. naval vessels.

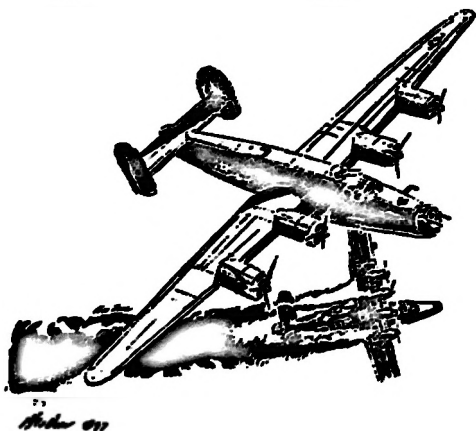
However, it had been a near thing. But as proven before, it is often a thin line between a court martial and a Navy Cross.



A BIG BATTLE - "Hagen the Horrible," carrying his big club (his crew and 0.50 caliber machine guns), participated in a battle of the giants on December 28th. This engagement took place about 170 miles east of Qui Nhe, French Indo-China. The opponent of the four-engine PB4Y-1 was also a large four-engine patrol plane of the Japanese Navy code-named "Mavis."

Ed Hagen had departed Tacloban at 0514(I) loaded with 3400 gallons of AvGas for the 1000 nmi search on the Cam Ranh Bay sector. The flight would take 12.4 hours flight time. At 1145, while cruising at 7500', the PPC sighted the Mavis off to the right well above his airplane. Applying military power, 2550 RPM and 45' MAP, he turned 30 degrees to the right to climb and close on the big enemy flying boat. Reaching 8500' and slightly behind the Mavis, Hagen gave the order to commence firing with the bow and top turrets. The range to the enemy aircraft was about 1500'. With the first burst from the four 0.50 caliber machine guns the number three engine began streaming heavy smoke. The Mavis then started evasive maneuvers, rocking and rolling back and forth. James Mathews' guns in the bow turret jammed after firing 200 API rounds. However, Byron Fahnestock's guns in the top turret operated beautifully and he fired off 800 rounds in short bursts during the battle.

Now the Mavis was making gentle "S" turns, descending, and as the PB4Y-1 continued to close, its speed built up to 220 knots. It became apparent that the enemy aircraft was trying to reach a large cloud bank ahead. So Hagen increased power on his engines to 50" and 2700 RPM. At closer range now, the bow turret (the jam having been cleared) and the top turret poured hits into the starboard wing root and suddenly the wing exploded, separating from the airplane. The rest of the airplane spun through the clouds and crashed into the South China Sea. A large underwater explosion was seen as the depth charges were triggered. The entire episode took only six minutes.



On December 29, 1944, VPB-137 arrived at Tacloban with their PV-1 Lockheed Venturas. These were sleek twin-engine medium patrol bombers, very fast but limited in combat radius to 600 nautical miles. Commander Task Group 73.6 (Seventh Fleet Long Range Search Group) would alter Search Plan Annex H to provide for sectors W, Y, J, K, and L to be flown by VPB-137. Sectors one through ten plus

"S" (special additional sectors) were assigned to VPB-104 and 117.

A WELCOME ARRIVAL - VPB-137's arrival and sector alignments, while of some importance to our operations, simply did not have the great impact of another group--WAACs!--American girls of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. They were being housed in a warehouse or big building of some kind in downtown Tacloban. This Philippines village now resembled a boom town of the Old West on Saturday night. Soldiers, sailors, and airmen crowded every inch of space within 40 miles of the WAAC's billet. Well, perhaps not 40 miles, but certainly as far as the eye could see. One naval type managed to sweet talk an attractive WAAC (and they all were, given their location) into a big and prolonged embrace. This set back Army-Navy relations considerably.

Combat Aircraft Servicing Unit (CASU) Nine arrived at Tacloban about this time to relieve our overworked flight crews of the local maintenance effort. However, we still ferried our aircraft to Morotai for heavy maintenance and to Owi for engine changes. At Owi, the procedure was to leave one aircraft with "tired" engines and fly one back with fresh engines installed. As good as the Pratt & Whitney R-1830 engines were, they could only stand so much of a beating. Patrols sometimes returned to base without completing their sector search due to engine problems. A standby aircraft was on the schedule as well as those assigned for the search missions. Should the engine trouble or other problem cause a patrol to return to base after flying well into the sector, a standby crew would man the aircraft to fly the mission.

Not every patrol made contact with the enemy nor engaged in a combat action of some sort. We all had our negative sectors where nothing was seen from time to time. This is not to say that a negative patrol was not without an adventure of some kind. Just the black takeoff from the Tacloban airstrip was enough.

DEAD RECKONING GONE WRONG - Sloan Bomar, a first class radioman in Waldeck's Crew Seven, tells of one such negative patrol:

"On departure from Tacloban, we found cloud cover extending in every direction. As we proceeded out into the South China Sea visibility was limited to a few miles but some drift measurements could be made. Conditions didn't improve as we proceeded to the China coast but, unfortunately, the navigator wasn't able to get an identifiable landfall on the cross leg of our sector. On our return, the weather did not improve. As we got closer to the Philippines, and in deference to the 8000' peaks there, Waldeck sent me back to the radar as he climbed for additional altitude. Our APS-15 radar was really great since it could, under the right conditions, generate a map-like image. Being closeted in the little dark radar room over the bomb bay in foul weather was something my stomach never quite got used to. Watching the green trace go round-and-round while the plane wallowed along frequently gave me a green feeling. Finally, I was able to report land on the 100-mile scale. Then at 30 miles the Position Plan

Indicator (PPI) scope started painting a clear picture. I compared it with my map hoping to identify our landfall. As we drew closer it became all too clear as to where we were. On the ten-mile scope I saw a beautiful harbor with an island centered near the entrance--Japanese-held Manila Bay! The island at the harbor entrance was Corregidor. I gave our PPC the information, saying it was one of those good news/bad news situations. The good was that I knew where we were. The bad news was we were approaching Manila Bay. Just at this point we ran out of cloud cover and flew into the full glory of the afternoon sun. As I came out of the radar closet and looked out of the waist hatch, I could see forever in the direction we had to fly. No place to hide there.

"I figured that we were in a lot of trouble. I could readily imagine what was now happening at the Japanese airfields there. If this was in our possession and a lonesome Japanese bomber came over in the afternoon sunshine, no expense would be spared to provide an adequate reception. Boy, we were in deep doo-doo! Just what would it take for the intercepting fighters to arrive--ten minutes, fifteen minutes went by, then twenty and still no Zekes nor Tonys. Who can figure this one out?

"Who to blame for this excursion? The navigator or just lay it on the weather situation. Waldeck must have decided to let it go as when we loaded up for our next patrol, the same navigator was still walking. No one had broken his leg."

Waldeck and Crew Seven experienced an even more frightening excursion or incursion on a subsequent patrol. During a routine mission, they came upon one of our fast carrier task forces. Now this was a truly frightening situation, as their combat air patrols of F6Fs did not appear so friendly when making an investigation of the single PB4Y-1 on its search mission. All PPCs dreaded coming upon one of the famous Task Forces Thirty-Eight or Fifty-Eight. Scary.

A MIRACULOUS SURVIVAL - Crew Seven had an encounter of another kind with a P-38. Returning from a patrol and being very short on fuel, Waldeck decided to land at Mindoro. They spent the night in a camp adjacent to the airfield. The next morning when preparing to fly "home" to Tacloban, a P-38 flew overhead very, very low. It was obvious that the airplane was struggling and losing altitude. It hit the ground in a ball of flames a short distance from the PB4Y-1 crew. It gave all of them a sick feeling, knowing the pilot did not have a chance of surviving. But they later learned that the pilot was thrown from the P-38 and took flight on his own. He wound up hitting into a tent which kept him from being killed. Fate has some strange twists.

On December 30, 1944, Sutherland and Crew Fourteen were assigned the 1050 mile sector to Hainan Island. It would take 14.1 hours to cover the sector. Cruising at 1000' off the east coast of Hainan Island, they sighted three luggers at five miles distance. Dropping

down to near water level, they fired 1300 API rounds into the vessels; stopping one dead in the water and scoring many hits upon another one. Since neither would burn, only slight damage was claimed.

Fifteen minutes later the PB4Y-1 was jumped by one Zeke. The patrol plane and the fighter first met on reciprocal courses at 1000'. The Zeke then maneuvered to make a head-on attack. This Japanese meant business as he pressed home a determined firing run. Sidney Beechy in the bow and Walter Mazurek in the top turret opened up at 500 yards. Each fired 250 rounds and scored hits into the engine, cockpit, and wing roots. At the same time the Zeke scored with four 12.7 hits into the bow turret plexiglass. The fighter skidded off to the starboard side of the patrol plane, wobbling, losing altitude, and smoking. It disappeared from sight and was not seen to hit the water but it was definitely severely damaged.

A CLEAN KILL - New Year's Eve 1944 and a good way to finish off the old year. No great coup but one very pretty shoot-down. Stevens and Crew Two departed Tacloban at 0700 for a 900-mile patrol to the southernmost end of the Ryukyu chain of islands. The no attack and carry no bombs rule continued in effect.

It was a very poor day weather-wise, generally low ceilings and off and on light rain and drizzle. At 1215(I) I sighted five Sugar Dogs anchored at Yonaguni Jima located 120 nmi east of Formosa. Because of the weather and a 1700' peak on the island, I made only one strafing run. Firing 500 API rounds, we set one SD afire sufficiently to assure its destruction. We also saw a Betty and Sally that had crash-landed on the island.

Continuing my search sector to the northeast of the island, a crewman called out an enemy aircraft at our five o'clock position. I made a left turn around and with coaching from the waist hatch gunners, I finally saw a Nate fighter. The weather had improved in this area, which permitted me to see the enemy aircraft flying at 800' at two to three miles distance. At this time I was low on the water. Continuing to maneuver with military power on the engines, we approached the fighter on his five o'clock low. We had complete surprise and closed to 100' before opening fire. With the very first rounds from the top and bow turrets, the fighter burst into flames. Alan Anania in the top and Lee Webber in the bow turrets had scored hits into the engine and wing roots (they sure as hell couldn't miss from this close!).



The pilot jumped out of the burning airplane and for a very short time tumbled alongside our airplane. He was not wearing a parachute. The winter flying suit that he was wearing was certainly of no help at this point. We followed the airplane down and watched it hit the water. There was a cloud of smoke generated but there was no large explosion. Marx Stephan in the port waist took some excellent photos with the K-20 camera.

After completing our search sector, we began our return leg, which would take us over the island of Ishigaki Shima located about 40 miles southeast of Yonaguni Jima. It was shrouded in the same miserable weather encountered outbound; light rain and fog with visibility one half to one mile. I made a cautious approach up to the well-protected harbor that was packed with 25 Sugar Dogs and two Sugar Charlies. Due to the poor visibility and high terrain, it was impossible to enter the harbor, so I made a circle around outside, firing at the small vessels inside. We did claim damage from 0.50 caliber hits on three SDs. Continuing on around the island, we came upon an attractive building set upon a neck of land on a high cliff overlooking the ocean. No doubt in my mind that this was a house of pleasure for the high-ranking officials of the Japanese forces there. We gave it a good hosing down with our machine guns. However, our ACIO preparing the Aircraft Action Report chose to call this structure a radar station. Could there be something wrong with interrupting a morale-building activity for the enemy? Whatever, there were no antennas on the structure.

Rumors of a break-through at the perimeter at Morotai had long been replaced. The red-hot scuttlebutt at Tacloban was that an attack by Japanese paratroopers was to take place on New Year's Eve. It was an uneasy bunch of Screamers that evening, but it did not interfere with our celebration. The prime ingredient for a "real" celebration was in very short supply. But this was made up for by banging off rounds with various firearms, all of the small caliber variety. The firing of three rounds from a heavy anti-aircraft gun was still the signal for a red alert and no false alarms, please! This form of celebration must have

masked the actual assault by enemy paratroopers that did occur. The drop was made on Army encampments at Dulag only about 20 miles south of our camp. It was a pitched battle and one unit was wiped out (not sure of the size, battalion, perhaps). The U.S. Ground Forces prevailed eventually and in turn killed off all of the attacking Japanese paratroopers.

In summary, during the month of December 1944 we had lost seven men KIA or MIA. Three PB4Y-1s had been lost and we had operated throughout the month, on average, with 13 airplanes. The three aircraft lost were; BuNo 38816, shot up in combat; BuNo 38849, demolished in a taxi accident; and BuNo 38927, destroyed while parked alongside the runway when hit by an Army fighter (it blew a tire on landing). The squadron had flown 159 operational sorties for 1806 hours. Also, 94 hours had been flown as ferry flights.

A total of 73,430 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition had been fired. The number of bombs dropped tallied at 246 100#, 50 500#, and 5 100# incendiary clusters.

Ships sunk totaled 23,500 tons of the following classes: one FTB, one FTC, three SB, twelve SD, six luggers, three riverboats, and two barges.

Ships damaged totaled 24,900 tons of the following classes: one FTD, one SA, Four SB, two SC, twenty SD, twenty-one luggers, one PC, and one CA (heavy cruiser).

Land targets destroyed or damaged: one steamroller, two radar stations, one building, one warehouse, and five trucks.

Destroyed in the air were two Zekes, one Sally, one Jake, one Mavis, one Nate, and one Tabby.

Probably destroyed were one Betty, two Zekes, one Pete, one Tony, and one Val.

On the water, three Petes and three Jakes were destroyed (burned). Probably destroyed were one Jake and one Pete. Damaged were two Jakes, two Petes, one Rufe, and one Oscar.

It had been a productive month despite the restrictions of no bombs carried and no attacks during the later part of December. Apparently, the "no attacks" clause did not apply to strafing runs and shoot-downs.

CHAPTER FIVE
A MONTH OF NO BOMBING - NO ATTACKS
TACLOBAN

January did see improvements although the primary obstacle remained. The one and only runway at Tacloban simply could not be improved. There was no way to prepare a hard surface and it could not be extended in length. Hard stands were added but so were additional aircraft. So we continued to takeoff and land between rows of parked airplanes and tolerate, barely, the other hazards previously stated.

The nightly bombing of Morotai did not extend to Leyte. There had been 46 air raids at Morotai during the month of November. We only experienced occasional "washing machine Charlie" raids to interrupt our sleep at Tacloban. Yet, there was the night of the "destruction of the mosquito nets." The narrow strip of land that our camp occupied was enclosed on each side by wide rice paddies. Unknown to us was a movement of heavy anti-aircraft batteries onto the next strip of land. Late one night in early January, this battery announced the red alert. **BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!** Far more than a surprise, these muzzle blasts so close to our camp generated panic. Every one jumped, leaped, or by whatever motion, tried to find shelter. Not only did we penetrate the mosquito nettings, some even tried to run through the canvas sides of their tents (unsuccessfully). Few had dug fox holes, as the water level meant that digging produced a well sooner than an adequate bomb shelter. One group fled into the rice paddies and were up to their elbows in muddy water well fertilized by caribou and other droppings. It was a night to remember.

Personal clean-up from this night's activities as well as other routine bathing was accomplished in each tent's own bathing facility. Water from rain, usually a daily occurrence, was captured by turning up the tent siding. Then with steel helmet and soap in hand, standing in the nude, one dipped into the water trough. After a wet-down from your helmet filled with water, a good soaping followed. Another helmet or two filled and splashed from head to toes and you were clean. The feeling of cleanliness lasted all of about two minutes in the tropics.

Counting the pluses though, we now had wooden floors for our tents, a big improvement. Also, the camp's very own mess hall was now in operation. The food served was canned and dried rations and quickly became very tiresome. I found a solution at least for my taste. There were two kinds of "butter." One was pure axle grease; the other was later marketed widely as "Cheese Whiz." The mess hall did have their own bakery so with fresh bread and a can of Cheese Whiz, I existed reasonably well. I never did gain weight beyond my 125 pounds, however.

For the entire month of January, we remained under the no attack, no bombs to be carried order. The emphasis was placed upon our primary mission of search and reporting

of enemy surface forces. I am unable to explain the toleration of strafing attacks and our initiating aerial combat. It may be that the restriction was "diluted" by either the Wing Commander and/or the Commanding Officer of VPB-104. During my audience with RAdm Wagner during the morning of December 27th, there was no question of his intent. Nowhere in my research is this question clarified. Be sure that there was no question of the feelings regarding this policy by the flight crews. We opposed it most strongly.

Our search sectors remained the same until February 6, 1945, when VPB-117 left Tacloban and began operating from Mindoro Island. At this time the western and southwestern sectors were realigned under Commander Aircraft, Seventh fleet Operation Plan Number 10-44, Search Plan H, dated 27 December 1944. However, these sectors were still assigned for VPB-104 to cover when so scheduled.

Our mission under the above operation plan was; Forces under Rear Admiral F. D. Wagner, USN, to support the capture of the Lingayen Gulf area of Luzon, P.I., by search, bombing, transport, and evacuation missions.

Another change affecting the sharing of our mission was the arrival of VPB-111 at Morotai on January 12, 1945, to relieve VPB-101. Five PB4Y-1s and crews of VPB-111 would move on up to Tacloban to share the joys of turmoil. Later, on February 5, 1945, this squadron would move its command to Tacloban although four aircraft and crews would move to lend assistance to VPB-117 at Mindoro Island.

The new year did not begin too well for Heider and Crew Eleven. The weather was rotten for most of the search. Flying at 100' with the visibility, at best, one mile, they sighted a Tabby transport plane similar to a Douglas DC-2. Through a break in the clouds, the enemy was seen on a 90-degree crossing situation. Power was increased on the engines and an attempt was made to intercept. But the PB4Y-1 was apparently seen by the Tabby as it escaped into the clouds. However, 170 rounds were fired at long range with no hits observed. The encounter took place off Luzon about 30 miles south of Lingayen Gulf.

However, on January 1, 1945, Hagen and his crew had better weather and better luck. About 50 miles north of Luzon they found a Dave while cruising at 6000'. The Dave, a reconnaissance seaplane, "wearing wheels" (the single float removed and wheels installed) was flying at 1000', most likely on an anti-submarine patrol. Hagen reduced power and began "S" turns back and forth to slow for an attack. When Ed was one-half mile behind the enemy aircraft, the Dave pilot saw the big patrol plane and quickly jettisoned two bombs or depth charges. Most likely well frightened, he began maneuvering violently as the PB4Y-1 closed the range. At 1000' distance, Hagen ordered "open fire" as he continued to close to 500'. Robert La Bissoniere, who first reported the enemy aircraft, was in the port waist; Donald Bruce in the tail turret; Byron Fahnestock in the top turret; and Earl Harris in the bow turret all scored hits beginning at the cockpit and moving forward to the engine. The Dave soon stopped evading and flew straight ahead, crashing into the sea and disintegrating. All gun stations fired off 200 rounds except Fahnestock, who got in 300 rounds.

A CLASSIC DITCHING - On January 2, 1945, Jock Sutherland and his crew took off at 0700(I) from Tacloban for a 1000 nmi search which included a stretch of the China coast. After 16.8 hours in the air, they made a water landing at night with no loss of life nor injuries to the eleven-man crew. A first for a B-24 Liberator.

On the return leg, Sutherland made contact with a barge-gunboat (type C). It may have been serving as an anti-aircraft trap set up by the enemy. This vessel was anchored just off the shore where many guns were located. It also was tactically positioned to be of considerable value in anticipation of the eventual landing by the U.S. Forces at the entrance to Lingayen Gulf. The actual landing assault was to take place January 9, 1945.

Sutherland made a low-level strafing run, firing off 800 rounds of ammo. No damage to the barge was observed and as he pulled up from this pass, shore batteries opened up with heavy, medium, and light anti-aircraft fire. It was intense and very accurate, with bursts surrounding the PB4Y-1. The airplane was flown violently about to evade and no hits were noted. However, later it was found that the CW command radio transmitter and receiver, the frequency meter, and VHF radio were all inoperative. The Automatic Direction Finder (ADF) radio and the receiver itself were out of commission. The ASE radar was weak and could not discriminate between land masses and bodies of water.

Continuing the flight, the pilots and navigator did the best they could under the circumstances to locate the airstrip at Tacloban. But due to the heavy weather and failure of the radios, it simply could not be done. By 2300 hours, Sutherland accepted the fact that they were lost and a night ditching would be required. Attached to AAR Number 93 dated January 2, 1945, is Sutherland's statement concerning the ditching. Because this night ditching was so successful, his report follows in its entirety:

"I began to realize that the necessity of ditching was rapidly changing from a possibility to an absolute certainty.

"At 2330 I informed the crew that we were going to ditch in about 20 minutes as we only had enough fuel for a maximum of 40 minutes flight. I told the plane captain to jettison all loose gear such as the waist guns, ammunition, tool boxes, engine covers, spare radio gear, and oxygen bottles. Then I told him to have someone knock out the aft bulk head in the radar compartment.

"While the boys in the after station were having a big time tearing the ball (belly) turret out of the airplane and throwing out gear, I pulled the emergency release wire on the pilot's window and shoved it out. My copilot had difficulty removing his window until he finally knocked it out with a fire extinguisher. Then we buckled on our guns, canteens, and jungle kits and fastened our shoulder harnesses on as tightly as we could get them.

"I told the navigator to open the flight deck escape hatch and the radioman to transmit, 'I am ditching.' Then I told both of them to go to the after station as I wanted no one to remain on the flight deck during the ditching.

"At about 2340 hours the after station reported that everyone was ready for ditching. I told them that I felt confident that we could all get down without being hurt and that I wasn't worried about the outcome in the least. From the comments on the interphone, no one else seemed much concerned either. Not a single member of the crew became panicky.

"After making sure that everybody in the after station was ready for ditching, I told them I would ring the warning bell just before we hit. The radar operator continued to watch the radar and said that he was pretty certain that there was water to the north and that all of the land was behind us. As I thought the wind was northerly, I continued to let down on a heading of due north until we broke out of the clouds at 2000 feet. In the moonlight I saw two small islands dead ahead and a large mass of land to port. The water appeared to be calm with a northerly wind of about 8 knots. In order to ditch a little closer to land, I made a wide 360 degree turn to start my base leg over the large mass of land. Then I switched the radio altimeter to the 400-foot range and told the copilot to put the mixture controls in automatic rich and the props to 2700 RPM and to stand by with his hand on the crash bar [master ignition].

"At 400 feet I looked at my watch and saw that the time was 2349(I). Then I switched on the landing lights, fully extended and put down full flaps. At a speed of 105 knots I continued to let down to 75 feet on the radio altimeter. From here I was able to judge my altitude visually but I continued to glance at the artificial horizon to keep the wings level.

"Then almost on the water, I reduced power, rolled back the elevator tab and pulled back on the yoke [elevator control] until I felt the tail touch. Then I gradually added power and pulled up the nose still further until we mushed into the water at about 75 knots.

"The initial part of the landing was much like that of a P boat [PBY flying boat]. There was only a swishing of water while that nose was high. Then when it became impossible for me to hold the yoke back any longer, the nose dropped and a wall of water crashed up through the cockpit, just as the copilot hit the crash bar. Naturally, I had forgotten to ring the warning bell.

"For a few seconds the cockpit filled with water, during which time I released my harness and got out of the window in a hurry. As soon as I was

out of the cockpit, I yelled and asked if everyone was out. Somebody answered that everyone was out of the after station and the copilot said that he was okay, but that he was having trouble getting out of his seat because the yoke [control wheel] had jammed down against his legs. I inflated one side of my Mae West and started swimming around to the starboard side, but the navigator, who had come up over the airplane from the after station, was there first and helped the copilot twist the yoke around until the open side was down, thus enabling him to withdraw his legs.

“While this was going on, one of the men inflated the seven-man raft while another released and inflated the two auxiliary wing rafts, all of which operated perfectly. With an officer in each separate raft we ended up with a total of 3 men in the large raft, and 4 men in each of the smaller rafts.

“Aside from a smashed bow, the plane seemed to be in good shape. The top turret had not come down as expected. The props appeared to be unbent and the plane was riding fairly high in the water.

“In questioning the crew on the results of the ditching, I found that no one was even slightly injured. Some of the ditching positions had been peculiar. Two men were in the radar compartment with their backs against the forward bulkhead. The navigator was sitting between one of the men’s legs facing aft. One man was lying on the floor boards beside the belly turret station with feet forward. Three men were also aft lying there with feet braced against the step. One man was in a standing position beside the port waist hatch, holding on to the armor plate brace with one hand and the gun mount with the other. One man was in a similar position on the starboard side. Neither of these men were thrown from his feet during the ditching.

“As we stood by waiting for 813 [last three BuNo’s of their airplane] to sink I noticed that we had sufficient survival gear to supply our needs considering that we were so close to land. The inventory revealed 2 bags of emergency rations, 2 jungle packs, 1 parachute, 10 pistols, 5 Very pistols [flare guns], with plenty of cartridges and 8 canteens. The Gibson Girl [emergency radio] had been lost during the ditching.

“After waiting 7 minutes for the plane to sink and as it didn’t seem to be settling very rapidly, I told one of the men to remove the gas tank caps.

“At 1159, exactly 9 minutes after ditching, 813 gave her final gurgle and sank nose first to the accompaniment of a rousing cheer from the entire crew.

“In conclusion, I might say that the success of the ditching was due to the excellent circumstances. Prior to the ditching, we had ample time for

preparation, that the sea was relatively calm and there was sufficient moonlight to see the location of the land and the water.

"In my opinion, all hands except the pilot and copilot should have ditching positions in the after station. However, in this particular ditching, the navigator could have sat on the navigation table with his back against the pilot's armor plate. The use of the shoulder harness by both pilots is very necessary and should be standard equipment in every plane. The emergency window release wire is a simple device which makes for an easy removal of the pilot's window and I consider it an essential modification [a VPB-104 innovation].

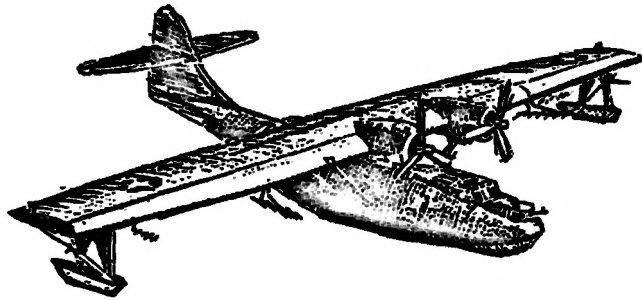
"To prevent the yoke jamming down against the pilots' legs when the plane hits the water, both pilots' seats should be adjusted as low and as far back as possible. This is especially true if the pilots are large men.

"Finally, it is infinitely better to ditch with power than to make a dead stick ditching."

After Sutherland and his crew returned to our camp at Tacloban, he wrote a letter to his parents, mostly to reassure them that the MIA notification was no longer valid. It contains more information about the aftermath of the ditching. What follows is a condensing of the letter and the highlights of the rescue and return:

"We started paddling our rafts towards an island about five miles away. Soon some natives met us and took us to their village. Although it was 5:00 am when we got there the whole village turned out to greet us. The chief of police took us to his house and we were royally fed on fish, rice and yams. We then distributed all of the things we had brought from the plane. The lady that got the parachute was tickled to death.

"The Chief brought up three outrigger canoes and we traveled over to a larger island and settlement. A tremendous welcome was given and our every wish was anticipated. We were fed chicken, eggs, green coconut milk, bananas and commotes [sweet potatoes]. The Chief sent a runner with a message several miles away where they had a radio to send a message back to our base. I was given a bed of a wooden board and slept more soundly than ever before in my whole life.



© 1977 M. J. Jones

PBY

"After several days we went down to the beach to await our pick-up which we knew was coming. After waiting all day long with about 180 natives a black P boat [PBY] came flying over the beach at low altitude. We shot up flares, waved a yellow poncho and set off a smoke bomb. Then I saw a B-24 flying as escort and it turned out to be my own airplane flown by Joe Shea of our squadron. Before we paddled out to the PBY they tried to feed us again but we just could not eat anymore. One of the more unforgettable characters was our self-appointed guard. He hovered over us, carrying a rusty sub-machine gun and had grenades hanging from his belt. As we were leaving, he wanted to give me a monkey, a pig, and two chickens but I declined.

"At the flying boat we found that our rescue pilot was Lt. Delmar R. Fager, USNR from San Francisco, California. His squadron was VPB-54, an experienced Black Cat outfit.

"When we returned to our camp at Tacloban, you have never seen such a welcome! Everyone started yelling and clustering around the truck. The boys at our squadron had been flying on their days off looking for us. The Skipper was really happy to see us. He tries to act like he is tough, and he is when it comes to flying and hitting the Japs. But when somebody gets in trouble out here, he worries himself to death.

"Tomorrow the Skipper wants me to talk to all the pilots here about the ditching. This is important, as no B-24 has landed in the water and got off as fortunately as we did. Oh yes, the airplane I was flying that day was #13."

FOX HOLE JONES - A big party got underway in the tent that I shared with the Skipper. Though we knew that one of our planes was flying an escort mission that day, we did not realize that it was for Sutherland's pick-up. We had given up and had inventoried his effects for shipment back to his next of kin. All his belongings were packed except for any

adult beverages he might have stashed away. It was customary to utilize a KIAS or MIA shipmate's booze most effectively. Besides, it might upset the next of kin to know that their beloved indulged in strong drink and, of course, it didn't ship well.

By nightfall, the party was roaring and a "bitch" session about Tacloban, the rotten airstrip, lousy food, the higher command, and on and on were the current topics. Wishing we were back at Morotai with the good runway and better food. By now, the Wing Commander there, Captain C.B. "Doc" Jones, had taken on saint-like qualities. At this point Whit Wright looked up and said, "Well, there's the old son of a bitch now."

I was not believing this turn of events. One, that Whit had made such a statement and two, that Doc Jones was standing there just outside our tent with an incredulous look on his face. Then, seeing that it was Whit who had made the remark, he broke into a wide grin. They had become very good friends, mutually respectful, during our operations at Morotai. The conversation continued with our Commanding Officer providing details of our current operations to Doc Jones. Continuing the discussion, it then centered on our next base of operations. Whit argued for an immediate move to Mindoro Island and Captain Jones stated that it would be Vigan, located on the northwest coast of Luzon. However, we all recognized that the Vigan landings were sometime in the distant future, whereas Mindoro was now operational.

Captain Jones flipped a lighted cigarette out of the side of our tent which landed upon the tent next to our's. Fearing an ignition, he then stepped off the wooden floor of our tent to retrieve the cigarette--and promptly fell into our fox hole! We had dug deep! Now our respected and admired Wing Commander was partially supporting himself with his elbows on the edges of the fox hole while he was up to his waist in muddy water. We all gathered around, very excited, and gleefully viewed the scene. No one offered to help him out of his trap. It was just too funny. Finally, several gave a helping hand and extracted him from the fox hole/mud hole. Forever thereafter, our favorite Wing Commander would be known as "Fox Hole Jones" (in private conversation, that is, and outside his hearing).

On January 3, 1945, Wood and Crew Eight were on the return leg of their patrol. Just off the northern tip of Luzon and about 30 miles east of the Japanese air base of Aparri they came upon a 600-ton Sugar Charlie. Three strafing runs were made, firing 500 rounds of API. Many tracer rounds flashed as hits were scored. However, the SC had a steel hull and superstructure so only minor damage was claimed. There was rain, low ceilings, and limited visibility in the area which may have prevented an interception by fighters from Aparri Air Base.

Bittenbender and crew had returned from their sector late and after dark this same day and were on the airstrip awaiting transportation to our camp. A Betty came in low, flying over the runway and dropping a string of bombs. These hit on a line of VPB-137 airplanes that were parked wing tip to wing tip. The explosion and fire that followed was a sight to behold. Bitt and his crew did not stay to count the destruction. Eleven PV-1s and one PB4Y-1 of VPB-117 were destroyed. Replacement PV-1s were flown to Tacloban the

next day by VPB-128. The real tragedy was that the VPB-137 flight crews had thought they would now be going home. It was not to be. The VPB-128 flight crews were ferried back to Morotai and the VPB-137 crews continued their patrols from Tacloban.

Task Forces Thirty-Eight and Fifty-Eight were one in the same as regarding the combatant ships assigned. The Commanders of the Task Forces did change. Rear Admirals William F. Halsey and Marc A. Mitscher, USN, with their staffs, alternated from action with the task forces to periods ashore plotting their next forays. For the flight crews of VPB-104, it continued to be a terrifying experience to come upon this massive collection of warships. During the month of January 1945, Task Force 38/58 conducted strikes on Formosa, Luzon, and the South China Sea area. We did stumble upon these Fast Carrier Task Forces all too often. Awesome and frightening.

The tremendous fire power of the task force struck Formosa on January 3rd and Burton had a ringside seat. He was careful to stay clear of the action and established on the VHF voice radio just who they were and where they were. No interceptions by the F6F Combat Air Patrol (CAP), if you please.

At the same time, Stevens and Crew Two made contact and reported a large number of Japanese vessels ripe for "pick'ins" by the aircraft of the U.S. Task Force. At Takao, a major harbor on the west coast of Formosa, 20 freighter-transporters were seen of various sizes, all the way from 2000 to 10,000 tons. In the Pescadores Islands just off the west coast of Formosa there were three destroyers, four freighter-transporters, one 8000-ton tanker, and a number of small craft. On the way back to Tacloban we, as did others, searched for Sutherland and crew.

Bittenbender had to cut short his sector this day as his airplane was experiencing engine problems. It was becoming increasingly common to have problems with the Pratt & Whitney R-1830 engines. Most engine problems and failures were simply due to our operational demands. Our main concern was the timing of a failure. Flying the airplane in the heavily overloaded condition that we were, an engine failure just after liftoff created a very serious situation. On one takeoff from Tacloban in complete darkness, one of my propellers ran away—the propeller governor could not control the revolutions per minute (RPM). I saw 3400 RPM on the gauge, it was really howling, but I chose not to feather the engine. I figured that I was still getting some thrust from it and reducing the airplane's load took time. Managing to get around the pattern quickly, I touched down on the landing at 135 knots. At normal landing weight, we touched down at 105 knots.

Wright and Crew One flew the long search to Cape St. Jacques and Cam Ranh Bay on January 5th. They made contact with freighter-transporters and tankers of varying sizes. There was also a number of patrol craft (PC) accompanying these vessels. Wright took a look at the inner harbor at Cam Ranh Bay and counted 14 Jakes. No attack was made as the Japanese gunners were ready. Copilot Mike Blevins reported in his logbook that anti-aircraft shells were "popping" overhead the PB4Y-1. They landed back at Tacloban after 14.4 hours in the air.

A MAJOR CONTACT - On January 6, 1945, I had a search sector to the China coast. The weather was poor as I cruised northward along the coast with my APS-15 search radar looking seaward for targets. Off Amoy, my radarman called out a number of substantial blips about 15 miles off our starboard side. I continued to fly northerly into a 25-knot wind, intending to use this as an addition to my speed while making a visual examination of the suspected convoy. When I judged that we were ten miles ahead of these targets, I turned out, away from the coast. After five minutes or so the radar contacts were then directly off my starboard beam and I turned towards them. Cruising at 1000', I was in the base of a ragged ceiling with visibility of two to three miles, haze and drizzle.

I added military power, 45" MAP and 2500 RPM, to the engines and made ready to drop down slightly from the indefinite overcast to get a good look at this large group of ships. Then, well in front of the main body, was a Sugar Able two-stack super-tanker. Weighing in at 40,000 tons, it appeared huge with two smoke stacks athwartship poking up from the structure on the stern of the ship. What a disappointment to have no bombs to lay upon this monster of the seas. Then the main body came into view and an exciting view it was; in three columns were one aircraft carrier that appeared to be about the size of our escort carriers (CVEs), one light cruiser, seven destroyers, three large transport ships of 8000 to 10,000 tons, and two additional large tankers of 10,000 tons. A big find and I sent off our contact report as quickly as possible. I also transmitted this information on the VHF guard frequency with the hope that one of our submarines might be near enough to receive the information promptly.

On the return portion of my search, I flew along the west coast of Formosa and counted one small freighter-transport, one destroyer escort, and three small anti-submarine craft (PC) at anchor in the Pescadores Islands. In Takao Harbor, there were nine freighter-transport of about 5000 tons, three large tankers, four SCs, and many small craft. The AA batteries at Takeo were quite accurate. Scary, but made no hits on us. I had counted many enemy ships this day but was never able to determine whether our submarines or carrier task forces were able to make use of this information.

Bittenbender's patrol on January 6th became one of several unfortunate incidents with our brethren fighter pilots. His electronic "Identification Friend or Foe" (IFF) box had failed. Unknown to Bitt, one of our Task Force Combat Information Centers (CIC) on board a carrier classified him as a "bogey," an unknown contact but treated as enemy until visually identified. Then here came the F6Fs, boring in with mean intent. Montoux, the bow gunner, did not wait and opened fire. To do otherwise would court disaster. The fire power of a flight of Grumman Hellcats was just too great. The "friendlies" broke off their gunnery run.

Burton also saw units of our striking fast carriers this same day. Assigned sector three, which would take him and Crew Ten to Swatow on the China coast, their flight would take 13.5 flight hours. While flying past Manila and northern Luzon, they witnessed

the awesome sight of our carrier air groups hitting airfields in the Manila area, Clark Field, and Lingayen Gulf.

A DISASTROUS LANDING - On January 7, 1945, Waldeck and Crew Seven would cover the Hong Kong search sector flying their own airplane, BuNo 38754. After the 12-hour flight, they crashed on the landing roll-out at Tacloban. The starboard brake locked, which then threw the patrol plane into a row of Fifth Air Force fighters parked wing tip to wing tip alongside the runway. Six fighters were destroyed as well as the PB4Y-1. Two of our flight crewmen died.

Eddie Bagein, a mechanic-gunner, assigned to Crew Seven, tells the story of the crash:

"The somewhat spectacular accident we had on Tacloban is still very well fixed in my memory. We broke an axle on landing and wiped out a number of aircraft parked along the runway and stopped just short of hitting some C-54s loaded with drums of aviation fuel. Raymond L. Kelsey was crushed in the nose turret and Lazarus "Blackie" De Vartanian was pinned down by the ammunition cans from the top turret. Unable to escape, they perished in the fire.

"Carl Thorp, a copilot, experienced severe and painful burns to his hands and face. Sitting in the cockpit, he turned to exit the area after George Waldeck, the PPC. Intending to leave the airplane through the hatch over the navigation table, he was held up by others climbing out. Thorp returned to his cockpit seat and attempted to pull out the release wire and exit from the window. But he could not get the plexiglass bubble window out. He then returned to the navigator's hatch as it was then clear. Looking up, he saw flames flowing across the opening but figured he had no choice but to go out this exit anyway. The metal around the hatch edges had become quite hot and it burned his hands as he climbed out. Jumping to the ground, he landed in soft sand. As he pushed up with his hands, he saw strips of skin hanging down. In his panicky state he proceeded to pull the strips of skin off but fortunately some Army medics arrived and grabbed him. They took him to an aid station, gave him a shot of morphine, and dressed his wounds. Carl Thorp recovered after treatment at the local Army Hospital and returned to duty.

"Flash Gordon and I were unable to go forward from the waist hatch area because of the fire in the bomb bays. We did manage to open the rear hatch aft of us and dropped about twenty feet to the ground. We took off running at a record speed even though hampered with our bulky winter flight gear. We then watched our "Bad Penny," the PB4Y-1 assigned to our crew, burn to nothing left except four piles of engine debris and a bit of the tail section.

"Later the medicinal brandy we received at the hospital did dim the immediate shock of our near demise. But nothing will dim the memories of the laughter and smiles of the Armenian, De Vartanian, or the stoic humor of the farmer from Minnesota, Ray Kelsey."

Although there was still plenty of fight left in the Japanese that we had to contend with, it was obvious that there was no way they could prevail. If the sight of our Fast Carrier Task Forces was not fully convincing, then seeing our amphibious force streaming toward Lingayen Gulf for the invasion of Luzon should erase any and all doubts. Fred Himsworth describes this fleet as seen while flying a routine search mission:

"Our first two patrols in January were uneventful but on the third I saw a sight to stagger the imagination. It was January 7th, the eve of the invasion of Luzon, and our return leg took us down the west side of the island, giving us a magnificent view of the invasion fleet. You can see a long way at 8000 feet and as far as I could see the ocean was covered with ships. There must have been four or five hundred of them. In addition, the sky was full of carrier planes either going to or coming back from strikes on the island. It was an exciting sight and one I will long remember.

"And we were a lot luckier than a crew from another squadron patrolling the same area the next day. One of our carrier fighters attacked them and wounded three crewmen before he recognized his error."

The squadron involved in the above incident was VPB-117, operating along with us from Tacloban. Much to our unhappiness, we were still forced to exchange airplanes between the squadrons from time to time. On this occasion, the VPB-117 crew was flying my airplane, BuNo 38889. Damage to the tail section of my airplane was substantial and required the replacement of the tail turret. I did not get to fly my own airplane for the rest of January.

The resentment to this trading of aircraft arrangement came to a head. One of our chief petty officers was prompted to write a letter to his opposite number in 117. Their procedure for cleaning and servicing the 0.50 caliber machine guns was quite different from ours (as well as other servicing chores). The One-O-Four crewmen broke down the guns thoroughly and made or checked a variety of adjustments. Brand X of flight crewmen merely ran an oiled wad down the barrel without the break-down.

The offending CPO of VPB-104 utilized the term "muzzle-cleaning bastards" quite liberally in his letter. For reasons unknown and not fully understood, the One Seventeen contingent took offense. The war was not limited to the skies over the Philippines, South China Sea, Borneo, and the Netherland East Indies.

January 8, 1945, saw the welcome arrival of a replacement crew, with Lt. Darrel D. Becker as the PPC, and was designated as Crew Twenty-One. In addition to the PPC, the following pilots and crewmen were to make up Crew Twenty-One:

Ens. Donald Wiederspan
Ens. Frank Chambers
Boardman, Harold M. AMM3c
Byrne, John H. AMM2c
Davis, John F. AMM3c
Dingle, William E. ARM3c
Farrell, Malcolm L. AMM3c
King, James R. AOM3c
Ryan, Emmett J. ARM3c
Teaford, Robert E. AOM3c

The inflow of replacement crews was very slow and, on average, we operated with one or two crews short. And too, we continued to operate with 13 PB4Y-1 aircraft vice our assigned complement of 15. However, our routine sector searches remained at six per day with additional special missions scheduled regularly.

On January 9, 1945, the amphibious assault began at Lingayen Gulf. It was a massive effort supported by forces of all services. The wise PPC steered well clear of the area when at all possible.

The effects of the Fast Carrier Task Forces' operations in the Formosa and Luzon areas and the sweep through the South China Sea was evident. The pick'ins had become slim indeed. However, we kept trying. January 8th saw Didier strafing a Dinah, a twin-engine reconnaissance plane, on Calapan airfield located on the north tip of Mindoro. Seen through heavy camouflage, it appeared intact with no damage except possibly a wheels-up landing. Didier made two very low level runs, firing off 300 rounds. Though it did not burn it is believed that it would never fly again.

Bittenbender had more than his share of airplane mechanical problems on January 9th. He began his search sector in PB4Y-1 BuNo 38859 but his long-range CW radio failed and he returned to base. However, going and coming back, he did give some comfort to a small formation of our landing craft steaming along his route. There was some security in having a U.S. Navy aircraft overhead however briefly. The next takeoff was in BuNo 38789. About five hours into his patrol, he had to return due to an oil leak. For the day he logged 13.4 hours but only partially covered his sector.

Three days later Fulwider found ten landing craft one mile off shore at Okinawa. Despite the poor weather, his crew fired 2800 rounds at these craft, eight of which had troops on board. Completing five attacks, one landing craft was burning, three had gone dead in the water, and the other six made it to the beach. Crew Twenty saw ten men jump

over the side. Fulwider and his crew believed that many of the troops were killed but an accurate count could not be made.

On January 11, 1945, Lt.(jg) Joseph D. Shea, the PPC, and Crew Eighteen failed to return from a patrol to the southeast coast of Indo-China. Several days later we received a report from friendly Philipinos on Panay Island that a four-engine bomber had crashed on the northeast tip of their island. Seven bodies were found near the wreckage and one, identified by his social security card, was a copilot in Crew Eighteen.

Months later, an intelligence summary reported that on the same date and in the area of Shea's search sector, fighters from a U.S. carrier task force had shot down an unidentified four-engine bomber. Although it cannot be confirmed, it is likely that this was our PB4Y-1. Rather than having been shot down immediately, the patrol plane may have been damaged but was able to make it to Panay before crashing. We will never know, but our experiences and distrust of our own fighters was a deep and growing concern.

On January 12th our searches made many contacts but no kills. The no bombs and no attack order continued to rankle. Wright flew sector four, China coast to Amoy, the Pescadores, and Formosa, and drew anti-aircraft fire but scored no kills nor made a claim of damage. Burton flew a special 5.5-hour search for Shea but reported no results. Noon and Crew Four flew the Hong Kong sector and reported a 10,000-ton freighter-transport. They too, were impressed with the magnitude of the amphibious effort at Lingayen.

For January 13th through the 15th, the wing directed additional searches to cover north and south of Hainan Island and to the west of Palawan Island and Borneo. Although the carrier task forces ran their own searches with an SB2C dive bomber and a F6F escort, one must assume the higher command wanted even more coverage.

January 13th also had Waldeck flying a special weather reporting mission to Hainan and the south China coast for the roving carrier fleet. It was all bad. They landed at Mindoro for fuel and with an inoperative VHF radio. Staying overnight with the Army there made our Tacloban camp look much better. The next morning while preparing the PB4Y-1 for flight, a P-47 very nearly wiped out our patrol plane and crew. The pilot of the Republic Aircraft Company fighter plane was going to "hot dog" it a bit. On the takeoff run he raised his landing gear while not quite off the ground rather than waiting to fly off. Dipping a little, that great big propeller chewed into the runway and in he went with a great cloud of dust generated. Amazingly, a very lucky Army Air Corps pilot walked away from the episode.

Continuing with the 13th, Burton flew another search looking for Shea and his crew. The flight lasted 7.5 hours.

Bittenbender had the southern Ryukyu Islands sector and strafed several luggers off Miyako Jima. They had made a late takeoff and had five hours of darkness returning. This,

combined with very poor weather, made them unsure of their position (not really lost, just didn't know where they were). They landed at Tacloban finally, very low on fuel.

I flew the Skipper's airplane on January 14, 1945, on a search to Hong Kong, sector two. I found the Portuguese island/city of Macao to be empty. Though allegedly neutral, we sometimes saw enemy shipping and seaplanes there. At Hong Kong I made a zoom climb to the peak of the island and had a very clear look into the harbor. We were then able to report one light cruiser, two destroyers, two destroyer escorts, four large tankers of about 10,000 tons, and seven freighter-transport of various sizes. On this patrol I also saw two of our carrier task forces. Be sure that I announced our presence on the VHF radio very early.

On January 15th the wing extended most all of our search sectors to 1050 nautical miles. It's the thought that counts. And this was a most thoughtful addition. An extra 50 miles did not make much of an impact on the current struggle to cover the 1000 nmi sectors. And I had yet to see a wing or Seventh Fleet staffee observe at first hand one of our search missions. But they carried the heavy responsibilities of like decisions.

Apparently, Whit Wright was forewarned. On the day of the edict, he flew a patrol all the way to the southwestern tip of Borneo. This was 1100 nautical miles one way. Given the usual 100 nmi cross-leg at the end of the sectors, this amounted to 2300 total miles flown in 13.8 hours. The Commanding Officer really knew his cruise control.



Sugar Dog (SD)
100 - 400 tons

A LARGE SIGHTING OF SMALL VESSELS - Noon and crew flew the southern Ryukyu Island search on the 15th and sighted a total of 85 vessels, mostly Sugar Charlies, Sugar Dogs, Sugar Puppies, and luggers. Obviously, the Japanese were using these islands as staging points. The natural harbor of the island of Ishigaki Shima could, and did, offer shelter and replenishment for these small vessels.

January 16, 1945, Bittenbender and Crew Thirteen flew the China coast sector. Returning, they landed at Mindoro to refuel. Now dark, they took off and returned to Tacloban for a night landing after 15.8 hours of flying time. Bitt tells of the landing as follows:

"The air was calm as I made the approach from the south. The PB4Y-1 seemed to drift left and so far that we knocked down a tent with the port wing and narrowly missed a F4U. Since we were straddling the runway flare pots on the left I added power for a go-around. With full flaps and landing gear down, we were staggering. But I had to start a turn to the right

to avoid a 500' mountain ahead and across the bay from the end of the runway. As I called for gear-up, my wing tip was only a few feet off the water and the harbor was filled with ships. As the landing gear finally retracted, I asked the copilot to start raising the flaps a few degrees at a time. We were still only a few feet above the water in a turn and showing only 80 to 90 KIAS. As our altitude and airspeed improved we were clearing the ships by only a few feet. But we did get on around for another landing. The airplane again drifted off to the left but this time I slammed in right rudder and managed to land on the runway. The man in the tent was not hurt."

Bitt's experience was somewhat to be expected. The whole area was blacked out due to "washing machine Charlie." The runway flare pots were quite dim and with the dark waters of the bay beyond, some degree of vertigo could be expected. Add to that a complex cockpit and an airplane that required good flying techniques.

Wright's patrol to Hong Kong on January 18th reported an unusual occurrence. Conducting the ship count in the harbor, they received a good deal of anti-aircraft fire. At the same time the Japanese laid smoke in the harbor in an attempt to hide their ships. A first for this tactic.

Whit Wright also encountered the Third or Fifth Fleet in the South China Sea. Generally, two or three of our patrols did see the carrier task forces each day. However, there had been no ugly incidents for some time. This was due, most likely, to our flight crews making a decided effort to announce their presence and the carrier's Combat Information Centers now more or less expecting our passages through their (?) area. Often they asked for a full weather report of our route thus far. Do understand that we did not dispute the ownership of the South China Sea.

On January 18, 1945, Noon and his troops caught a 200-ton Sugar Dog of steel construction just off the southeast coast of Formosa. They made two strafing runs, firing 1000 API rounds into the vessel. Several small fires were started but it appeared they could be contained. A subsequent patrol found this SD beached and laying on its side, abandoned.

Also on the 18th, Bittenbender flew sector four to Amoy, China, returning along the west coast of Formosa. In the Pescadores group of islands, he saw 12 large freighter-transport ships. Three Petes took off as he passed by but they showed no interest in the patrol plane. The weather was very poor throughout the search and it may have been that the scout seaplanes just missed Bitt due to the visibility.

THE RED PRINCE - During World War One the German Air Forces had their "Red Baron," Manfred von Richthofen. He was credited with 80 victories. The Japanese had their "Red Prince" during WW II and while not as productive as von Richthofen, he was

credited with 52 shoot-downs. Burton and his crew met the Red Prince off Saigon, French Indo-China, on January 19, 1945. This is Burton's story:

"We were assigned the 1050 nmi sector to Saigon and I knew we would have to watch our fuel consumption very closely. Also, the city and harbor were strongly defended so we would have to be very alert on this patrol. Trying to save fuel, I approached the area at 8000', planning to do a shipping count and then get out quickly. Immediately four fighters, two Oscars and two Tonys, rose to intercept us. I turned the airplane around very sharply and dove to 4000' with military power on the engines. I figured to get far off shore as quickly as possible to discourage the fighters from following us.

"About forty miles off shore, I reduced power back to a long range cruise setting and selected auto-lean on the carburetors. I didn't get far enough quickly enough as here they came hell bent to do business. I yelled to the copilot to reset to military power and started a dive for the water in what I believe was nearly a vertical dive. All of us well knew to get right down on the water when in a duel with fighters. At 100' above the wave tops, Bill Wales in the waist hatch reported that the Oscar on the starboard was performing acrobatics. I told him as well as all the gunners to ignore the showoffs and watch for the ones making a determined attack. Two other fighters kept trying to get ahead of us to really box us in but I turned one way then the other to prevent them from establishing themselves. Of course, I was also varying my altitude up and down, skidding and whatever to deny them setting up for an accurate firing run. Then a Tony, painted red, came boring in on our tail, firing all guns from a very low altitude. He was so low that he was kicking up a rooster tail and his gunfire churned up a terrific spray to such a degree that I thought that we had got him. Not so, and as I continued jinking around every which way, the red Tony came pulling alongside so close we could have thrown a rock and hit him.

"Then they all turned away and headed back to Saigon. Guess they became a little uneasy being out of the sight of land. We settled down a bit and again set up for long range cruise. With all the high power on the engine this would make it tight on fuel. We made it OK but the 14-hour flight did not leave much of a reserve. As per usual I held a debrief with the crew and reviewed the battle with the Japanese fighters. I really bore in on the tail gunner as he should have knocked that Tony out of the sky as close as he came to us. Gilbert Baker said that he didn't see him. I said, what do you mean you didn't see him, he flew right up our tail! Baker replied that his turret Plexiglas was covered with urine from the after relief tube which obstructed his vision. I really got into this problem and found that the tube had a fault and instead of dissipating the fluid, it collected on the tail turret. A simple fault that could have been fatal.

"Also, as a routine after a patrol I reported in to our ACIO and told him the story. He was unbelieving and asked if I was trying for a section eight (mentally unbalanced) discharge. And since we made no claim for a kill there was no AAR filed nor was there an entry into the VPB-104 War Diary.

"*Time* magazine carried an article about the Imperial Japanese Prince who had amassed a substantial number of aerial victories. To achieve this record, his squadron mates would do the herding and distractions and the Prince would do the shooting. Little did he know that except for a malfunctioning pee tube, he could have become a victim rather than a victor."

AROUND AND AROUND - The only kill of the 19th was by Wood and Crew Eight. About 100 nmi west southwest of Brunei, Borneo, Woody found two Sugar Dogs of 200 tons and one tug of 150 tons. One SD was under tow by the tug and both SDs were loaded with fuel drums and many personnel. Wood made a total of 25 strafing runs firing 4000 rounds of API. All three ships caught fire and burned fiercely, with one of the SDs exploding. All three sank with personnel jumping over the side.



EXOTIC INOCULATIONS - It was about this time that I was appointed as Officer-in-Charge of inoculations. For some long period I had not taken an inoculation of any kind. Being in the forward area and/or moving about from one base to another, I found that the medics simply did not keep up too well with our medical records. When the general call was put out to fall in line for a shot, I just did not go. I got caught, at, of all places, Tacloban, Leyte, Philippine Islands.

Our aircraft serving unit, CASU Nine, had set up a dispensary in our camp occupying the only Quonset hut other than the Wing Commander's. And, lo and behold, the Medical Officer of FAW-10 awakened to the fact that our flight crews were flying over China! Horror of all horrors, they had not been inoculated for the plague, yellow fever, cholera, and Lord knows what else. A P-38 was dispatched to acquire all sorts of exotic serum and the call was issued to form up and be shot up (big syringes and long needles were the order of the day). I didn't go and was caught (the worst word in the dictionary).

Whitney Wright's humor took a bad turn. Not only would the O-in-C be grounded until he was up to date on ALL shots, he would stay grounded until ALL members of 104 were up to date. The list of recalcitrant squadron members that passed from the medics to my C.O. then to me was much longer than ever imagined. The memory of suffering the indignities of many shots and really sore arms caused a great number of members of Screaming 104 to hold the same distaste for inoculations as I did. Running them all down and leading them into the dispensary took four days. And I decided that my anti-inoculation program had to change.

On January 20th I made a good contact on ships located in the harbor of Kiirun. It was difficult to get in and get out for a ship count there. It was a natural anchorage set back into high hills all around. And too, the Japanese defended this harbor with a good assortment of anti-aircraft batteries. It was strategically positioned on the most northern point of Formosa. This day there were seven medium-size (5000 ton) freighter-transports, two large 10,000-ton tankers, two medium 6000-ton tankers, and five Sugar Charlies in the harbor.

I made no other contacts nor kills for the rest of January. I returned from one search after seven hours of flying due to an engine oil leak. We continued to have a considerable number of aborts because of airplane problems. I have no data to support this, but I would estimate that between five and ten percent of our flights returned to base without completing their sectors. However, the sector was always covered by one means or another.

A LARGE CONVOY OF SMALL VESSELS - January 21, 1945, saw some action and important contacts. Both Fulwider and Sutherland scored against Sugar Dogs. The SD that Jock attacked was a straggler behind 44 additional 150-ton Sugar Dogs. This large number of small vessels was located about 50 miles west of Okinawa and was steaming to the southwest. A large amount of materials was moving towards the contested areas of Formosa and the Philippines.

Wright flew the Hong Kong sector this day and logged 13.8 hours. He did the ship count there a little differently by flying around the harbor to the west and over Kowloon. By this approach, there was no AA fire to greet him as he made his pass by the harbor. At anchor were one large 8000-ton transport ship, three small 2500-ton freighter-transports, one 10,000-ton tanker, and one destroyer.



Burton flew a special night search on January 22nd. Their sector was to the south of Borneo looking for a reported Japanese aircraft carrier. No carrier nor any other ship was found. But four enemy night fighters found the PB4Y-1. It was a cat-and-mouse game for awhile but no shooting.

AN UNTIMELY ENGINE FAILURE - On January 24, 1945, Sutherland and Crew Fourteen began a takeoff from Tacloban in the early morning darkness. Just after liftoff an engine failed and their PB4Y-1, BuNo 38807, crashed into the water. Five crewmen were killed, three seriously injured, and three escaped with no injuries. Those killed in this crash were: Edwin H. Edel, AMM3c; Walter Mazurek, ARM1c; Oran W. Crummitt, AMM3c; Calvin B. Coates, AMM3c; and Sidney R. Beechy, AOMB2c. Ira Williams was a crewman aboard during the crash and was seriously injured. His story follows:

“Kane and I were in the after station (waist gun stations) as we started our takeoff run. The hatches on both sides were closed as usual and it was dark outside. We seemed to be airborne but as I glanced out I could see the wing tip lights reflected in the water. We both knew we were too low. There was no warning from the cockpit that anything was wrong.

“We each reached for a hatch opening lever as we hit the water. After impact, I was in the water with fire and smoke all around. The plane had broken apart and the tail section was floating nearby. I made my way to it and somehow managed to crawl onto it. Some boats were making their way towards us and I yelled and they hollered back that they saw me. I was then unconscious for a period of time. Coming to much later in the hospital, I found that one leg was in a cast from the waist down. On the other side my arm and shoulder were in a cast. I was heavily bandaged, seemingly all over, as I was burned all over. My hands looked as though I had sixteen-ounce boxing gloves on. Another time while conscious, Mr. Hoch and Mr. Drake [the two copilots] came visiting. They told me that five had been killed and two others were in the hospital also. They also told me that the squadron had been notified that I had not made it but they would have this corrected. I was glad this had not been sent back home. Sometime later I was transferred to a hospital ship. They were better equipped and I received much better treatment.

“For quite a period of the time I was transferred to Finschhafen, New Guinea, then back to a hospital ship and off loaded again at Lea, New Guinea. Here I stayed for a long time. Saw a USO show which featured Carmen Miranda. I was finally declared fit for duty and released.

"I was given my records and told to return to the Philippines and rejoin my squadron. I traveled by ship to Samar Island which was just across the bay from Tacloban. But no one knew where 104 was located. Finally, a new replacement told me that the squadron was at Clark Field, Luzon. I caught a flight to Nichols Field just outside of Manila and after a short hitchhike rejoined VPB-104. The date was April 25th, three months after our crash at Tacloban."

A WELL-HANDLED EMERGENCY - Waldeck and Crew Seven was a good deal luckier. They lost an engine after takeoff but were well above the dark waters of the bay. Immediately they made a successful drop of both bomb bay fuel tanks (no bombs were aboard, otherwise they would have gone first). The fuel cells and 800 gallons of AvGas lightened the load by about 5400 pounds. But the airplane was still heavy and it was still very dark. It was a sweat getting back around and landing safely.

Bittenbender and crew had a close one on a rainy day while climbing out after takeoff from Tacloban. From a break in the clouds, they saw that they had just missed a mountain top on Leyte. Throughout the month of January the weather had made the "ordinary hazards of flight" even more touch and go.

On the 24th Hemphill and Crew Seventeen, returning from a search of the China coast, found a small group of vessels between Formosa and northern Luzon. Leading the column were four Sugar Dogs, followed by two luggers. Since the SDs often mounted 20 mm cannons on top of the pilot house, Hemphill made one strafing run on the two luggers. Not much point in letting it hang out with no bombs aboard to level the playing field. The run on the smaller vessels was productive as one burned and sank and the second lugger was lightly damaged by the 800 rounds of API.

On January 24, 1945, Lt.(jg) Richard S. Jameson and crew arrived as a replacement and was designated as Crew Twenty-Two. The other members of this crew were:

Ens. Kenneth McHenry
Ens. David Lanquist
Arnett, Charles J. AOM3c
Dodsworth, Willard S. AMM3c
Fanelli, Donald G. ARM3c
Garrison, James W. ARM3c
Morris, Louis F. AMM3c
Ridge, William H. ARM2c
Schoenwalder, George T. AMM2c
Skews, Roger H. ARM3c

Two days later Wright searched the China coast and found no shipping contacts. At Swatow he strafed a Betty on the airstrip there and in turn gathered the attention of the anti-aircraft batteries. Slight damage on the bomber was assessed.

A NICE CLEAN KILL - Goodman made a clean kill on a Jake this day just to the west of the southern end of Formosa. Cruising at 1000', Bill Goodman saw the twin-float scout plane at the same altitude and on a reciprocal course. The Jake made a right 90-degree turn followed by the PB4Y-1, quickly closing. At 200' range John Bierman in the bow turret fired off 200 rounds, scoring many hits in the engine. As the patrol plane slid by, Elmer Krom, manning the single 0.50 caliber machine gun at the starboard waist hatch, fired 175 rounds hitting in the cockpit, wing root, and engine. The Jake went down in flames. It hit the water, tearing off both floats, and then bounced back into the air. It then dived into the water, breaking into bits. The rear seat gunner in the enemy aircraft made no effort to use his 20 mm cannon. The entire engagement took three minutes.

Adler and Crew Five searched the lower end of the Ryukyu chain on January 27, 1945. He found four Sugar Dogs 25 miles west of Miyako Jima. He made four strafing runs on the largest SD, leaving it smoking and dead in the water. This vessel had a steel hull and wooden decks and was judged to have been damaged.

The next day Wright searched farther up the chain. At Okinawa they found many ships of unidentified classes and sizes.

At the other end of our operating area, Noon and Crew Four had the Brunei, Borneo sector. The Japanese at the airfield there, Miri, sent up an Oscar to do business with the patrol plane. After several exchanges of gunfire the Japanese Army fighter left the scene smoking. There was no damage to the PB4Y-1.

On January 30, 1945, Didier and his crew bagged a Val about ten miles southeast of Ishigake Shima, Southern Ryukyu. The players this day aboard the Liberator were: James Wotherspoon in the top turret; Charles Burke, bow turret; Grover Combs, tail turret; and Robert Hayes, port waist. They all participated in this victory. The Japanese single-engine dive bomber was cruising at 2000' and the patrol plane at 1500' when Didier saw the Val dead ahead, eight miles. The two planes met head-on with the bow turret opening fire as the range quickly closed and scored hits in the engine. As the enemy aircraft passed overhead, the top turret fired into the fuselage and wing roots. Then the tail turret had his turn shooting as the Val continued on course but well shot up.

Didier reversed course and with military power on the engines, quickly caught the slower airplane. Closing, they saw the dive bomber jettison two depth charges. Didier passed along the starboard side of the victim and the bow, port waist, and tail gunners all got in more bursts. The outer starboard wing was blown off as the Val burst into flames then exploded and fell into the sea. A total of 750 rounds were fired by the PB4Y-1 crewmen.

ONE VERY GOOD JAPANESE PILOT - While Jerry Didier was easily making his kill, Goodman's encounter with one very good Jake pilot that same day did not turn out so well. The Japanese ASW missions were flown by a variety of airplanes. The twin-float

three-placed airplane soon to be engaged by Goodman was patrolling off Kiurun, hoping to offer some protection for the shipping in and out of this important harbor. The patrol plane PPC saw the Jake on a crossing situation with both airplanes at 1000' altitude. Goodman made a hard right turn, placing the patrol plane on the Jake's tail. He closed to 400 yards and directed the bow and top gunners to open fire. The clever Japanese pilot made a very steep turn to the right, rolling out after 360 degrees. The PB4Y-1 tried to stay with the seaplane as it made this maneuver but was "out-turned" and lost 400 yards of range. The identical closing range, firing, and then being out maneuvered and losing position, continued for fifteen minutes. Some tracer flashes were observed on the wings and fuselage of the Jake but damage, if any, was not sufficient to affect its performance. The skillful pilot made his escape into Formosa and over an airfield there.

The Liberator was faster and out-gunned the seaplane by far. But the Jake pilot utilized his one advantage, maneuverability, to live and fight another day. This was one of the very few escapes by this model airplane. There was no report of return gunfire from the 20 mm gun in the rear seat of the Jake.

Bitt flew his last January patrol with one sick engine. On the Hong Kong sector, he flew for 13.1 hours with the number two engine "popping" all the way. Three hours of the return leg was at night, adding to the uncomfortable situation. Nor was the night landing at Tacloban a piece of cake.

A HO HUM FLIGHT - Ettinger and Crew Nine's final patrol of January 1945 was a bit more than uncomfortable, it was downright scary. Fred Himsworth tells the story:

"We had a very close call on the last day of January. This was due to a combination of very bad weather and flying a plane not familiar to us. Unfortunately, it was a gas hog.

"The weather was terrible all over the area and we were on instruments most all the way. Besides this, we had very strong headwinds. I could see, from my seat at the radio set, that the pilots were very concerned about our fuel consumption. From their calculations we should have adequate fuel but the fuel gauges were telling a different story. Even though these gauges were not very reliable, we had to give them some consideration.

"To make matters worse, upon our return to Tacloban, the airstrip was completely socked in. Usually, with these conditions, the airfield would turn on a powerful searchlight aimed straight up to help airplanes find the field. But this day the weather was so bad that the light could not shine through. Mr. Ettinger knew approximately where we were from radio bearings but could not find the airfield. He dropped down to about 150 feet before he could even see the water. Then he did manage to find the channel between Leyte and Samar. The airstrip was located at the end of the channel

so he knew he was flying in the right direction. But he couldn't tell how far we were from the field. Feeling his way along in the rain he kept trying to see the airstrip. Things started looking pretty bad when one of our engines cut out from lack of fuel. Our PPC was about to pick up his microphone to tell us to take ditching stations when he saw the airstrip 300 yards ahead of us. He had to make a slight turn to the right to line up properly. Mr. Ettinger went straight in, making a perfect landing on three engines. We had barely enough gas left to taxi off the runway. Another engine stopped due to lack of gas before we got to our parking revetment. Another ho hum flight!"

For the month of January 1945 the squadron had flown 159 operational missions totaling 1980 flight hours. No bombs were expended due to restrictions by the higher command but 75,550 rounds of 0.50 caliber API were fired by our gunners.

Six vessels were sunk totaling 750 tons. By class, ships sunk were; four Sugar Dogs, one tug, and one landing craft.

Eleven vessels were damaged, totaling 1100 tons. By class, ships damaged were; one Sugar Charlie, three Sugar Dogs, one lugger, and three landing craft.

In aerial combat three aircraft were shot down. The types were; one Dave, one Jake, and one Val. Damaged was one Jake. One Dinah was destroyed on the ground.

Losses of personnel were eighteen killed in action or missing in action and three wounded in action. One entire flight crew was lost and two crews lost sufficient personnel to be no longer functional.

Two replacement crews reported on board during January. An average of 13 flight crews were available for missions during this period.

The following PB4Y-1 aircraft were lost or destroyed as follows:

<u>Bureau Number</u>	<u>Cause</u>
38813	Ditched, fuel exhaustion
38754	Crashed on landing
38876	Failed to return from patrol
38807	Crashed into water, engine failure on takeoff
38972	Landing accident

The following aircraft were transferred to ComAir 7thFleet Logistics Section; 38806, 38789, and 46736. It is assumed these aircraft were no longer suitable for combat missions or required extensive maintenance.

The following aircraft were received from the Logistics Section; 38876, 38875, 38872, 46736, 46974, 46926, 46924, and 47856.

There were many lost opportunities during this month. Given the number of contacts made, a substantial increase in our score would surely have occurred. All hands resented the no attack, no bombs restrictions and always will.

CHAPTER SIX UNLEASHED TURMOIL AT TACLOBAN

On February 1, 1945, the restrictions upon carrying bombs and initiating attacks were lifted. This action improved our morale considerably. Our mission remained the same, that of supporting the U.S. Army in their landings and capture of additional islands of the Philippines and the overall liberation of the Philippino people. In addition, we were to attack targets of opportunity to assist in cutting off the flow of oil and materials to the Japanese homeland and the southbound flow of men and materials fighting our troops. We continued to operate under the command of Fleet Air Wing Ten and being serviced by CASU Nine. Our complement of PB4Y-1 aircraft was now maintained much better. Commander, Aircraft Seventh Fleet's Logistic Section, had established a pool of aircraft at Owi. In turn, FAW-10 set up a "ready issue" stock of aircraft at Samar to meet our replacement needs more rapidly. The search sectors continued to essentially cover the same areas. However, on February 6, 1945, VPB-117 moved to Mindoro Island and new sectors were established for operations from this base. These searches extended westward to just north of Hainan Island and southward through the South China Sea to the west coast of Borneo. VPB-104 continued to be assigned these more southerly areas also.

On this same day, VPB-111 arrived with their PB4Y-1 aircraft to base at Mindoro. A detachment of this patrol squadron was assigned to operate from the temporary airstrip of Mangalden at Lingayen Gulf. It was planned to increase PB4Y-1 operations there, as initially the dry and dusty airstrip looked good for expansion. But then the rains came and it became a mudhole of the first order and flight operations for the big bombers were impossible. It remained as an emergency airstrip only for our operations.

While these movements and the addition of another long-range search squadron shortened some sectors, our flight times while on patrol remained much the same. It simply permitted more time for the hunt on the China coast sectors. For the other searches to Wenchow, beyond Okinawa and to Oagari (Daito), we were still stretching to maximum range. During February we became very much aware of the next major thrust towards the Japanese homeland, the assault on Okinawa. A considerable number of U.S. Army and Marine Corps officers took the scenic tour to Okinawa with us. Even a U.S. Navy meteorologist felt duty-bound to view the weather there. We could have told him and saved him the trip--poor to rotten!

Wright took off at 0410 from Tacloban on February 1, 1945. The airplane was loaded with 3400 gallons of AvGas and five 100# incendiary clusters. He would cover the 1050 nmi sector in 14.7 hours. At midday, located 120 miles north-northeast of the northern tip of Formosa, they attacked a 150-ton Sugar Dog. Scoring with two 100# ICs and firing 600 rounds of API, the bridge of the small transport vessel was burned off. It was left smoldering but still underway.

About 50 miles west of the first SD, a second was found and given the same treatment with about the same results.

On the return leg and just off the northeast coast of Formosa, they found three sea trucks of about 25 tons each. The last 100# incendiary cluster was dropped on one of the open hull, very small, but powered vessels. It burned to the water line. The other two were thoroughly strafed but the PB4Y-1 could not stay to assess the damage.

Off the north end of Luzon, Wright sighted a landing craft tank (LCT) escorted by one destroyer escort. Gunfire from these two ships was meager and inaccurate, causing no damage to the patrol plane.

A JAKE PILOT FAILS TO ELUDE - Jameson and Crew Twenty-Two had the Hong Kong search sector this day and scored a nice easy kill on a Jake. The patrol plane was cruising at 4000' and sighted the enemy anti-submarine twin-float plane at six miles and 1,000' altitude. Jameson went to full power on the engines and dove down for the attack. Rapidly closing on the tail of the Jake, the pilot made a hard left turn. Being much slower, the Japanese pilot turned well inside the PB4Y-1, flying at 220 knots. Even so, Jameson turned quickly to come around again on the tail of the Jake. Now diving to the water, the Jake again banked hard left but the PPC had slowed the big bomber considerably and stayed with him on the outside, closing to 1000' range. Louis Morris, manning the single 0.50 caliber machine gun in the port waist, then got in a good burst, creating flames from the enemy's aircraft engine. At 50 feet altitude, Willard Dodsworth in the top turret, James Garrison in the bow turret, and Donald Fanelli in the tail turret, all joined in pouring API rounds into the cockpit and engine. The ASW airplane, now blazing throughout, crashed into the sea.

The Zeke and Oscar pilots based at Kai Tak airbase, Hong Kong, enjoyed a reputation for competence and aggressiveness while engaging F6Fs from the Fast Carrier Task Forces. However, none arose for a try to save the hapless Jake.

Exciting as a shoot-down may be, Waldeck and Crew Seven made a valuable contribution this day. Just off Formosa they sighted and reported one very large freighter-transport in company with one destroyer and two destroyer escorts.

Wood and Crew Eight drew the long patrol, 1040 nmi, to Cape St. Jacques on February 2, 1945. They took off at 0425 loaded with 3400 gallons of fuel and five 100# incendiary clusters and returned to Tacloban 14 flight hours later. At 1135(I), while approaching Cape St. Jacques, French Indo-China, they sighted a 700-ton steel-hull Sugar Charlie cruising three miles off shore. Wood descended the PB4Y-1 to wave-top height and made four bombing and strafing attacks. All five incendiary clusters hit on deck and started a large number of small fires. Assisting with the fires were 1200 rounds of 0.50 caliber API fired into the stack aft freighter. The ship came to a dead stop and continued to burn.

Further attacks were discontinued as two inline engine Tonys began an attack upon the patrol plane. The Tonys' pilots were aggressive and pushed in to very close range during their tail-on runs. The top and tail turret gunners, William Finady and Leon Bashist, each fired off 150 rounds at the fast and highly maneuverable fighters. One Japanese fighter was "smoked" and left the battle. The other made several more runs and then headed back to its base. The PB4Y-1 was not damaged.

Didier and Crew Sixteen were assigned a sector only slightly shorter than Wood's (925 nmi) on the second of February. This patrol took them down the west coast of Borneo to just beyond Bintulu, a port city and airstrip owned and operated by the Japanese. Finding no shipping, Didier headed north and made a pass at 100' altitude over an oil refinery midway between Miri Airfield and Brunei Bay. The oil from this area was of such quality that it was burned in the Japanese ships' boilers unrefined. Didier dropped the five 100# incendiary clusters and strafed with 850 rounds of ammo. A number of fires were started but Didier elected not to continue observing the damage as they were taken under fire by heavy, but inaccurate, anti-aircraft guns. Some of the gunfire was emanating from a dual purpose gun mounted on a mobile tank. They did silence this tank by strafing.

INCREASED BOMB LOADS - The Skipper and Crew One had a busy day on February 3rd. Fueled for a 1000-mile sector, they also carried one 500# and ten 100# bombs. They would expend 3400 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo this day. Off the China coast at Amoy, they sank two 150-ton Sugar Dogs, dropping one 500# and four 100# bombs and firing 1000 rounds of APIs. About an hour later and 50 miles southeast of Amoy, they chased two Vals but due to the foggy weather and the bow turret being inoperative, they were unable to make a kill. However, after firing off 750 rounds, one Val left, smoking. The other escaped into the clouds.

On the return leg of his search, Wright found an 80' lugger and a 125' steel-hulled trawler just off the southeast coast of Formosa. Making several low-level attacks, dropping five 100# bombs and shooting 1000 rounds of ammo at the trawler, it appeared to suffer very little damage. The lugger was sunk by strafing with 500 rounds.

POOR LOOK OUT DOCTRINE - On the same day Goodman and his crew had a 900-mile patrol to Swatow, China. Fueled with 2900 gallons, they carried a very unusual load of three 1000# bombs. They would put them to good use. About 25 miles from Swatow, while cruising at 1000' altitude, they saw a Jake on an opposite course at 600'. Bill made an 180-degree turn and closed from behind on the enemy ASW plane. At 500 yards range, Cecil Colvin in the top turret opened up, firing off 450 rounds. Tracers were seen entering the wing roots and the Jake burst into flames. It descended steadily and crashed into the water. There was no evasive action and no defensive fire from the enemy float plane. Most likely the victims were concentrating on the anti-submarine search and not expecting an enemy aircraft so far from its base. The bow turret got off only ten rounds before the feed belt hung and jammed the twin fifties.

Goodman proceeded to Swatow and entered the harbor looking for shipping. None found, he then flew over the airfield at 800' and dropped all three 1000 pounders. One landed on a twin-engine bomber, a Betty, obliterating it. The other bombs blew up two buildings. Seven other unidentified aircraft were seen on the airstrip and 200 rounds were fired at various targets. No additional claims of damage were made, however. No return gunfire was observed and there were no hits noted on the PB4Y-1.

On February 4th Adler flew a 1000 nmi search to the southwestern end of the Ryukyu island chain. With a full load of fuel, they also carried five 100# GP bombs and five 100# incendiary clusters.

Under a 400' overcast, Adler sneaked into the harbor at Ishigaki Shima to attack a 100-ton Sugar Dog. Although planning to drop a string of bombs during a low-level attack, the bomb release system malfunctioned and no bombs were dropped. However, 1570 rounds were fired into the SD even though the bow turret twin fifties had jammed. As they swung around for a second attack, several fires were seen on the small freighter. Before the next run could be made, the vessel blew up and sank stern first. The PB4Y-1 took one 20 mm hit into the port elevator.

Fulwider and Crew Twenty also flew a 1000 nmi sector just to the west of Adler's this day. They located a 1000-ton Sugar Charlie just off the northeast tip of Formosa and began the standard masthead method of attack against this steel-hulled freighter. Making two bombing and strafing attacks, they dropped three and then two 100# incendiary clusters of which only one hit and splattered about on the deck. Several small fires were started but soon were extinguished. Fulwider continued the attack, making five strafing runs and expending 3000 API rounds. During these attacks, five large explosions were seen on the ship. They left the area with the SC dead in the water a short distance from the shore. The following day, Didier found the vessel lying on its side on the rocky shore, irreparably damaged. During the seven low-level runs there was no return fire from the SC.

THE WORST DAY OF MY LIFE - February 5, 1945, will live in my memory as the worst day of my life forever. This day I flew a 1000 nmi patrol down the west coast of Borneo all the way to Bintulu airstrip and harbor in my own PB4Y-1, 38889. Takeoff was at 0420, loaded with 3100 gallons of AvGas and five 100# high explosive bombs. This was a bit of being shortchanged on the fuel load but I would not condemn the ground crew, considering the difficulties of operating and servicing our airplanes at Tacloban.

After takeoff, the engines would be left at 45" and 2500 RPM for the next 25 minutes while we struggled to gain altitude to clear the mountains of the central Philippines. And again, it was a constant play of cowl flap opening to keep the cylinder head temperatures from going too far over the red line or too open, which would spoil lift over the wings. During this phase of the flight, I kept the waist hatches closed and the APS-15 radome up to reduce the drag by some small amount. The crew was ordered not to move about as our pitch stability was neutral at best during the climb and even small control inputs detracted from our airplane's performance, or so I believed.

At level off, it was still dark and a crewman passed me a cup of coffee. Made with water treated with iodine, it would jolt a mummy back to life. This was one of the mornings when the "skip distance" for radio wave transmissions was unusually good. Tuning in WWL New Orleans on 770 kcs (or was it 870 kcs?), we listened to the "sweetest music this side of heaven." It brought back memories of dancing at the Roosevelt Hotel there while on leave in late November 1943. That New Orleans southern belle was gorgeous. Some contrast with this morning! Reception of low frequency radio this far from the station was not a figment of my imagination. Charlie Ehemann tells of receiving KRLD and WFF Dallas during the first 104 tour while in the Guadalcanal area.

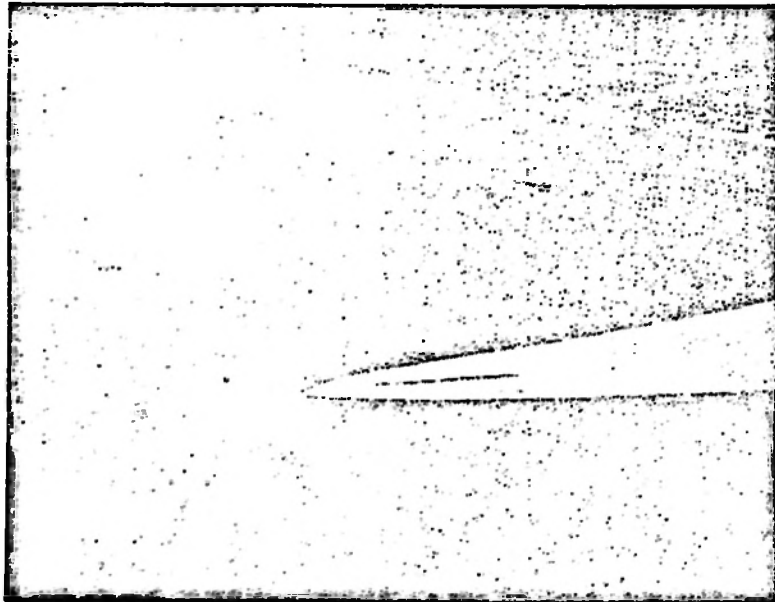
This day I stayed at 10,000' until about four hours after takeoff. While crossing the middle of the Sulu Sea in darkness, the probability of interception by enemy fighters was relatively slim. Once beyond the Balabac Straits, I let down to 1500'. The outbound leg was plotted to stay about 100 miles off the west shore of Borneo. The weather and visibility was quite good and I felt that we were covering our sector very well. However, no contacts were made. When we reached the end of our sector, I asked the copilot-navigator to plot a course directly for Bintulu. Thus far, at least to my knowledge, there had been no strikes by the Fast Carrier Task Forces nor the USAAC upon this Japanese base. I planned to have a go at this airfield and, hopefully, catch some aircraft there and score a kill or two. I let down to just off the water to achieve surprise by avoiding any Japanese radar stations making contact with our airplane.

About 50 miles from Bintulu, our radar operator called out a surface contact dead ahead about 15 miles. As there were several scattered showers about, I believed that the contact might be one of these showers. But, "radar" insisted that it was a solid contact even though a small one. Now guessing that this was a small vessel of the Sugar Dog or Sugar Puppy class, I sauntered on, always conserving fuel. Knocking off an SD did not necessarily demand a high speed run-in.

SURPRISE! Clearing a small shower, a large destroyer greeted us with bursts from her heavy anti-aircraft batteries. I had a good deal of respect for this class destroyer. They could shoot accurately and, overall, were rarely surprised. Fortunately, we were just at extreme gun range and, coupled with our very hard turn to the right, denied the DD any hits. But I was disgusted with myself. Had I taken the radar contact seriously and made a high speed run in at minimum altitude, I could have nailed this warship. Or the Japanese gun crew could have painted another American flag on their gun turret. A masthead bombing attack was questionable when destroyers were present. We resumed course for Bintulu and applied 45" MAP and 2500 RPM on our engines. As the wind was dead calm and the sea completely smooth, we were leaving a wake on the water from our down wash. No doubt we were low enough to evade the Japanese search radar. Being this low also limited our forward visibility somewhat. But, as we made landfall, I could see the entrance to the harbor and knew that we had hit Bintulu right on.

LOW-LEVEL ATTACK ON BINTULU - The opening to the harbor was sighted, as well as a good-sized warehouse on the dock. Since we had only five bombs on board, I directed Webber, our ace bombardier, to drop only one 100 pounder on the building. After passing over it, I looked back, and by placing my head in the bubble side window, I saw a big explosion. This seemed to be beyond a 100# bomb blast but, whatever, the warehouse appeared to be well wrecked. From the pull-up to clear the building, I now had a good view of the dirt runway. It appeared to be about 5000' long and up ahead at mid-field there were two trucks, two Oscar Army fighters, and a number of men standing about. I ordered open fire. As we flew very low over the runway, I heard sounds as though we were being hit by shrapnel. Then I saw a blob of dirt hit my windshield and knew that our forward-firing 0.50 caliber machine guns were hitting into the airstrip and throwing up geysers of mud. Flying as low as we were, we then flew into the mud, splattering our airplane. This had been experienced before during very low strafing runs and my report of such had been met with complete skepticism. Now my thought was that I'd avoid flying through any rain on the way back to Tacloban and prove my earlier claims.

Thus far, we had no indication of anti-aircraft fire being directed towards our airplane. This pleased me a great deal and proved that our low-level approach had achieved complete surprise.



Three strafing runs failed to burn either Oscar.

We were hitting the fighters and the tracer bullets were flashing as they hit along the fuselages of the Oscars. I saw three men fall as they were hit. Pulling up and looking back, I was very disappointed that neither airplane was burning. Also, I could see no explosion from the 100# bomb dropped at the airplanes. I guessed that the 4-5 second fuse had

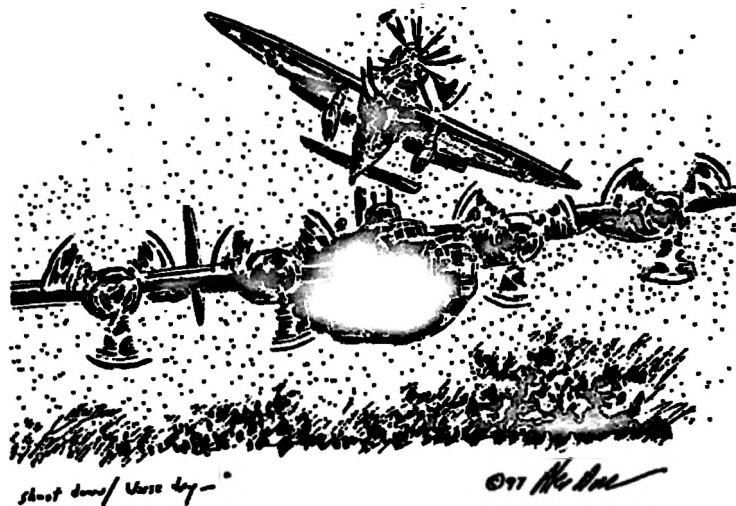
broken off as it hit the ground. Occasionally, the 15-inch long fuse snapped off from surface contact. There could be no claim for an airplane kill on the ground or water unless it burned. Obvious hits did not count. Once again I could complain about our machine gun belt load of all API plus one tracer per five shells (for all the good it would do).

I turned around as quickly as possible for another strafing run. As we dove in, I saw that the left tire on one Oscar was burning but no other evidence of damage. This time I pressed in even lower and again saw tracer flashes indicating hits, but neither airplane caught fire. In hindsight there is little question that there was no fuel in these fighters. But at the time, determination prevailed and one more run was made, with the same disappointing results.

I was very frustrated and angry with myself for making the two additional runs and achieving no results. My operating principle when attacking targets that possessed a capability to respond effectively was to make one low-level pass, strafing and/or bombing, and keep right on going. Repeated runs against contested targets was not conducive to good health.

We departed Bintulu and set course for Brunei. This was very well defended as the Japanese had been receiving oil from the Brunei fields for some time. Their fleet had used Brunei Bay as an anchorage regularly and major units of their navy had sortied from there for the Battle of Leyte Gulf. To avoid radar detection and achieve surprise for my arrival, I flew several miles inland at 500' and swept the South China Sea with my radar to cover my sector. As we passed the oil rigs and were approaching Miri Airfield, I saw a Val turning into a final for landing. I was determined to get this dive bomber and was quite overeager due to the failure to burn the Oscars. But we would have to shoot him down quickly as Miri was heavily defended. I did not intend to pass over this airfield.

We applied military power to the engines and closed rapidly. Opening fire at close range, Allen Anania in the top turret and David Gleason in the bow turret were hitting but I could see no results. We continued to close, shooting, then saw tracer flashes. Now pieces started falling off and smoke was pouring out of the engine. The Val began to wobble and then pulled up. We were very close. I pushed over to pass underneath the Val. At this time, both airplanes were at three to four hundred feet above the ground. Suddenly, the Japanese pilot pushed over or stalled the airplane. The dive bomber was coming right into my cockpit. A collision was certain.



I could see every detail of the two-seated, single-engine airplane. The neat rivet lines, slick finish, and the bomb or depth charge hanging between the fixed landing gear were plainly visible. I believed that we'd had it and there was nothing we could do. My whole life did not flash in front of me. My only thought was, "I wonder what the guys back at the squadron will think when we don't get back tonight?"

The Val just passed over the cockpit unbelievably close. Next I felt a jolt and shudder as the Japanese aircraft hit the right vertical stabilizer and rudder. This momentarily straightened him up and Anania, who had swung his top turret around to follow the enemy airplane, said over the intercom, "Well, that son of a bitch is still flying!" The Val then rolled over and hit the ground, inverted. There was a large explosion as the bomb exploded or the depth charge detonated.

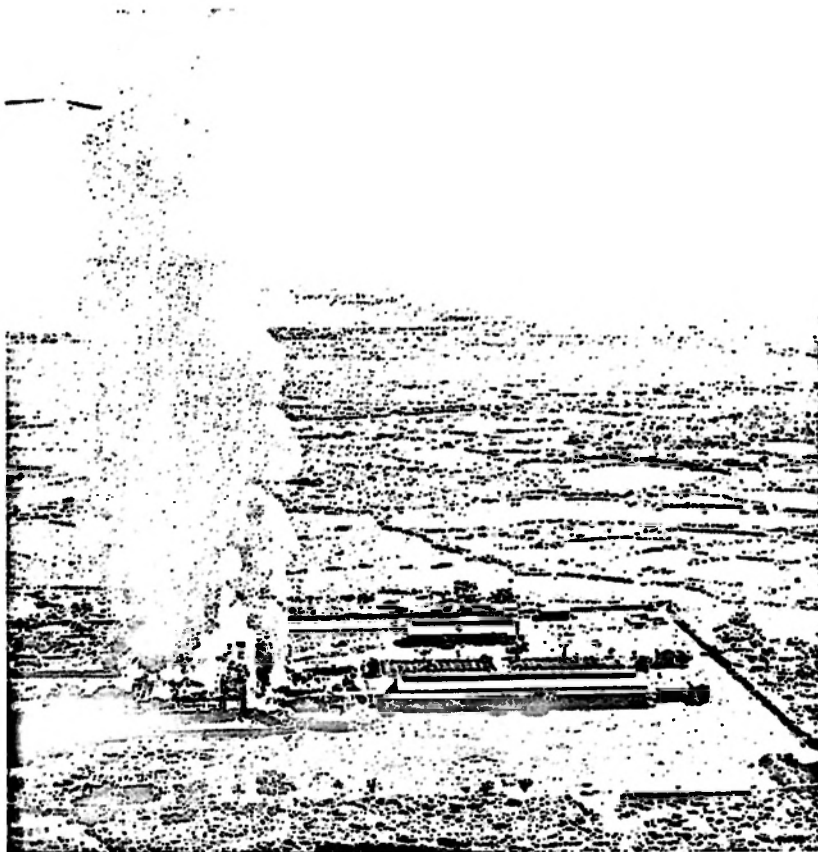
The PB4Y-1 was now at about two to three hundred feet and in a slightly nose-down attitude. I pulled on the elevator to stop our descent but it was jammed. Eddie Streit, my copilot, recognized the problem and joined in to force the elevator free and stop the descent. We leveled off too low for comfort and were not out of the woods yet. The empennage was twisted and distorted and the rudder was still jammed. But the airplane was still flying, however poorly.

We were a long way from Tacloban and would have been very vulnerable should we encounter enemy fighters. It appeared best to make for San Jose airfield on Mindoro Island. It was closer and, at this time, I was not sure if our fuel consumption would be adversely affected by the damaged tail section.

We made it to San Jose without incident except for something less than completely satisfactory flying qualities. The airfield at Mindoro was very, very busy. After landing, we taxied to a parking area without directions. There was no attention paid to us or our

damaged airplane whatsoever. Lee Webber was a first-class metalsmith as well as our bombardier. He crawled up onto the horizontal stabilizer with his tools and began hacking away at the damaged tail. Soon the shattered metal pieces were cut away and the rudder was freed. We took on 1400 gallons of fuel and departed for Tacloban. The 1.5-hour flight was uneventful.

The entire empennage was replaced with a salvaged USAAC model. My PB4Y-1 was now unique. It was the only blue B-24 with a bare aluminum tail dressed with the Thirteenth Air Force black markings. BuNo 38889 would continue to fly to very nearly the end of the war.



On that same day, Noon and Crew Four bombed a target not often found by a crew of the Long Range Search Group. Assigned the northeast sector passing east of Okinawa and onward to Oagari Shima, Hank found no shipping. At the island of Oagari Shima, he did find a group of 20 to 25 buildings approximately 40 to 50 feet in width by 75 to 100 feet long. Making one bombing and strafing run, he dropped all five of the incendiary clusters carried and strafed with 100 rounds. Two of the 100# clusters hit buildings, setting

both on fire which blazed heavily. These two buildings were definitely destroyed and possibly others caught fire also.

Of interest are the patrols flown by VPB-118 from Tinian Island beginning January 14, 1945. One of these extended to Oagari Shima. To the best of my knowledge, none of their PB4Y-2s were seen by our searches. Should they have made contact, a lively conversation might have developed on the VHF radio as several of VPB-118's PPCs served in VB-104 during its first combat tour to Guadalcanal and Munda. Once one got on the circuit to the South Pacific, one seemingly returned.

A GOOD DAY FOR BILL GOODMAN - Goodman and Crew Twelve had a very good day on February 6th flying the patrol to Okinawa. It was a 1050-mile leg and the patrol plane was fully fueled and carried two 500# and five 100# high explosive bombs. Somehow the bomb load had grown for the 1000-mile patrols. It had been a sneaky progression, from no bombs to five 100 pounders, to ten and on to 1500 pounds of bombs of one kind or another.

Approaching Okinawa from the south, Goodman found a 50-ton picket boat. Immediately attacking, his bombardier scored a direct hit with a 100-pound high explosive bomb. The lookout vessel was blown to bits.

Continuing around the island, they came upon 11 small cargo ships of about 100 tons each. Crew Twelve made four bombing and strafing runs, dropping two 500-pound bombs and firing 2000 rounds of APIs. One bomb blew off the stern of a Sugar Dog, sinking it, and another was set on fire by strafing, burning it to the water line. Two other transports were damaged by strafing.

A few minutes later and about 15 miles east of the Sugar Dogs, the PPC sighted a twin-engine bomber on a northerly course and slightly above the PB4Y-1. Immediately heading for the Betty, they closed from behind and below; the enemy aircraft crew was totally unaware of the approaching Liberator. Sidney Seifer, a radioman from Chicago, Illinois, in the top turret, fired 125 rounds from 200 yards range. Hits were seen in the port wing root and engine, which burst into flames. The Japanese aircraft nosed down and crashed into the sea. Complacency is very often fatal.

While Goodman's top turret gunner burned a Betty, Wood and Crew Eight encountered an unusual target. Patrolling the Formosa Straits, they found a salvage ship of 1200 tons. Two low-level attacks were made. On the first, all five 100-pound bombs were dropped but due to a malfunction in the release system all fell over. A total of 1000 rounds were fired at the ship but did little damage to the steel-constructed vessel.

On the same day, Didier destroyed a radar station on Miyako Jima with 600 rounds. But the real adventure of the day belonged to Bittenbender and his crew!

A SUGAR DOG WRECKS A PATROL PLANE - February 6, 1945, will be a day to remember for Bittenbender and Crew Thirteen forever. It appeared to be a routine patrol and a routine kill of a small cargo ship (200 tons) off Ishigaki Shima. This was a haven for the Sugar Dog class of Japanese vessels. What happened during a low-level bombing and strafing attack can best be reported by Bittenbender, the Patrol Plane Commander, as follows:

"On this rainy day on Sector Six covering the Ryukyus we had trouble with the intercommunications system which meant difficulty talking to the crew. On the return flight, I decided to bomb a Sugar Dog several miles from a small island. I told the bow gunner to stop firing within a half mile of the target in case it would explode from our bullets. Not getting the message, he fired until we went over it at about thirty feet. The bomb missed so we came around for another run.

"Since there was no explosion due to the strafing on the first run, I said nothing about not firing close in to the ship. On this attack, just before the bow of the airplane was over the ship, it exploded and we flew through flying lumber. A piece from the bow turret's plexiglass passed by our windshield and we emerged from the flying debris with the starboard engines and wing shaking. Looking over and beyond the left-hand outboard engine, I could see a large gash in the leading edge of the wing, probably where the ship's masthead came up and hit the wing. I feared that the wing would break off and the aircraft would cartwheel through the water and kill us all. So I added power to climb high enough to get our parachute harnesses on and then bail out. Adding power created two loud backfires and the after station said the number three engine was on fire. I cut the throttle, fuel, and ignition, and feathered the engine and was able to continue the climb. It appeared that the debris had damaged the exhaust stack, jamming the super-charger control vent, thereby causing excessive intake manifold pressure. This exploded one of the cylinders into three pieces.

"With only three engines and a badly damaged airplane, I decided to try and make Lingayen Gulf airstrip as it was closer than Tacloban. We planned to jettison the forward bomb bay fuel tanks once we had land in sight. If we were forced to ditch before then, these tanks would have provided extra flotation. After landing at Lingayen there was no question that PB4Y-1 BuNo 38856 would never fly again but, by God's grace, the crew did. The next day we got a ride to Tacloban in an Army C-46."

Gene "Buck" Montoux was manning the bow turret on that day and adds to the story:

"On February 6th we were just east of Formosa and caught a Sugar Dog off shore of some small islands. On the second run, as I was firing at the vessel, one gun jammed. Continuing to shoot with the other machine

gun, I saw one tracer go straight into the forward hull. The ship exploded with a hell of a blast and since we were about 75 feet high, we flew right through the debris. We also flew right into the masthead as it rose up and it hit our wing a few feet inboard of the wing tip. There was a great amount of other damage too. The number three engine had one cylinder split open.

"I got out of the turret and told Faust Verna, our bombardier, to leave the bow as I thought we were going in. Passing through the cockpit area, I saw our PPC feathering the engine and heard the damage report. With so much damage, we all turned to and began throwing out everything we could to lighten ship. We kept the bomb bay tanks in as we still had 550 miles to go to the closest airstrip.

"Once we got near the fighter airstrip, we jettisoned the bomb bay tanks and rigged four parachutes to the waist hatch gun mounts to use as air brakes on the landing roll-out if need be. We did have hydraulic brakes and the tires were OK. As we slowed on the roll-out, I heard the most gosh awful noise as the debris held in place by the wind stream while in the air now fell off onto the runway. It took the airstrip G.I.s all day to clean up the mess on the runway. After writing up five pages of damage to the plane, the decision was made to leave it there as it would never fly again. We flew back to Tacloban on an USAAC C-46 but had to stop en route because of an oil leak. The C-46's flight engineer hadn't the foggiest notion of what to do. Howard Brown, our other mech, and I made the repairs and we flew on home. This convinced me that our training was so much better than USAAC's."

VPB-104's Aircraft Action Report Number 121, dated February 6, 1945, stated the damage to the airplane as: number four engine cowling bashed in; wings, ailerons, and rudders all damaged; number three engine destroyed; bow turret damaged; and aircraft not repairable. It was surveyed and stricken from the records.

Burton and Crew Ten flew a 13.4-hour trip to the China coast, covering the Amoy area this day. In the weather almost all day, they were unaware of the strong tail wind on the return leg. Letting down for Tacloban, neither the airstrip nor the island of Leyte could be seen once they were below the clouds. Taking up a heading of 270 degrees corrected the uncomfortable situation. The airstrip was right where it should have been.

BOMB RELOADS - While the memory serves with clarity for some adventures, it is better by far to verify with the written words of 50-some years ago. The idea of carrying additional bombs loose in the airplane for reload while airborne now appears absurd. But this method for additional killing power was recorded in Aircraft Action Report Number 122 dated February 7, 1945, with the Commanding Officer as PPC.

Wright departed Tacloban at 0437(I) with 3400 gallons of fuel and twenty 100-pound general purpose bombs, ten hanging from the bomb racks, and another ten laid within the airplane for reload. About 50 miles east of Hong Kong and close in to the coast of China, Wright found a 90-foot picket boat. Four bombing and strafing runs were made, dropping ten of the bombs and firing 1000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition. There were no direct hits with the bombs but several close bomb explosions did create damage. The lookout vessel got underway, heading for the beach but rolled over and sank in shallow water. The bomb misses were due to the target being close in to the hilly shore and wind and turbulence made it difficult to make a steady platform for the releases.

Gunfire was received from the beach and 7.7 mm hits were taken in the fuselage, port and starboard, and the tail. John Cooper, a crewman, was hit in the leg. Later it was determined that the wound was serious enough to evacuate him to the States. Not aware of this, Wright continued with the patrol.

Two small freighters of 250 tons each were then sighted five miles from the picket boat. Two strafing runs were made while ten bombs were being loaded onto the racks. The 750 rounds fired at the Sugar Dogs caused only slight damage. Then, realizing the seriousness of the injury to Cooper, the attacks were discontinued and the patrol plane headed for home.

Adler and his crew took off two minutes before the Skipper. The PB4Y-1 was loaded with 3300 gallons of fuel and ten 100# bombs in the racks. In addition, five 100# GPs and five incendiary clusters were lying on the walkways in the airplane. Their patrol was out to 1050 nmi, covering the Formosa Straits and a section of the China coast. Their attack upon a small freighter of 100 tons was somewhat inconsequential, but the sighting of a convoy off Amoy was a very good contact. It consisted of one destroyer and one destroyer escort in company with two freighter-transport of 8000 to 10,000 tons each, two tankers of 5000 tons, and one very large tanker weighing in at 18,000 tons. They were on course 050 degrees and speed 15 knots. Because of the relatively small surface escort, this convoy was also being covered by a twin-engine bomber to enhance the anti-submarine effort. It stayed close over the convoy and Adler had no opportunity for engagement. Given the escort situation, this convoy had to be an appetizing prospect for our submarine wolf packs.

UNUSUAL AA DEVICES - Waldeck and Crew Seven would also fly this day to the China coast and experience something new and different. About midway between Swatow and Hong Kong, very close in to the shore, a 1500-ton freighter and two 150-ton wooden cargo vessels were seen. Waldeck made two bombing and strafing runs and three additional strafing attacks. One small cargo vessel was sunk, the other damaged. During the second low-level pass at the ships, a small parachute was seen 200 yards off the starboard wing at about the same level (200'). The parachute was about six feet in diameter with a canister hanging three to four feet below. The canister, shaped as a cylinder, appeared to be three feet long and nine inches in diameter. The rig had a rate of descent judged to be 400 feet per minute.

A total of eight parachute-canisters were dropped while the patrol plane made its attacks. On one occasion four were dropped over the ships simultaneously, obviously as a protective measure. All of these devices were definitely launched from the shore. There were no aircraft sighted at any time. The Patrol Plane Commander stated that these anti-aircraft weapons were easily avoided. However, used in large numbers, such could be a hindrance and even deny an attacking aircraft. In this instance, the 1500-ton cargo vessel was not attacked due to the confusion factor.

On February 8, 1945, Hemphill and Crew Seventeen flew a 1000-mile sector which included the island of Formosa. They took off at 0435 loaded with 3000 gallons of fuel and five 100# general purpose bombs.

The weather was very poor, low ragged ceilings and limited visibility, which did not permit a shipping count at Kūrun by the usual method (a peek in from the harbor entrance). This important harbor located on the northern tip of Formosa warranted examination as it often served as an anchorage for Japanese shipping steaming through the Formosa Straits.

In a very bold move, Hemphill entered the harbor by letting down through the overcast and circled within the narrow bay of about two miles diameter surrounded with hills. Here he reported one very large freighter-transport of 10,000 to 12,000 tons, a 10,000-ton hospital ship, eight freighter-transport of 5000 tons, and ten to twelve small freighters, steel-hulled, of about 500 tons. An important find and, surprisingly, no escort ships.

Circling within the harbor a second time, he began an attack upon the largest ship. Prior to reaching the bomb release point, light, medium, and heavy anti-aircraft guns began firing intensely at the PB4Y-1 from all around the shoreline. Shrapnel from 3-inch and/or 40-millimeter guns hit into the top turret, fuselage, and aft starboard wing. Mark Hagen, top turret gunner, was hit in the head and rendered unconscious. The attack was broken off and the patrol plane escaped out the harbor entrance. Hagen was treated by our base medical team and released to continue flight duties.

A COLLAGE OF EVENTS FEBRUARY 8TH - Meanwhile, off the China coast at Swatow, Burton found and reported a Japanese convoy. Its composition was not recorded. I returned after 4.8 hours airborne from a patrol due to engine problems. Only the day before, Hagen had aborted a search after 3.9 hours in the same PB4Y-1. Noon attacked two small freighters of about 200 tons, Sugar Dogs, at Iriomote Jima in the Ryukyu island chain. One was seriously damaged. In the same general area, they found a convoy of two destroyers, four destroyer escorts, one 10,000-ton transport ship, and an 8000 to 10,000-ton tanker. Ettinger strafed a small airfield on Formosa, setting fire to a hangar. There were no aircraft seen on the airfield.

On February 10th Bittenbender was assigned a 1010 nmi patrol around Formosa island and into the straits (wonder who and why the extra ten miles were added?). Off the

southeast corner of Formosa, he hit a small freighter of 150 tons with a 100# GP bomb. It broke in two and sank. Bitt also made a ship count in Kiiun and determined that Hemphill's sighting was quite accurate. The weather had cleared so no daring entry into the harbor was needed.

In the Formosa Straits, Bittenbender found a convoy underway that was heading southwest, consisting of two destroyers, one large transport ship of 10,000 tons, and one small 2,000-ton freighter-transport.

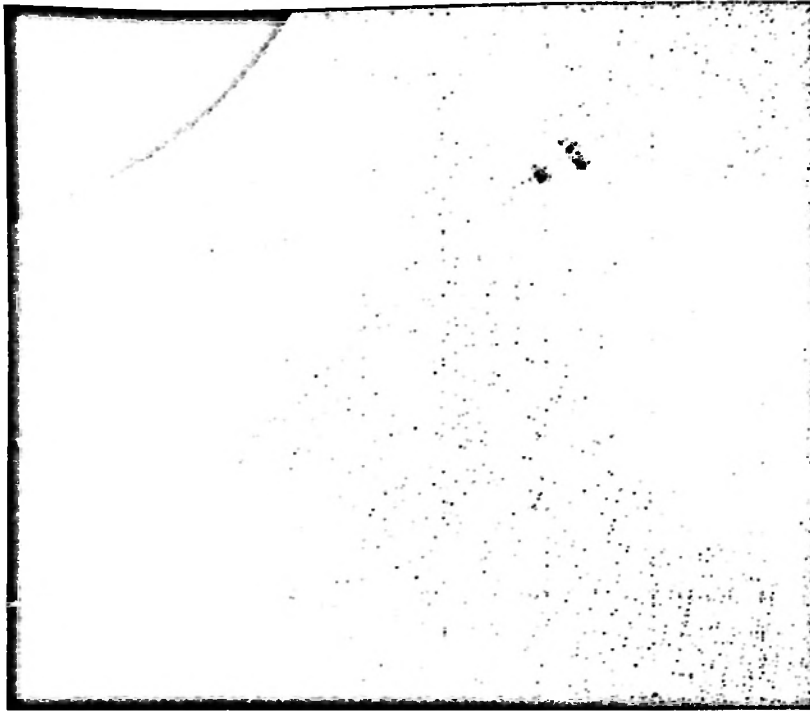
Also on the 10th, Vance "Hotsy" Adler, the PPC for Crew Five, ferried PB4Y-1 BuNo 38730 from Owi to Tacloban. He would carry some very welcome passengers for the squadron, Lt. Ira B. West and what would become Crew Twenty-Three. The other crewmen were:

Lt.(jg) Leo Hebert
Lt.(jg) Keith Albrecht
Cook, Dale AMM3c
Dugan, William ARM1c
Lipman, Martin ARM3c
Rummel, Earl ARM3c
Sager, John AMM1c
Schultz, Robert AOM3c
Smith, Harold ARM3c
Vasentine, Joseph ARM3c

On February 12, 1945, West would fly his first patrol under the tutelage of Lt. Bill Goodman. They were friends of some considerable time. The indoctrination included some anti-aircraft fire from the island of Borodina.

Not much else on the 10th, except that the Skipper had an ugly surprise at Oagari Shima. Without provocation they opened fire at him--very disrespectful. Hagen and crew had an enjoyable sight while working over some small shipping at Iriomoto Jima. After sinking a 30-ton motor launch about 20 Japanese had to swim for shore. But it was very doubtful they could make it, just too far away.

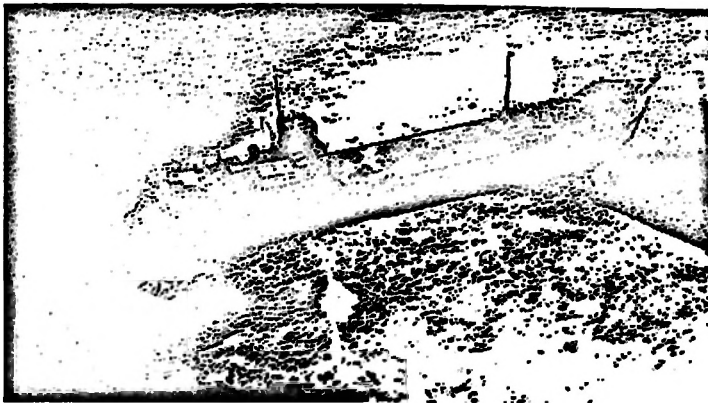
On the 11th, I flew a patrol to the China coast. Just south of Swatow we came upon a flight of three Zekes in a "V" formation. Unfortunately, our interphone system was inoperative and I was still under the influence of the midair collision with the Japanese dive bomber on February 5th. We did achieve surprise and slipped up behind them but I stayed higher rather than making a run to pass below them. Only our top turret got a shot at all three as each peeled off, one at a time.



Oddly, they seemed irritated and then attacked us. They put on a display of aerobatics and dropped a number of phosphorus bombs and occasionally made a firing pass. However, all of our gun stations were alert by this time and our 0.50 caliber fire discouraged any determined attacks.

After the return of our patrols, VPB-104's Air Combat Intelligence Officer, Lt. Travis E. Baker (a Texan from Midland), debriefed all of the PPCs who had flown that day. In turn, he proceeded to the Wing Commander and Chief of Staff's Quonset hut to brief them upon the day's happenings. The report of Crew Two's attack upon the Japanese fighters was met with the response, "You mean the Zekes attacked the patrol plane!" "No," replied our ACIO, "Our patrol plane attacked them." The debate continued with no give on either's view of the encounter. The upshot was that our gentleman from Texas returned from the wing briefing even more irritated than the Japanese Zeke pilots had been with me.

Noon scored well on February 11th. They were airborne at 0430 loaded with 3300 gallons of fuel and five 100# GP and five 100# incendiary clusters. The patrol was for 1050 nmi covering the west coast of Formosa and a portion of the China coast. Close in to shore off the coast of Formosa, Noon located an 800-ton freighter. Making four bombing and strafing attacks while under return fire from the Sugar Charlie, they dropped four 100# general purpose high explosive bombs and three 100# incendiary clusters. Getting straddles with the bombs and firing off 1150 rounds, the ship was left dead in the water, burning and



drifting towards a reef, propelled by a 50-knot wind. It was considered to be destroyed.

Continuing the patrol, Noon found a 4000-ton tanker escorted by a destroyer off the coast at Amoy. Under gunfire from both the tanker and the destroyer, they made one bombing and strafing run, dropping one 100# GP and two 100# IC. The incendiary clusters hit amidships and just aft amidships. The high explosive bomb hit 20 feet off the port quarter. Also, 1150 rounds were fired into the Sugar Baker. The tanker was left burning and dead in the water and judged to be seriously damaged.

The PB4Y-1 was not hit by gunfire from the destroyer nor the tanker, most likely due to the heavy seas. Noon and Crew Four were fortunate.

EFFICIENT USE OF EXPLOSIVES - Jameson and Crew Twenty-two flew the Formosa Straits on February 12, 1945. In addition to a full load of fuel for the 14.7 hour patrol, they also carried five 100# GP bombs. Midway between the northern tip of Formosa and Foochow on the China coast, they saw two Oscars. These Japanese Army fighters carried fuel tanks or bombs attached to the belly of their planes. This had not been seen before. No engagement was made and they disappeared into the clouds.

Twenty-five minutes later and about 40 miles northeast of Foochow, Jameson found a 4000-ton freighter. He made a total of eight attacks, dropping all five high explosive bombs and strafing with 2300 rounds of 0.50 caliber APIs. Two of the bombs hit aft amidships and exploded below decks, which started fires. Burning furiously, gutted and dead in the water, the ship was beached by a 45-knot wind. It was judged to be destroyed.

The ship returned fire initially and hit the patrol plane with 12.7 mm shells in the fuselage, near the top turret and port side. There was no report of injury. A good job, Richard!

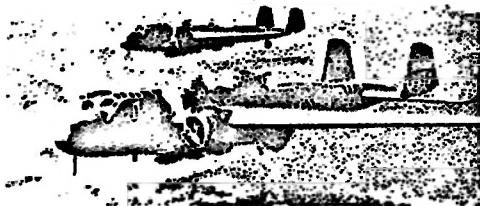
Burton and Crew Ten had the pleasure of watching 20 USAAC P-47s working over targets on Formosa during the return from their sector search. It was a nice warm feeling to see our Allies at work. There was a down side, of course. The Army pilots were hungry

for aerial kills. And they rarely saw a B-24 all alone so far from home. But in this case the pilots with the silver wings continued with the work at hand.

Later this night, Wright flew a special night search in heavy weather looking for two battleships, one heavy cruiser, one light cruiser, and two destroyers. Contact with this major Japanese force was not made during the 14.2 hours of search. They did land at Mindoro for fuel on the return leg. The Skipper logged his 5000th flight hour that night.

Also on the 12th, Hemphill and his crew flew by the Bataan Peninsula and observed our floating Navy's heavy guns softening up the area for a landing by our troops. Bittenbender ferried PB4Y-1, BuNo 32165, to Owi for maintenance (even fat cats require care and upkeep). After several test flights, he ferried BuNo 38863 back to Tacloban.

A DOUBLE VICTORY BOMBER VS BOMBER - Hagen, ever aggressive, with Crew Fifteen, bagged two Nells (twin-engine bombers) on February 13, 1945, about 60 miles west of Takao, Formosa. This was an important port and military base located on the southwestern coast of Formosa. The Nells most likely were en route to Hong Kong, considering their location and course at the time of the engagement.



The weather situation was a factor in this coup by Hagen. It was an overcast sky of stratocumulus clouds with the base a ragged 500 feet, seven miles visibility, and a 40-knot wind blowing on the surface. The cloud tops at 2500' were also variable with 30 miles visibility above.

The shooters during this encounter and approximate rounds fired were: Byron Fahnestock, top turret - 150 rounds; James Mathews, bow - 550 rounds; Donald Bruce, tail turret; Jean Cramer, starboard waist; and Charles Johnson port waist - all of the last three gun stations fired 175 to 200 rounds each. It was an exhilarating day for all hands on board the PB4Y-1.

The action can best be described by the Patrol Plane Commander, Edward "Hagen, the Horrible" Hagen as told to our ACIO after the patrol:

"While flying a routine patrol 60 miles west of Formosa at 5000', the tail turret gunner reported two aircraft low at six o'clock flying from starboard to port. A turn to port was made in order to parallel their course of 240 degrees, allowing the pilot to recognize the enemy planes as Nells by looking at them through the binoculars. The enemy planes were flying a flat,

tight formation, the second flying the left wing position. They were skimming the top of the overcast at 2500'. Their speed was about 120 knots so it was necessary to slow down to 110 knots, dropping half flaps, in order to lose altitude and stay behind the formation. While this was being accomplished, all hands were warned not to fire until the word was passed. It was decided that the bow turret would pick off the lead plane and the top turret would take the left wing plane flying a position slightly lower than the other. The two planes were going in and out of the tops of the clouds. The flaps were then brought up and the range decreased to about 1500 feet at which time the order to commence firing was given.

"Up to this time it was apparent that the Nips hadn't been alerted but it didn't take long for the lead plane to wiggle its wings in the break off signal as the things started to fly from his starboard wing. He then went into a steep diving turn to the starboard, disappearing into the clouds. However, the wing man was warned too late as the top turret gunner had set his starboard engine and wing root to blazing furiously. The Nell then started to go into an almost vertical dive and disappeared into the clouds.

"As we followed down through the overcast, the starboard waist gunner made visual contact with the lead plane occasionally and fired a few rounds at him each time. After breaking out of the overcast at 300 feet, the tail turret gunner reported a large fire on the surface at our six o'clock position. All hands were reminded to be on the lookout for the lead plane. We made a turn to port and came out on a heading of 060 degrees to investigate the crash site. While approaching it, the fire had turned into a few plumes of black smoke. At this time the other bomber was seen proceeding away from the crash on a reciprocal heading from its original course. This would take him back to his home base of Takao. The Nell was flying through the low hanging clouds at an altitude of 600 feet and five miles distance. We flew at 300 feet to maintain contact and quickly closed the range to 2000 feet with military power on the engines. Again, the Nip bomber crew was completely surprised and, as we opened fire, the pilot instinctively dove for the water. Gunfire from our bow turret started fires on the Nell's port engine and wing root. As the action continued, every gun station on the PB4Y-1 was brought to bear and the enemy was soon burning furiously. Our crewmen in the waist area could hear crashing and popping sounds from the doomed Japanese aircraft. Finally, the pilot turned the Nell into the wind for an attempted ditching. But the high seas kicked up by the 40-knot wind created a poor surface. Hitting the water, the Nell broke up and exploded."

Throughout the battle, the Nells had returned meager 20-millimeter gunfire but it was inaccurate and the patrol plane received no hits. Hagen completed his search sector and landed back at Tacloban after 13.4 flight hours.

A little over an hour later, Didier and Crew Sixteen encountered a Sally off Kiirun, Formosa. The Japanese twin-engine bomber was more modern and much faster than the Nell. The two airplanes met on a reciprocal course with the enemy bomber at 500' and the PB4Y-1 at 1000'. Didier pushed over, turned, and added military power, pursuing the Sally. As the PB4Y-1 closed on the enemy, the bow gunner opened fire at extreme range. The Japanese pilot immediately reversed course, heading toward the Formosa shoreline. Didier tried to counter this move, but due to the Sally's higher top speed, it succeeded in making the shore ahead of the patrol plane. It then headed into a canyon with mountains extending up to 3000' on each side. The weather was very poor overall and there was a 500' overcast encasing the canyon. Last seen, the Sally disappeared into the overcast heading straight into a mountain obscured by clouds. Didier broke off the chase as he received heavy caliber and accurate anti-aircraft fire from the shoreline.

During the four- to five-minute engagement, the bow gunner had fired 500 rounds at the enemy aircraft. Tracer hits were seen into the tail, fuselage, cockpit, and bow. The bow turret starboard gun then jammed and the port gun barrel had burned out. The top turret fired off 50 rounds with no faults. However, the only damage noted to the Japanese aircraft was pieces flying off the tail. No return gunfire was observed from the enemy bomber, although it was equipped with a powered top turret. Only damage was claimed on the Sally but it is doubtful it could out climb the shrouded terrain.

I flew a special night search on the 13th off the French Indo-China coast, looking for the Japanese battleship, cruiser, and destroyer force. It was a thoroughly lousy night and I failed to find anything in 13.8 hours. I did plunge through a lot of very heavy weather.

Waldeck ferried BuNo 38749 to Morotai and on to Owi the next day for maintenance. His flight on the 15th was for 3.2 hours in BuNo 38761 and was classified as a photography and test mission. This was unusual but most likely the local command at Owi had a photo requirement and got two for the price of one.

On the 17th, Whiskey Waldeck and one copilot ferried a PB4Y-1 to Mindoro for delivery to VPB-117. In turn, Lt. Art Elder, a really big-time shooter for VPB-117, flew Waldeck and crew back to Tacloban. Don't know how George acquired the name "Whiskey." Actually he was more moderate than most of us, given the opportunity. BuNo 38761 was later returned to us with fresh engines.

February 14, 1945, saw a good deal of shooting by our patrol planes but not many kills. Becker and Crew Twenty-One made contact with a Japanese twin-engine night fighter, a Nick, off the northeast side of Formosa at high noon. In poor weather conditions, 500' overcast and one mile visibility, John Byrne in the top turret sighted the enemy on a crossing situation at one mile. "DD" Becker pulled into the Nick and both the top turret and James King in the bow turret fired at the fighter as he maneuvered in front of the patrol plane. At about 800 yards range, a total of 700 rounds were fired by Becker's two forward

bearing turrets. Tracer hits were observed into the port engine and wing root which generated a stream of smoke flowing from this area. The Nick got very low on the water and then pulled up into the clouds. The fighter was damaged but the extent was not determined.

Noon and Crew Four got off at 0450 for their 1050 nmi patrol which would take 14.0 hours to cover. They were carrying a real mix of bombs; two 250# GP and five 100# GP bombs, and two incendiary clusters. By day's end, they would have fired 1400 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo and dropped about half their bomb load. At Iriomote Jima they dropped two general purpose bombs and two incendiary clusters on eight warehouses. Along with the strafing, four warehouses were destroyed by fire and four were damaged.

At Yonaguni Jima, Hank Noon attacked a radar station. They missed with one 250# bomb but scored hits with strafing to claim slight damage. Both of these islands are located to the northeast of Formosa about 70 and 120 miles respectively.

Fulwider and Crew Twenty had the sector to the east of Noon and found two small freighters of 100 tons each (Sugar Dogs). Making two bombing and strafing runs, they missed by about 30' with the bombs, but fired 1000 rounds with their machine guns to create some damage. The Japanese fired back with light guns but did not hit the PB4Y-1. This crew did maintain a good lookout as they were about 50 miles west of Okinawa but no fighter arose to offer protection for the Sugar Dogs.

Meanwhile and 100 miles northeast from Fulwider's activities, Ettinger found a 100-ton Sugar Dog. However, his patrol plane was carrying no bombs as they had 1050 nmi of search to cover. Making nine strafing runs and firing 3500 rounds, a fierce fire erupted just under the vessel's bridge. The PPC left the SD burning and dead in the water. Two days later Ettinger had a patrol in the same area and found the small freighter on a reef lying on its port side, gutted from the bridge forward to the bow.

On the return leg of his patrol on the 14th, Ettinger made a low-level pass alongside the main Japanese airstrip at Naha on Okinawa. Here, they counted 35 aircraft all with the large red meatballs on the wings and fuselage.

For his second patrol, flown on February 14th, West and Crew Twenty-Three had the long, long haul to Borodina. Here the Japanese greeted the PB4Y-1 with heavy anti-aircraft fire but for no score. Returning to Tacloban after the 15.5-hour search, the Wing Commander and his Chief of Staff greeted the new PPC with a dressing down. He had taken too long for his patrol! Not exactly a demonstration of loyalty downward. Support like this, the flight crews could do without. Ira West should have been commended for obtaining maximum performance from the airplane and a record flight time with a landing on an airfield, vice a ditching.

On February 15, 1945, Hagen and Crew Fifteen made a 0438(I) takeoff from Tacloban loaded with 3400 gallons and five 100# general purpose bombs (spell that high

explosive bombs). Off Swatow, China, they saw three 1000-ton freighters with the stack and bridges aft and steel construction throughout. These ships were classic Sugar Charlies. Attacking without delay, Ed was frustrated to find that no bombs had dropped from the bomb bay due to an electrical malfunction. On the next masthead bombing and strafing run, the bombs were salvo'd by a manual release with no spacing between the bombs. Although the bombs missed, some damage was done by the strafing. One SC was seen to be trailing oil. A great disappointment for the aggressive and competent Ed Hagen.

Furthermore, the medium-sized freighters had fired back at the PB4Y-1. Heavy, medium, and light AA guns blazed away and scored well. Hits were taken into the number four propeller and number three engine's underside, cowl flaps, air duct, and turbo-super charger intercooler which set fire to the engine. The PPC shut down the number three engine, cut off the fuel, and feathered the propeller. This action put out the fire. Ed continued to run the number four engine even though there was a great deal of vibration in it.

A landing was made at Mangalden airstrip, Lingayen Gulf, which was about 450 miles short of Tacloban. Two days later, a homeward-bound patrol was diverted to pick the crew up. PB4Y-1, BuNo 38859, was repaired, retrieved, and placed back into service a month later.

AMMO APLENTY - The Ryukyu island chain continued to serve as the main waterway for the small Japanese cargo vessels. The count intercepted at the southwestern end of the chain continued to increase. On the 15th, Wood and crew had more than they could handle, try as they did.

At the western end of the chain and about 60 miles east of the northern coast of Formosa, Wood found six Sugar Dogs of 70 to 100 tons, bow into shore on Yonaguni Jima. A radar station was also located on the shore, midway behind the string of SDs. The patrol plane was adequately loaded for the actions this day even though fueled for a 1050-mile search. They had ten 100# GP bombs, plenty of 0.50 caliber ammo, and extra gun barrels on board.

Woody made three bombing and strafing runs on these vessels, dropping two bombs on each run. One was a direct hit and the others were near misses. Together with 2000 rounds fired, one small coastal freighter was destroyed and two others were seriously damaged. Just off shore, three Sugar Dogs were underway and received similar treatment. Two bombing and strafing runs were made, dropping two bombs each run but again all missed. Then two additional strafing passes damaged all three ships. The radar station was also thoroughly strafed. A total of 1500 rounds were expended on these four low-level attacks.

Continuing his patrol, Wood then sighted eight 100-ton Sugar Dogs steaming in a column off the northeast corner of Formosa. This convoy of small cargo ships were apparently heading for the major harbor of Kirun. The patrol plane made two strafing

attacks up and down the column, firing a total of 2500 rounds. Two SDs were set on fire and the others were slightly damaged. There was no count of the number of gun barrels changed while 6000 rounds were fired at the 17 ships and the radar station. This was a record expenditure of ammunition to this time, but no citation was issued.

February 16, 1945, was a banner day for Skipper Wright and most certainly a day to remember for some airborne troops of the U.S. Army. Flying our patrols out into the South China Sea, we had seen several assault landings on the Bataan Peninsula during the past few weeks. On this day the paratroopers would drop onto Corregidor Island at the entrance to Manila Bay. The big guns of our surface navy had well pounded the island and the air drop and submission of Corregidor was to have been easily and quickly accomplished. Not exactly. Our intelligence estimate had made a gross error on the wrong side of the ledger. The Japanese forces on the island outnumbered our air assault troops considerably. It was a tough thing but our troopers finally prevailed.

A FAILED ASW PATROL - Wright was assigned an 1120 nmi patrol this day and was loaded with ten 100# bombs as well as full fuel tanks. About 50 miles northeast of Wenchow off the China coast, he located a major Japanese surface force consisting of two battleships, one heavy cruiser, and three destroyers. They were on course 040, speed 15 knots. About 15 miles northeast of this force, a convoy was sighted of one 10,000-ton tanker, and two 8000- to 10,000-ton freighter-transport, all protected by two destroyer escorts. A twin-float seaplane, a Jake, was flying an anti-submarine patrol between these two groups of enemy ships. Bad choice. The PB4Y-1 was flying at 300 feet and the Jake at 1000 feet. Wright maneuvered to approach the enemy aircraft from behind while the Japanese flight crew remained completely unaware of the patrol plane's presence. At 50-yards range and slightly above the ASW airplane, Joe Morin in the bow turret fired 100 rounds into the cockpit area. The pilot was apparently killed as the Jake nosed over and dove steeply into the sea, exploding on impact.

Meanwhile I ferried the Skipper's airplane, BuNo 38869, to Owi for an engine change. A bar was in full operation at Owi and I partook of the strong drink excessively. The trip back to Tacloban the next day was not pleasant. However, I did manage to get BuNo 38973 back in one piece.

STRETCH CLEANS HOUSE - Ettinger and his crew were far more gainfully employed than I on the 16th. They departed Tacloban for the 1050-mile patrol to Okinawa with 3400 gallons of fuel and ten 100# general purpose bombs with the 4-5 second delayed fuses (standard and essential for our low-level attacks). Off the coast of Okinawa to the northwest, they found two small steel-hulled freighters of the Sugar Charlie class and one 100-ton Sugar Dog which was towing four sea trucks of about 40 tons each.

First attacking the Sugar Charlies, the PPC made a total of five bombing and strafing runs, dropping five bombs and strafing with 900 rounds of 0.50 caliber API. Each SC received one direct hit and several near misses. One of the freighters blew up and the other



sank from a direct hit into the stern. Now directing his attention to the smaller Sugar Dog, he made two runs, scoring one direct hit, and the vessel blew up.

Continuing the attacks, he made six runs against the four sea trucks, dropping three 100# bombs and strafing with 800 rounds. Two of the open-hatched, aft-engine light transports blew up from bomb hits and the other two were sunk from strafing. A clean sweep of the shipping targets!

Next, it was time for Ettinger to begin the distasteful chore of leaflet drops on Okinawa. Flying at 50-foot altitude, the leaflets were sprayed over the area. Suddenly they came upon a 300' long bridge next to a village. Dropping the last of the 100 pounders, it hit at one end at the approach and foundation. The explosion knocked down the access to the village. Instead

of walking to and from their village, the citizens would now have to crawl down and then up to cross the ravine.

Our hard-nosed Skipper was so pleased with this day's effort by Crew Nine that he put a congratulatory memo on the bulletin board. Fred Himsworth purloined it and still has it as a prized souvenir. This day does raise the question of where were the Zekes, Oscars, and/or Tonys? Saving them for the invasion they must have known was sure to come was a mistake. The Fast Carrier Task Forces were certain to pound Naha airstrip thoroughly prior to the appearance of the amphibious forces. Their mistake; our gain.

Noon obviously liked to choose his own bomb loads. This insured a good mix for ships or shore targets when no shipping targets were found. On February 17th his bomb bays were loaded with one 250# GP, two 100# bombs, and seven 100# incendiary clusters. He was now loaded for bear or billy goats.

His patrol this day would take him along the east coast of Formosa to the northernmost tip. The first contact made was one 500-ton Sugar Charlie off the southeast coast. One bombing and strafing run was made, dropping two 100# GP bombs which missed. However, slight damage was inflicted by 475 rounds of 0.50 Caliber APIs.

About 50 miles north of the SC, Hank attacked a four-story building of cement construction and about 175' by 200' in dimensions. Aiming at the building's 100' smoke stack, they dropped seven 100# incendiary clusters and one 250# GP. The high explosive bomb hit the primary target and the incendiary clusters hit several smaller adjacent buildings

as well as the larger building. Heavy smoke arose from the four-story building and one large and several smaller fires were started over the adjoining building area.

Five minutes later the crewmen of the patrol plane sighted a twin-engine bomber code-named "Betty." This aircraft had an appearance similar to our B-26 Martin Marauder and was just about as fast. Beginning a chase, the enemy bomber was seen to jettison four bombs as it pulled away from the slower PB4Y-1. There was no opportunity to fire at the enemy aircraft.

Off the north tip of Formosa, Noon worked over a 300-ton freighter (Sugar Dog) with 1100 rounds in four low-level runs. A large fire was started but eventually burned itself out. Serious damage was judged to have occurred. About ten miles away, they found a 75-ton lugger and a similar treatment was granted this small open-hull vessel. Five hundred rounds were fired and, while no blaze was started, it was considered to be damaged. Noon also unloaded a number of leaflets upon the Japanese troops on Formosa. No doubt this was extremely detrimental to their morale.

At the same time as Noon's activities on eastern Formosa, Bittenbender demoralized the enemy troops on the west coast with his leaflet drops. Somehow the Japanese were not amused and made evident their displeasure by shooting at the PB4Y-1. Bitt also made leaflet drops on Amoy, China, but induced no reactions. The flight crews' evaluation was that this effort was more detrimental to our morale than that of the enemy's.

Still on the 17th, Ira West, "the Clovis Kid," flew the Hong Kong sector. On the return leg but still in a contested area, he spotted a rubber life raft with four men on board. Identifying these survivors as our people, the PPC circled the raft and ordered a drop of another seven-man life raft. This would provide more flotation and survival gear. Continuing inbound for Leyte, the patrol plane crew sighted a PT boat. Signaling the U.S. Navy vessel with an Aldis lamp "follow me," West led the patrolling surface craft to the downed airmen. The rescue was made and the PB4Y-1 was flown on into home plate.

The next day the four rescued men of VPB-117 came by to thank West for his vital part in their survival. They explained that on a ferry flight, they had run out of gas which forced the ditching of their PB4Y-1. However, on a visit to the PT boat base to also give thanks to the skipper of the rescue boat, a different reception occurred. The commanding officer of the boat was very angry to have been diverted from his mission to pick up a "bunch of Airedales." Sometimes it was quite difficult to identify friend from foe.

SHOOT OUT AT OKINAWA CORRAL - Wood and Crew Eight were assigned a long patrol, 1100 nautical miles to just beyond Amami Ō Shima, on February 18, 1945. The search sector was to become a "corralling of Japanese" in the Okinawa area. Their patrol plane was loaded with full fuel tanks and ten 100# GP bombs. It was very good hunting weather, partly cloudy with 15 miles visibility.

About 40 miles northeast of Okinawa, Woody spotted a 500-ton steel-hull freighter. This Sugar Charlie was hit by two 100# high explosive bombs and 300 rounds of 0.50 caliber gunfire. A raging fire was started and although the vessel tried to make the small island of Okino Erabu Shima, between Amami Ō Shima and Okinawa, it burned and sank before reaching the beach.

Nearby a 50-ton patrol boat was attacked by Wood making two runs, scoring one direct hit with a 100# bomb. The PG blew up and sank.

Continuing along the west coast of Okinawa, Wood sighted a twin-engine transport plane, a Topsy, on an easterly course at 2500'. It was most likely planning to land at Naha Airdrome. However, Wood closed to within 100 yards from below and Chester Osiecki in the bow and William Finady in the top turret rudely interrupted the Japanese pilot's flight plan. Firing 250 rounds into the engine and fuselage, the Topsy burst into flames and, in a diving starboard turn, crashed into the water. Unfortunately, there was no camera on board the PB4Y-1 to record this spectacular kill.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Wright took a familiarization flight in PV-1, BuNo 33067, under the tutelage of LCdr. Porter. The Lockheed Ventura was a slick-looking airplane, fast, but a little short on range. Wright's comments entered into his pilot's logbook noted, "fun but will stick with the B-24." VPB-137, operating the PV-1 at Tacloban, were not making anywhere near the kills we were.

Jameson and Crew Twenty-Two had a very bad day February 18, 1945. Finding no shipping on their outbound search, the PPC decided to attack an airfield on Borodina Island, located to the east of Okinawa. Diving in with full power from 1800', he dropped three 100# GP bombs spaced at 80-foot intervals and aimed at a small hangar. Once over the airfield, they saw 20 aircraft well camouflaged but they were committed on their run. The bombs missed but strafing set fire to a small building and silenced a machine gun position.

Passing over the targets, they received accurate and intense light and medium anti-aircraft fire. Ensign Kenneth Ray McHenry, at the navigation station, was fatally wounded by a bursting 20-millimeter shell. The airplane was totally shot up but miraculously made it back to Tacloban. The PB4Y-1 was surveyed and stricken from the records.

It was even worse by far on this day for Lt. William E. Goodman and Crew Twelve. Patrolling the east coast and north of Formosa, they failed to return to our base. There were no transmissions from their airplane nor any information concerning their loss. As always in such instances, we laid on extra searches in this sector but found no clues. It was terribly disheartening to lose our friends and comrades. We continued to fly our missions but the sadness of our losses remain with us to this day.

On the following day, February 19th, I flew the sector that made a complete circle of Formosa. This flight was conducted at very low altitudes in hopes of locating or finding some indication of the fate of Crew Twelve. There was nothing to be seen whatsoever.

A "get-even" complex may have been developed, resulting in a field day for Crew Two gunners. We shot up three trucks, one bus, one car, one radar station, two Shinto Shrines, and blew up one building. All from about 50-foot altitude.

Also on the 19th, Waldeck made a good contact off Formosa while en route to the end of his sector on the China coast at Amoy. The sighting consisted of two destroyers, two 5000-ton freighters, and one very large, 15,000-ton passenger liner. The convoy had a Val dive bomber flying an anti-submarine patrol overhead. The patrol plane commander attempted to nail the Japanese airplane but the wily pilot managed to keep the PB4Y-1 at bay by staying within gun range of the destroyers. Poor luck with enemy aircraft this day as they had also seen a twin-engine bomber, a Betty, earlier but there was no chance for a kill.

Heider and Crew Eleven made a 0437 takeoff for a patrol to Hong Kong on February 19th. Under a 700' overcast and visibility of three to four miles they sighted a 700-ton freighter, classed as a Sugar Charlie. Attacking from 50-foot altitude with three bombing and strafing runs, Hugh Heider dropped two, two, and one 100# GP bombs in sequence. He scored one direct hit and one near miss while also firing 550 rounds of 0.50 caliber APIs. The ship caught on fire and sank. There was no return gunfire nor opposition from enemy fighters though this action took place just off Hong Kong. Didn't the Japanese Airedales like their Navy seamen?

On this day the U.S. Marines initiated their assault upon Iwo Jima. After bitter fighting and great loss of life, the island was declared "secured" on March 16, 1945. However, fighting and dying to the last man, digging out the Japanese continued for some time. Once the airfield became operational, the B-29 raids against the Japanese homeland became far more effective and there were fewer losses. The escorting of the big bombers by the outstanding P-51 Mustang made a vast difference. The Japanese populace now learned firsthand of the gross mistakes of their military leaders.

On February 20, 1945, Wright had the patrol alongside the east coast of Formosa and on beyond into the East China Sea. Flying northbound, they came upon a very small wooden freighter of about 75 tons. He made one bombing and strafing run and sank it. Later, off the northeast coast of Formosa, he attacked a 150-ton steel-hull Sugar Dog. Making one bombing and strafing attack, he got a straddle with two 100# bombs and strafed with 3000 rounds. It continued to steam on course 200 degrees and eight knots, only slightly damaged. On the return leg of his patrol, Wright once again strafed the same SD but it maintained course and speed. One tough little ship.

Returning to Wright's outbound portion of his patrol and off the northeast tip of Formosa, he sighted three Val dive bombers in formation, flying on a crossing situation. The weather was 1000' overcast with five miles visibility and the Vals were flying just under

the overcast. From 300' altitude, Whit pulled up to attack the enemy flight. One dive bomber immediately pulled up into the clouds. Another dived for the water while the patrol plane made for the third Val, but he dove and maneuvered to pass back under the PB4Y-1. Zooming from below the patrol plane, the Japanese pilot then pulled up in front, climbing and reversing to make an overhead firing run. After this attack, the last but bold and competent Samurai then disappeared into the clouds. The blue-painted Liberator was holed by a 12.7 shell and though all hands had banged away with 1500 rounds, there was no apparent damage to any of the Vals. The Skipper completed his patrol after 14.4 hours and expended a total of 4500 rounds of ammo and five 100# bombs.

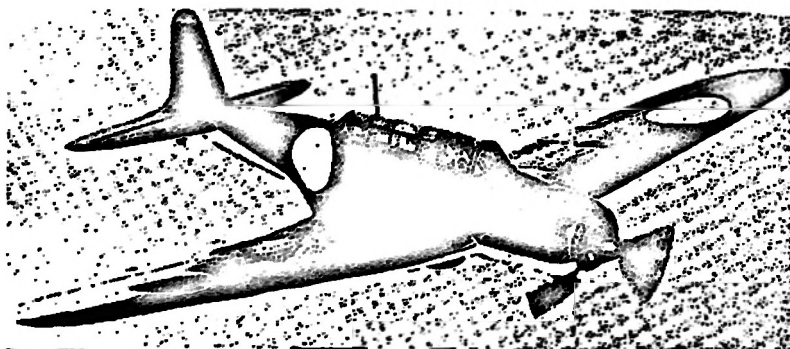
Ettinger and his crew had just a grand day on the 20th at Okinawa. They left Tacloban at 0530 in PB4Y-1 BuNo 38809, loaded with 3400 gallons and ten 100# GP bombs. They would return 13.8 hours later with only 25 gallons per engine remaining. Not a comfortable fuel reserve.

The first victim for Crew Nine was a 150-ton Sugar Dog anchored very close to the shore. Their attack sank it with two direct bomb hits and 350 rounds of gunfire. While making three runs to do a job on the SD, the patrol plane was swinging over a highway on the island. About 40 Japanese troops in uniform had the misfortune to be traveling in a bus along this highway. After 400 rounds of 0.50 caliber gunfire, the bus had part of its top blown off, all four tires were flat, and all windows and the windshield were shattered. There was no identifiable count of the troops killed or maimed. During the conduct of this business, Fred Himsworth in the top turret saw three Japanese aircraft but they quickly evaded into the overcast at 2000'.

The next activity was to work over four sea trucks/luggers of about 75 tons each. Three were set on fire and sank, the other was riddled and came to a dead stop.

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE - Ettinger headed on a southerly course on the west side of the island, flying in and out of the overcast. The idea was to approach Naha Harbor unseen and then drop out of the clouds to do a shipping count there.

Fred Himsworth now picks up the account:



"We dropped down out of the clouds at the harbor entrance and dead ahead of us about 500 yards a torpedo bomber code-named "Kate" was making its final approach to the airfield. With its flaps and landing gear down, it was just kind of hanging in the air in front of us. Our PPC pulled over onto the Kate but I couldn't fire as my guns would not depress far enough to bear on him. Clifford Batton in the bow turret, however, did not need any help from me. He fired off two short bursts totaling 50 rounds and set it afire. It crashed into the water about 20 yards short of the shore.

"A second Japanese aircraft, a Zeke, then came drifting across our course, apparently to investigate the fire off the end of the runway. Again I tried to fire on him but our wing tip blocked my aim. As it moved from there to pass aft and below us I did get off a short burst. But again Alfred Dixon in the tail turret needed no help. He set him afire with about 100 rounds into the engine, cockpit and fuel tanks. The enemy fighter crashed within 20 or 30 yards of the Kate in flames. I didn't know what happened to the third enemy aircraft. He had either already landed or just didn't want any part of us.

"We climbed back up into the clouds to evade any fighters they might launch to get us. But we headed for home elated, excited and jubilant over these victories. They were a long time in coming and at times it didn't look as though they would ever arrive. Now, getting two in one day was the icing on the cake."

As had happened before, there was an attentive passenger on this flight. He was a U.S. Army colonel who would land with his troops during the invasion of Okinawa. The Colonel had a real preview of the island and of things to come. He would have several comments to make on the actions this day. Once clear of the area, Ettinger asked the waist hatch to put the passenger on the interphone. When queried by the PPC if he had seen what he had come for, his reply was, "Wow, do you guys do this all the time?" Later, back at Tacloban, he arrived with some liquid refreshments for the "debrief." His observation now was, "I've been in the Army 25 years and today I've seen more combat than in all those 25 years." His kindness and thoughtfulness was only exceeded by his selection of beverages.

Whitney Wright, always sensitive and concerned with the morale and well-being of the squadron, now set forth a bit of levity. Our gracious and lovely Putt Putt would provide us with a blessed event. We would all participate in this and, perhaps, win a good bit of cash. Never mind that Putt Putt's name was misspelled on the lottery ticket, it was the thought that counts. The winner of the contest was not recorded in our War Diary nor any other document, official or unofficial.

.....LOTTERY.....LOTTERY.....LOTTERY.....LOTTERY.....

CLOSING DAY FEBRUARY 20th

"PUT-PUT" has been tampered with, There should be a Blessed Event take place in the near future. So.....for ONE DOLLAR or TWO PESOS or TWO GUILDERS you can buy a ticket and guess for the winnings. WINNER TAKE ALL!!!!!!!!!!!!

FACTS: "PUT-PUT" in heat February 8th-14th. Usually takes 55-63 days for pups to be born. There's been a Black, a White, and a Brown dog seen in the drivers seat.

NOW WIN YOUR MONEY:	NO STRINGS:	AN HONEST LOTTERY:
DATE PUPS BORN	NUMBER PUPS IN LITTER	PREDOMINANT COLOR, PREDOMINANT SEX
:	:	:
:	:	:
:	:	:

.....
 KEYS AND TICKETS WILL BE HANDLED
 BY YEVAN BORDEMAN

 (Signature)

LOTTERY.....LOTTERY.....LOTTERY.....LOTTERY.....

It had been apparent for some time now that our reliable and efficient R-1830 Pratt & Whitney engines were showing the toll of harsh treatment. We were ferrying PB4Y-1s regularly to Owi for engine changes. I am not sure whether the criterion for the schedule was hours accumulated or indicators of engine wear such as oil consumption, compression checks, or increased fuel flows. Also, the rate of engine failures while on a sector search or while still close enough to return and man the standby aircraft had increased. There are no records available of the trend, but from examining a number of our pilots' flight logbooks, it appears that engine problems were causing about five to ten percent returns short of covering the sector and/or utilization of the standby aircraft for the patrol.

On February 20th, Bittenbender and his crew flew the Hainan sector while also looking for any clues of Goodman's disappearance. They came upon a rescue operation at Hainan of two B-25 USAAC airmen in the water and being covered by P-38s. Bitt joined in for an hour and 45 minutes before a U.S. Navy PBM flying boat made the pickup. The PB4Y-1 took anti-aircraft hits into the navigation and radio compartment as a "thank you for your business" from shore-based anti-aircraft guns.

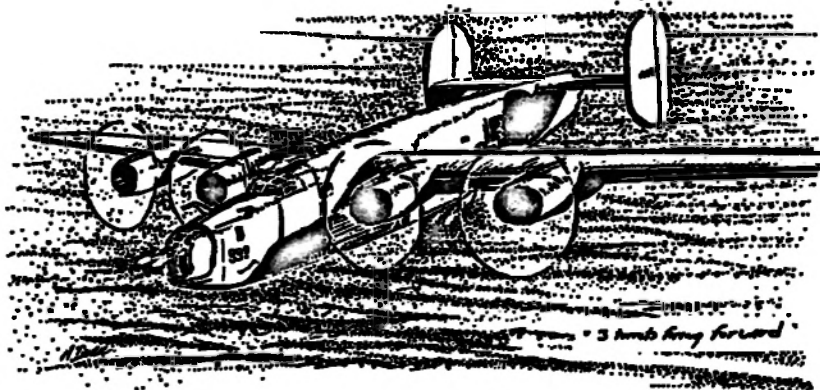
It was obvious that all of our patrols were making early departures from Tacloban. This may very well have been pressure or a directive from the USAAC to have us long gone before the dawn patrol of their fighters and then their morning bomber strikes. After all, they owned the airstrip. Burton and Crew Ten made a 0435 takeoff on the 21st to search along the east coast of Formosa and then on into the East China Sea. They were carrying ten 100# general purpose bombs (and, as always, with the 4-5 second delay fuses). On the return leg, the PPC found six 700-ton Sugar Charlies (steel-hull freighters) just off the northeast tip of Formosa. They were anchored together in two groups of two and four.

Burton made three bombing and strafing runs, hindered by poor weather, 400' overcast, and one-mile visibility in haze. Two bombs were dropped on the first attack and four on the second. On each attack, the high explosives straddled the second SC as a total of 1100 rounds were fired at the ships. The release of the four bombs was due to a stuck electrical switch and not as selected. The PPC decided against further drops due to this fault and departed the area, satisfied that four of the vessels had been damaged. Besides, with the terrain rising so quickly alongside the shore and the poor visibility, these attacks were just too difficult.

Hemphill had the sector on the west coast of Formosa this day and made two important contacts. In the harbor at Takao, on the southwestern coast, he reported four large freighters of 5000 to 6000 tons. In the anchorage at the Pescadores, off Takao, he found one large tanker of 10,000 tons and one freighter of 5000 tons. The PPC did not note in his logbook that he received anti-aircraft fire while making the ship count at Takao but it would be a rare occasion if he didn't. There was a hill about 500 feet high at this harbor. The Japanese had installed a radar station on its very top. It would be quite unusual to fly by Takao without a greeting from the AA guns there.

On February 22, 1945, Adler really got off early, 0356(I). He had the Okinawa sector and the patrol plane was loaded with five 100# bombs and five 100# incendiary clusters (IC). Vance lined his airplane up for his gunners to bag a 75-ton lugger one mile off Naha Harbor. In clear weather and 30 miles visibility, they made two attacks to do in the lugger. Not particularly significant to burn a lugger but there was no gunfire from the shore nor any fighters launched to contest this incursion. This "lying in wait" was to be very significant in the ground battle to come on Okinawa.

On the 22nd, I flew a 13.4 hour patrol in our airplane, BuNo 38889. Our sector covered the western end of the Ryukyu chain of islands. We passed by Miyako Jima and no targets were seen. At Ishigaki Shima, we flew down a row of docks with small vessels and one gunboat moored. We strafed them thoroughly but the bombs hung up for no kills. As we pulled up from this run, I made a 30-degree turn to port and was then lined up to blast the airstrip. There were ten fighters and one Lockheed Lodestar (or model 14) on the strip, but again the bombs hung up and there was no release. We did hose down the area with 0.50 caliber gunfire but nothing burned. Just off to the right at the end of the airstrip, I saw a barracks building and we dropped half our bomb load on it. The building really blew up, much to my satisfaction. I wish to stress that for most of these strafing runs and most all other attacks also, the top turret was bearing forward when firing. This placed the muzzles only inches from the cockpit and the pilots' heads. The sound was deafening and the



concussion rattled the whole cockpit. One thought his head would be split open from the blasts. I would instinctively lower my head when I knew the top turret guns would be shooting forward—it didn't help. All of the pilots dreaded this, but there was no choice in the matter.

As we started home, I dumped the rest of our bombs on Tarama Jima, a small island west of Miyako Jima. Our bombs hit squarely on a radio relay station, completely destroying it. There was quite an antenna farm associated with the radio station. They also had a neat parade ground adjacent to the relay station. No Aircraft Action Report was filed for the incidents. Nothing to be proud of.

The Aircraft Action Report dated February 23, 1945, on the Skipper's patrol to the China coast again documents that we really did carry spare/additional bombs stowed in the hull of the airplane unsecured. Years later, when asked about this, Lee Little, the old guy of Crew Two, verified that yes, we did and normally stowed such alongside the nose wheel and under the flight deck. Lee was asked, "Just how did you reload these bombs into the shackles in the bomb bays?" He replied that they just "muscled" them into the bomb racks; after all, they were only 100# bombs.

Wright departed Tacloban this day with five 100# GP and five 100# IC bombs loaded in the bomb bays. An extra five 100# general purpose bombs were stashed on the fuselage deck in the forward part of the airplane. Other extras included numerous metal boxes of 0.50 caliber ammunition and gun barrels. A reader may wonder if we observed the airplane's center of gravity limitations. The answer is yes and in a very practical manner. Jimmy Mathews, the Plane Captain for Ed Hagen's crew, explains:

"We had a weight and balance slide rule, very fancy, which detailed how each compartment of the aircraft was to be loaded for trim and safety. It was never used.

"We had a much simpler method. An empty ammunition box was placed under the tail skag, a structure to absorb the damage if the airplane dragged its after belly. Then the airplane's after station was loaded until the plane was sitting firmly on the main wheels and the tail skag. Then the front of the airplane was loaded until the weight was back on the nose wheel. The airplane then was deemed ready to fly."

Whit Wright was just south of Swatow on the China coast, in poor weather with an overcast at 800' and visibility restricted by fog and drizzle, when a large passenger ship code-named "Tare Baker" was sighted. The ship was of such size (7000 to 8000 tons) and since it did not have escort ships, the PPC thought it might be a hospital ship (AH). Deciding to verify the situation, he began a pass alongside. Its classification was readily established when a three-inch gun on the stern began firing at the patrol plane. Wright immediately translated the identification pass into an attack upon the beam of the TB. The bombs failed to release due to bomb bay door creep. This released pressure upon a micro-switch which canceled the bomb release signal.

A second low-level bombing and strafing run was made on the opposite beam of the ship. Heavy, medium, and light anti-aircraft fire (inaccurate) was directed at the PB4Y-1 and Whit jinked to avoid hits. This, in addition to the enemy executing a turn at the last minute, caused the bombardier to miss with the one bomb released. He had recognized the situation and knew a hit was not likely. A third and fourth run was made but no hits were scored due to line-up difficulties (poor visibility) and electrical release problems. At this time the PPC broke off to load the other five 100# GP bombs.

Wright returned to make a long straight-in approach, flying very close to the water to drop the five bombs with 25' spacing. All bombs missed, falling very close along the ship from bow to stern. During this and all other attacks, heavy and continuous strafing by the Liberator crew (4000 rounds) kept the ship's gunners comparatively silent. The gun crews were seen to leave their gun stations for better protection. The enemy transport ship was armed with one 3" gun on the stern and four 20 mm guns on the boat deck and most likely there were additional 12.7 mm machine guns on board.

Not only did the creeping bomb bay doors cause problems, but the bombs did not release as set up by the bombardier. Also, during the attempt to salvo five 100# bombs, one single fell and a second or so later the other four released. All in all, the bomb release system on BuNo 38926 was truly fouled up. In the copilots' logbooks for this day one described these attacks as "hairy" and the other entered "lots of shipboard AA!"

The same day West and Crew Twenty-Three flew a 13.9 hour patrol along the west coast of Formosa and into the South China Sea. On the return leg, just off the southwest coast of Formosa, they blew a small lugger to bits with one 100# bomb. Completing this attack, West sighted a 40-car train. Making one strafing run and firing off 600 rounds, they then continued along the track and dropped one 500# bomb on a bridge. The bomb fell

between two pillars of the bridge and exploded. Some damage was claimed on the train but not to the bridge.

The ground battle had continued and, on February 24, 1945, the U.S. Army Forces declared that resistance had ceased in Manila. This was the completion of a tragedy of large proportions. The Commanding General of the U.S. Army Forces had sought to declare Manila an open city. The Japanese refused to do so. Consequently, heavy fighting for the city occurred with mass destruction. Heavy artillery pounded buildings and homes. House-to-house fighting was the order of the day.

On February 24, 1945, Bittenbender flew sector eight, covering Okinawa. He carried an U.S. Army major as a passenger for the express purpose to view and photograph a stretch of the island's west shoreline near the southern end. Here the major expected to identify and evaluate the underwater defense installations. Such would be a great assist for the underwater demolition teams due to invade Okinawa.

The C.O. had directed Bitt to fly a quarter mile off the shore at 1000' altitude. It was well appreciated that this would not be a "free run." As the PPC began the photo pass, he misjudged and wound up right over the shoreline for the one-mile stretch. And as expected, he came under anti-aircraft fire and while intense for a short period of time, the PB4Y-1 was not hit. Completing the run and clearing the area, Bittenbender called over the interphone for a report from the major, asking if he had acquired the photography sought. Regretfully, the major had become so excited that he neglected to operate his camera. The Patrol Plane Commander did not volunteer to make another pass.

The searches on February 25th would make a number of good contacts and attacks. And I would have the opportunity to be court-martialed twice in the same day. This would take a bit of doing, but by serious application it could be done.

Waldeck sighted and reported one destroyer, one destroyer escort, and two 6000-ton tankers in the harbor at Swatow.

Heider came upon four sea trucks of 75 tons each just east of the southern tip of Formosa. Making four runs, dropping five 100# GPs, and firing off 1000 rounds, three were definitely destroyed.

Didier found better targets midway in the straits of Formosa. Two Sugar Charlies of 300 tons each and one 35' motor launch were attacked, making six runs. During one run, two 100# bombs were dropped, straddling the SC. On the next run, three 100# bombs straddled the other small freighter. The one SC of wood construction went dead in the water and a small fire was started. The crew then abandoned ship in lifeboats. These small boats were destroyed as was the motor launch. The other SC was of steel construction and continued on course only slightly damaged. A total of 2400 rounds were fired during this engagement. Anti-aircraft guns were fired at the patrol plane but no hits were scored by these small vessels.

NOT A GOOD DAY - Now it was my turn to generate a series of blunders. The American authorities had long known of the atrocities and lack of food and medical attention in the treatment of our prisoners of war by the Japanese. A particularly serious situation had developed in the POW camps on the island of Java. An arrangement had been established with the Japanese to permit a given amount of foods and medicines to be shipped to them. In turn, the Japanese would have a free passage for the ship transporting the POW relief materials when returning to the homeland. Thus, for a relatively small amount going to our starving personnel, the enemy could return with a full shipload of critical war materials. The deal was on and messages were sent to all U.S. submarines operating in the western Pacific.

Although we were hunting in the same area, **NO MESSAGE WAS TRANSMITTED TO OUR SQUADRON NOR FLEET AIR WING TEN REGARDING THIS DEAL.**

The Japanese vessel designated to perform this mission was the *Awa Maru*, a modern transport ship of 15,000 tons. It was unknown to me at the time, but this was the large beautiful ship I had sighted on February 25, 1945. I was not the only patrol that day to see this ship. Hemphill was assigned the sector next to mine and he too reported it. Not as the *Awa Maru*, of course, but as a large hospital ship unaccompanied by destroyers or other escort ships.

I took off from Tacloban at 0410, fully fueled and carrying ten 100# general purpose high explosive bombs. It was a rough ride, weather-wise, across the South China Sea. Approaching Hong Kong, I planned to do a ship count in the harbor. Letting down through the clouds, I broke into the clear about 20 miles southeast of the harbor and saw a sight that thrilled me considerably, a big modern transport ship with no escorting destroyers and far enough offshore to have no support from shore anti-aircraft batteries. It did have one anti-submarine aircraft, a Jake, flying a pattern in front of the vessel. This appeared to be a chance of a lifetime.

My course would take me about five miles in front of the big transport, so I would attempt to fake it as I obviously did not have surprise. I would continue my letdown and course and then, once over the horizon, I'd reverse course and come roaring back in for a masthead bombing attack. The Jake's pilot saw me and made a run for the protection of Hong Kong. Ignoring the ASW airplane, although it would have been an easy kill, I continued what I hoped to be a convincing deception.

Just about upon the shoreline, five or ten miles north of Hong Kong, I reversed course and asked for military power on the engines. Very soon I made visual contact with the transport ship again and saw that it was still on course, paralleling the coast. The Jake was long gone and, as I closed the target, it appeared that I did have surprise as there was no gunfire directed at me. At about 2000 yards from the ship, I was about to order "open fire" when I saw a faded green cross painted on the hull. This made me hesitate, but I very

nearly ordered commence firing anyway. We had been told that often the Japanese painted a red cross on their ships to evade attacks even though the vessels carried war materials.

But the green cross was something different. I held our gunfire and broke off the run--very, very disappointed. But, there was still the Jake, maybe. Staying low on the water and leaving 45" MAP and 2500 RPM on the engines, I started running for Hong Kong. However, as the harbor entrance became visible, it was clear that the Jake had made good his escape.

I was about to head into Repulse Bay to plan a ship count in the harbor, when I looked up and saw a flight of six Sally twin-engine bombers. They were three to four thousand feet above us and on a northerly heading. I turned towards this flight and started a climb up to their altitude. I would sneak up behind the bombers and pick off one or two (perhaps more?). Then, looking more closely, I saw four to six fighters behind and above the bomber formation. This would never do! I made a diving turn back to seaward and hoped that the fighters had not seen me. I much preferred to have the odds in my favor, if at all possible.

Well, then, now I would do the Hong Kong ship count. Leaving military power on the engines, I started running in very low on the water. I planned to fly in low and then pull up to the top of the island of Hong Kong for a good look down into the busy harbor. As we approached from the east, we flew right over a big coastal defense gun set into a concrete basin. Continuing, and beginning the climb to the top of the island, there was no anti-aircraft fire directed at us. I really wondered just why we had not received some greeting from the Japanese. If no AA fire, then why no fighters? Mucking around as I had been doing, they surely knew I was on their doorstep.

The base of the cloud or haze layer was about on top of the peak, but the visibility was reasonably good in the harbor. There were a number of ships seen but I failed to enter the numbers and types in my pilot's logbook. Had too many other incidents to record this day.

I then made a left turn to depart the area on a southeasterly course. This placed us over Repulse Bay and I was letting down to be back on the water. I still could not understand why no opposition had been sent out for a tussle. Now, and about a mile or two from the look-see into the harbor, Arvid Rasmussen, tail turret gunner, called out, "Fighter coming in on our six o'clock." I quickly reversed course and saw one Oscar, a Japanese Army fighter, boring in directly for us. Just how insulting could the Japanese be? Sending one fighter out for me was beyond the pale. I would pull directly into the Oscar, shoot him down quickly, and proceed with my patrol. It didn't quite work out that way. This fighter pilot meant business. He came right in, firing, and did not waver one bit from the task at hand. We passed very close and I realized that I had made a mistake. I should have made a run for it and dragged him out to sea to hopefully discourage a long running battle. Not much choice now but to make sure our gunfire passed sufficiently close in front of him to announce that he would have no free firing passes.

By putting both feet on the one rudder in the direction of the desired turn and pulling very hard on the elevator, one could horse the big airplane about in a timely manner. In this fight, I kept turning and pulling to have at least two turrets bearing upon the enemy during all of his attacks. After one firing pass, he pulled up to the right in a chandelle and I traded off airspeed for altitude and stayed with him. At the top, as he turned back for another run, I was sitting there, firing. He sure as hell was not expecting this and rolled hard to the right and dove to pull away. This I could not match.

There is a small island in the center of Repulse Bay about two miles long and peaking at 500' or so. The Oscar pulled away from us and, low on the water, it appeared as though he would fly around the island at a low altitude. I turned to fly on the inside or the other side of the island. But why not pull up to fly over the top of the island and "cut him off at the pass?" Well, on the other side of the island, the guy in the black cowboy hat had the same idea. We met head-to-head at the top of "Boot Hill" and there was to be no give by either gunslinger. David Gleason in the bow and Allen Anania in the top turret had all four 0.50 caliber guns firing very effectively. Initially, I thought we'd had him as heavy black smoke was pouring off both wings. Second thoughts prevailed as I realized that both his wing-mounted 20-mm guns were firing very, very well.

Again we missed a head-on collision by the barest of margin. But I'd had more than enough. I would dive for the water and try running out to sea. In the airplane with the big red meatballs on the wings and fuselage, apparently the same thought occurred. One tough Oscar pilot kept right on going back to Kai Tac aerodrome. Wonder what he told the boys of his squadron over several hot sakes this night?

However, I still had ten unused bombs and with a reload of the gun turrets, we would try something else. I had heard reports that Japanese shipping and seaplanes had been seen in the harbor at Macao. I had also been briefed that the island of Macao was a neutral entity. By this, I believed that such applied to the islands off Macao. After all, a "neutral" port would not be harboring combatant (Japanese) forces. And, too, I did not know that a small river cut the city of Macao from mainland China and it also was an island. A BIG mistake on my part.

So, I would fly up the Pearl River at minimum altitude, then turn inland and fly in at high speed to Macao to surprise what enemy forces that might be there. Good plan. But it was to have unpleasant consequences.

After I had flown up the Pearl River 25 miles or so, I made a left turn to travel overland and set a course for Macao. Now this was a sight to behold. Flying at 50 to 100 feet over what must have been the main artery between Macao and Canton, China, there were hundreds of coolies trotting along, carrying articles of some kind on their shoulders or heads. It was an astounding display of the state of transportation for one thing. There were no powered forms of transportation seen other than a few oxen-propelled carts. The coolies' faces showed a degree of terror as they looked up at our big bomber.

As we came upon the outskirts of Macao, I saw that there were no ships nor seaplanes at anchor in the open harbor. On the other side of a strip of land from the open harbor, we suddenly came upon a small freighter of about 2000 to 3000 tons moored to a dock. Being so low, I had not seen this ship soon enough to establish a good line-up for a bombing run. Even so, I made a sharp turn into this target but was late in rolling out to obtain a level aircraft for the bomb release. Our bombardier, ever so capable of excellent judgments for the bomb drops, held the release until too late for a hit on the ship. Most certainly not his error; I simply was too close to the vessel to make the turn in and establish a satisfactory position for a hit. As it was, all ten bombs hit upon the dock and into a warehouse. I don't doubt that the warehouse was destroyed and a number of seamen and stevedores were killed. At least the Portuguese government claimed such.

As we departed the Macao area, I set a course for our return leg. I was very disappointed to have missed the ship. However, there is little question that dropping our bombs when we did most likely saved our lives.

Off the coast of Macao there are several islands. On course for Leyte, we would pass just to the north of one such island about ten miles long with hills up to 1500'. The visibility was now unlimited and we had an overcast at about 4000'. Located another five miles to the southeast of this island, I saw a real prize, a 40,000-ton tanker code-named "Sugar Able Two Stack." It was a very important ship for the Japanese. It was being accompanied by three destroyer escorts. The DEs were providing close cover for this oil-laden behemoth. At that time and even now, I know very well that if we still had bombs aboard I would have made an attack upon this convoy. At the time, I visualized an approach shielded by the island and then running in at 50 feet to make a drop on the huge tanker. It would have required flying right over or just alongside the lead DE. After the bomb release and pull up, the other two DEs would have had their shots at us. I believe that they would have gotten us but we would have laid ten 100# high explosive bombs on the deck of the tanker. We would have left several million gallons of crude oil burning and one small spot of aviation gas burning where PB4Y-1, BuNo 38933, hit the water. Fate. One never knows just how it will play out. In this instance Crew Two of Bombing Squadron 104 would continue to fly their patrols.

Several years after the war, Whitney Wright related the rest of the story to me regarding the *Awa Maru*. The medical and food supplies had been delivered to our POWs on the island of Java. On the return trip, the *Awa Maru*, loaded with critical war materials, was torpedoed by a U.S. submarine and it quickly sank. The Commanding Officer of the submarine was court-martialed despite his defense of being improperly informed of the movements of the enemy transport ship. He was convicted but his penalty was minimal. Had I made the attack on the *Awa Maru*, I, too, would have been court-martialed. Inasmuch as the U.S. Government was highly embarrassed, a conviction was assured in either instance. But I do believe that my penalty would have been very severe because the relief materials bound for our POWs would not have been delivered. Luckily, my decision was not to make a bomb drop on the *Awa Maru*.

A bad decision was made by me in attacking the ship moored in the inner harbor at Macao. Although the squadron and wing attempted to exonerate me when reporting the attack in the Aircraft Action Report, the U.S. government was again embarrassed. So, despite the AAR stating that "...the coastline was almost closed in with light rain and very limited visibility...", court-martial proceedings were begun about a month or so after the incident. I guess the Navy's higher command was forced to as a result of the Portuguese government's protesting and filing a claim for several million dollars. It was a frightening experience and, at the same time, impressive. A full colonel, U.S. Army, accompanied by a sergeant, came to our camp to take sworn testimony from me and my crew. I had prepared my crewmen. Of course, they remembered the day of miserable weather, very limited visibility, and we were unsure of our position on the China coast. It was fascinating that the sergeant was writing all these statements down as we spoke. I had never before been exposed to anyone with the capability to take dictation. Very soon after the encounter with the preliminary proceedings, the charges were dropped for lack of cause (or some such thing). I was called the "million dollar kid" for a period of time around the camp. I did not take all this lightly. I was concerned by the charges against me and was greatly relieved once it was all over.

On the following day, the only kill made was by Ettinger at Yonaguni Jima Island located about 70 miles east of the northeast side of Formosa. Here Stretch found a 150-ton Sugar Dog anchored off the north side of the island. Ettinger and crew made two bombing and strafing runs, destroying the small freighter by one direct hit. The ship blew apart.

Next they flew across the center of the island and spotted a radio station. These Japanese naval radio stations were easily identified by their associated antenna farms. Making three strafing attacks and firing off 400 rounds, the building was set afire and destroyed.

Repeating a search along the north shore, they came upon three Sugar Dogs of 150 tons each. Ettinger made two runs, dropping four 100# general purpose bombs and strafing with 250 rounds. All three were damaged by near misses and hits with the 0.50 caliber machine gun fire. At no time during these attacks and passes over and along the shore was any anti-aircraft fire observed.

EASIER BY THE HALF DOZEN - Wood and Crew Eight had a very busy day on February 27, 1945. They were off from Tacloban at 0400(I) carrying ten 100# high explosive bombs. Their 1000-mile sector would take them through the Formosa Straits up to Foochow on the China coast.

Flying along Takao on the west coast of Formosa, they made contact with three enemy twin-engine night fighters code-named "Nicks." Just over the shore, a Val dive bomber and an Oscar army fighter observed the action but chose not to participate. Wood turned into the Nicks to engage but the fast fighters turned away and increased speed. The top and bow turret fired 200 rounds at maximum range but no damage was seen. The night

fighters were too fast for the PB4Y-1 by far and faded away in the variable visibility. To engage the Val and Oscar would be foolhardy as there was an abundance of anti-aircraft guns at Takao.

Later, Wood found six Sugar Dogs of 100 to 150 tons each. These small freighters were in column, steaming on a course to enter a harbor on the China coast located about 50 miles south of Foochow. Twelve bombing and strafing runs were made, dropping all ten bombs and firing 3800 rounds into the vessels. Four SDs were blown up by direct bomb hits and the other two were set afire by strafing. All six vessels sank.

At 1200(I), and not necessarily looking for more action, the patrol plane was attacked by two very aggressive fighters off Amoy. One was a radial-engine single-place fighter code-named "Frank." This was a late model, high performance fighter armed with four 20 mm cannons. The other attacker was an old acquaintance with an inline liquid-cooled engine, also armed with four 20 mm cannons. It was a Tony and usually a frightening sight.

The fighters were very aggressive and pressed home their coordinated attacks. The fight lasted for ten minutes and the PB4Y-1 received one 20 mm hit into the after station, slightly wounding three men. Damage to the airplane was minor. A total of 800 rounds were fired at the enemy aircraft and hits were scored on the Frank. It departed the action, streaming smoke from the wing roots and fuselage. The Tony left shortly thereafter. No shoot-down was claimed against the Frank but, without question, it was substantially damaged.

The patrol plane landed back at Tacloban after 13.8 hours flying time. Due to so much action this day, only about 25 gallons of fuel for each engine remained after taxiing to the hard stand.

Well south on the China coast from Woody's tussle with the enemy fighters, Adler found a Nick that had crash-landed ten miles south of Swatow. There were a number of people standing around the night fighter as though it had just bellied in. Adler thought it well to insure that there would be no salvage for this aircraft. He made two runs, dropping five incendiary cluster bombs and two 100# GP bombs. The Nick did not burn but it was considered to be thoroughly damaged. There was no estimate of kills or wounding of the gawking Japanese.



BITT SCORES WELL - Bittenbender also engaged a number of enemy aircraft on his patrol to Hong Kong and Macao this same day. About 20 miles southwest of Macao and cruising at 1500' in good visibility, he met, head-on, three Japanese Topsy twin-engine transport aircraft. After the flight passed overhead at 2000', Bitt quickly reversed course to

attack from their rear. Gene Montoux in the bow and Carl Everhart in the top turret fired 300 and 200 rounds respectively into one Topsy. It went down in flames.

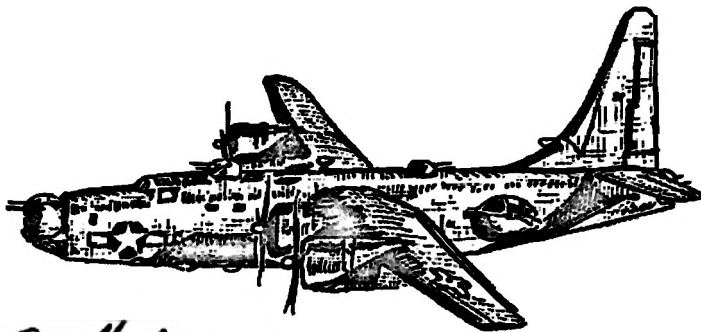
Firing on a second transport airplane, hits were seen in the fuselage, engines, and tail section. A large white flash was seen in the center of this Topsy as it entered a cloud. This airplane was considered to be probably destroyed.

The third airplane in the formation made a sharp turn to port and, as it broke away, Howard Brown in the tail turret got off 75 rounds. He definitely saw hits into the fuselage and port wing. As it pulled away on an opposite course, it was still flying but obviously damaged.

Immediately after the action with the transports, Bittenbender saw two Val IIs. This was an improved model of the earlier single-engine dive bomber and much faster. The PB4Y-1 was maneuvered to close from astern on the two airplanes, which were most likely serving as escorts for the Topsys. The rear-seat gunners in the Vals failed to see the patrol plane approaching. At 500 yards, the PPC gave the "open fire" to the bow and top turrets. Continuing to close, shooting, and when about 150 yards distant, one dive bomber was seen to be hit in the engine and wing roots. It broke off to port and dived down through the clouds. As it exited the stratocumulus layer, it was seen to crash into the sea.

During the shoot-down of Val number one, the other pilot pulled up into the clouds. He did not escape unscathed as Everhart, in the top turret, fired 100 rounds at him and saw hits into the wing and fuselage. Since the airplane seemed under control as it disappeared, only damage was claimed on this Val. Hits were judged to be made when tracer flashes were seen. Whether the other four shells in the belt load hit or not could not be determined.

It is not often that a patrol plane crew has an opportunity such as this one. Bittenbender and Crew Thirteen certainly made the most of it! And, since there was no return gunfire from the enemy aircraft, the Liberator was undamaged.



© 97 *Alco Dime*

PB4Y-2

On February 27, 1945, VPB-119 was ordered to depart Owi and report into Fleet Air Wing Seventeen at Clark Field no later than March 1, 1945. This arrival would add a great deal of punch to our patrol plane operations in this area. This squadron was equipped with the PB4Y-2. An improved version of the B-24 Liberator, it was faster, had greater range, and more 0.50 caliber machine guns, all mounted in powered turrets. We would have loved to have had this airplane!

On the last day of February 1945, Allied Forces invaded Palawan Island at Puerto Princesa. It was here that another sickening atrocity by the Japanese was discovered. A large number of prisoners of war had been bound and thrown into a deep ditch. Gasoline was then poured into the ditch and set fire. There was only one survivor of this inhuman act.

On the 28th, off the northeast coast of Formosa, Didier had an unusual incident. To begin with, he had a heavy bomb load for the 1000-mile sector; two 500# and ten 100# general purpose bombs. He made one low-level attack on a 50-ton lugger and dropped both 500# bombs (he may have done so to reduce the weight of his overloaded aircraft rather than overkill). One of the large bombs exploded under the lugger, lifting it into the air and letting it back down onto the water 90 degrees from its original heading. Jerry did not stay around to observe the results as he was under gunfire from six heavy anti-aircraft shore batteries.

Burton had a very long sector search this day, 1165 nmi. He would fly 14.7 hours and to just beyond Amami Ō Shima. On the return leg and south of Okinawa, he made one bombing and strafing run on a 400-ton freighter, a Sugar Charlie. Two direct hits with 100# high explosive bombs blew off the bow and the vessel quickly sank. Just after this attack, he saw a 5000-ton freighter-transport escorted by two gunboats. Appreciating that they were now alerted, Burton wisely passed this convoy up and continued homeward bound. Also, due to the extreme mileage of this patrol sector, he could not afford the extra fuel consumption that would be required for the action.

Meanwhile, just to the west, Jameson and Crew Twenty-Three destroyed a 75-ton Sugar Dog. Four bombing and strafing runs were required, as the electrical bomb release system malfunctioned. The 0.50 caliber gunfire did the job by setting the small freighter afire. There was an unusual number of personnel aboard and all were killed, including some after jumping over the side.

FIVE VESSELS FOR FIVE THOUSAND ROUNDS - The big shooters of February 28th were Noon and Crew Four. And it was well that they had extra 100# GP bombs lying in the bilges of their PB4Y-1, as they would well use all 14 bombs. The first action took place about halfway between the northern tip of Formosa and the southern end of Okinawa. Here they encountered four Sugar Dogs, two of 200 tons and the other two weighed in at 100 tons. Leading this group was a 500-ton Sugar Charlie. All of these vessels were of wood construction. Noon began the attacks which totaled 12 strafing runs, firing off 5000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. A bombing attack was made but the patrol plane's bomb release

system was completely uncontrollable. Selecting a release in train resulted in a salvo. Then trying to release in salvo, Noon found he had no control of the timing of the drop. Regardless of the failure of the bomb release system, the strafing readily set fire to all ships and they burned furiously. All five sank.

Later, at Yonaguni Jima, east of northern Formosa, Hank Noon attacked three small freighters of the Sugar Dog class. Two SDs were of the 200-ton size and the other of 100 tons. Six strafing runs were made, expending 3000 rounds. One SD began burning very well and most probably sank. The other two were only damaged. A new record of 8000 rounds had been expended but, again, no citation. Noon also failed to record how many gun barrels were replaced during this vast expenditure of ammo.

Time in the tropics was telling on our airplanes' electrical systems.

In summary, during February 1945 the squadron flew 143 operational sorties totaling 1788 hours. There were 17 ferry flights for maintenance, engine changes, and conferences with the higher command for 103 flight hours.

Munitions expended amounted to 159,700 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition, 435 100# bombs, 17 250# bombs, and 69 100# incendiary clusters. There was no recording of the number of 500# bombs dropped.

Two PB4Y-1 aircraft were lost and four replacements were received. An additional aircraft was lost but this was a Fleet Air Wing Ten airplane from their pool and not assigned to our squadron.

Lt. Ira B. West and crew arrived as a replacement for Sutherland's crew on February 10th which brought our personnel back to full complement.

The squadron had scored very well during this month. A total of 51 vessels had been sunk, varying in class and size from a 6000-ton transport to Sugar Puppies. The total tonnage amounted to 14,880 tons.

Fifty-eight vessels were damaged; the largest being an 8000-ton transport and the smallest, a powered motor launch. The aggregate tonnage was 25,700 tons.

In the air, there were twelve confirmed shoot-downs and four probably destroyed. Damaged while airborne were nine enemy aircraft. Another two were damaged on the ground and one destroyed.

A number of targets were hit on the ground. Destroyed were six warehouses and two buildings on airfields. Damaged were an oil refinery, warehouses, factories, radar stations, trucks, buses, and automobiles.

February had been a good month and illustrates the number of additional kills and destruction that could have been made in January were it not for the no attack edict from the higher command. All of us continued to resent that restriction

**.CHAPTER SEVEN
THE JOYS OF CLARK FIELD
A VERY GOOD MONTH**

The squadron was directed to move to Clark Field beginning March 1, 1945, and to complete the movement by March 3rd. I flew to our new base on the 1st via Mindoro Island. The Skipper flew to Clark on the 2nd and then returned to Tacloban. He returned on the 3rd and the squadron was then officially there. Our reporting senior was Commander, Fleet Air Wing Seventeen, and Commander, Task Group 73.8, Captain C. B. "Fox Hole" Jones. It was very good to be back under his firm command and wise, competent leadership. CASU(F) - 57 would provide our maintenance and upkeep.

However, it was not an auspicious start. Shortly after I had landed, one of our landing PB4Y-1s collided with a PB4Y-2 of VPB-119 hidden in a cloud of dust at the end of the runway. Faulty brakes on our airplane contributed to the accident. The Patrol Plane Commander in the Privateer was killed. He had been a member of VB-104 during the first combat tour to Guadalcanal. Both airplanes were damaged beyond repair and struck from service.

Clark Field was located in the middle of the Luzon Plains. It was dry, hot, and dusty. There was fighting here from day one. Evidence of the importance and value of the airfield prior to the beginning of the war were the remains of two permanent hangars now only twisted steel and crushed cement. Regardless of the gunfire in the nearby hills, Clark was an excellent airfield and camp. And busy! In addition to the main single runway of Clark Field itself, there was a dirt strip just across the road from our camp. Here, U.S. Marine dive bombers (SBDs) were shuttling back and forth, providing ground support to our troops fighting in the hills. Also, USAAC C-47s operated from this strip, performing their logistics mission. And, as at Tacloban, we were the first heavy bombers to base here.

We would continue to operate under Commander Aircraft Seventh Fleet Operation Plan No. 1-45. Our search sectors were again laid out in Annex D, Search Plan Jig. The mission, as set forth in the OpPlan, is quoted as follows; "Forces under Rear Admiral F. D. Wagner, USN, to conduct normal day-to-day operations in the Philippines-China Sea-Formosa area."

From the History of Patrol Bombing Squadron One Hundred Four dated June 1, 1945, the search sectors to be flown from Clark Field are as follows:

From Clark Field the search area was extended further north. The China coast was covered to within 30 miles of Shanghai. The arc was drawn eastward to include the entire coastline of Amami Ōshima as well as Okinawa and Oagara Daito Jima. The islands of the Ryukyu chain from Okinawa to Formosa included Miyako Jima, Ishigaki Jima, Irinote Jima, Yonagunti Jima, and the lesser Jimas. The broad arc of coverage included Formosa, the Pescadores, the China coast to Fort Bayard; Batan Islands; and northern Luzon all were

daily searches. The north and northeastern sectors were extended to 1050 miles during the Okinawa landing operations. They were subsequently cut back to 700 miles and increased in width (Note that USN VPB-118, operating from Tinian Island, was conducting searches, beginning on March 6, 1945, to Amami Ō Shima, Oagari Daito, and the Japanese homeland coastlines southeast of Kyushu and Honshu). Two sectors were then added to cover the Gulf of Tonkin, reaching to Haiphong and Mon Cay, French Indo-China, as well as the entire coastline of Hainan. Night patrols were flown north of Formosa to intercept dawn flights of Japanese aircraft between Matsuyama (near Kiirun, Formosa) and Shanghai airfields. Also, the secondary mission of striking targets of opportunity was broadened to include such land targets as might be deemed feasible by the squadron commander.

As it was, everything was deemed feasible by the VPB-104 Commanding Officer.

Patrols from Clark began March 2, 1945, but there was no action that justified an AAR. However, during the squadron's movement, missions were still flown from Tacloban. On the first of March, Wright flew the sector to Hong Kong from Leyte. Just south of this major Japanese base, he sighted and reported one 10,000-ton tanker accompanied by two destroyer/destroyer-escorts. The patrol plane received anti-aircraft fire from these ships in addition to the shore batteries of Hong Kong. The PB4Y-1 was not damaged.

On this same day in the adjoining sector to the northeast along the China coast, Waldeck made an attack upon a tug towing two barges and a junk. He made ten bombing and strafing runs dropping, singly, two 250# and five 100# GP bombs but scored only near misses. Two thousand rounds were fired also, but only damage could be claimed. Nothing to get excited about with this incident except for Flash Gordon's entry into his logbook. As the Plane Captain for Waldeck, Flash could choose his gun station. On this day in the waist of the PB4Y-1, he saw that the tug had some female crew members. Photos taken with the K-20 camera substantiated his sighting. Were the Japanese that advanced in gender equality?

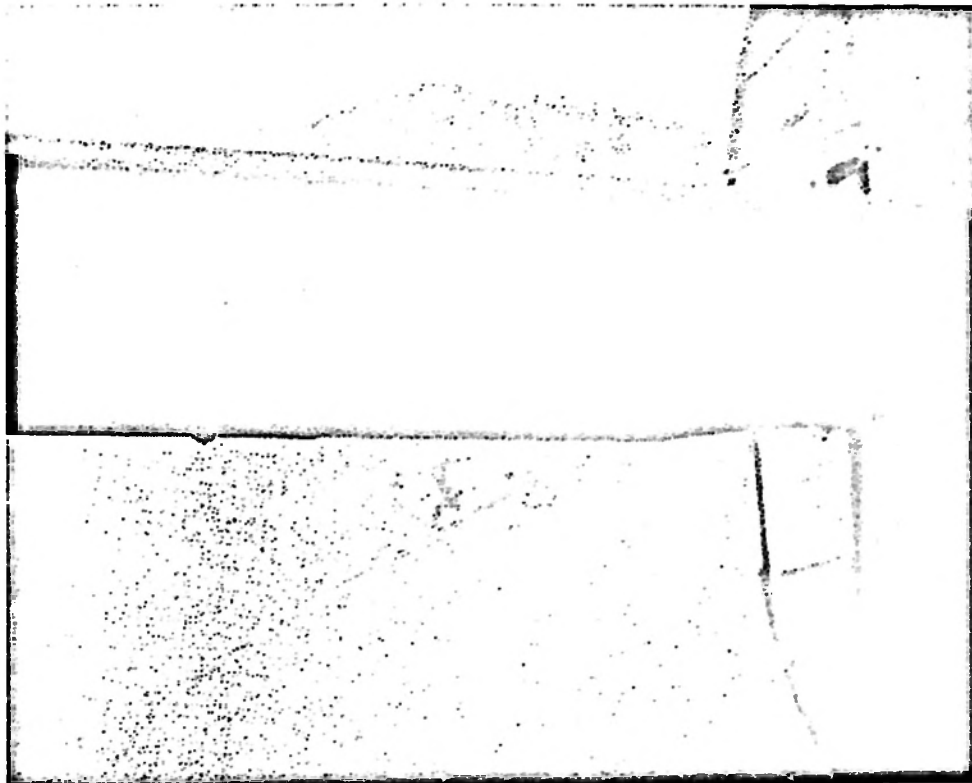
On March 1st, Heider sank a 200-ton Sugar Dog in the Formosa Straits, making four bombing and strafing attacks in very poor visibility (1/4 to 1/2 miles in fog).

The real coup of the day was accomplished by Hemphill. The exact position was not entered in his logbook but most likely the sighting was made at Kiirun. But wherever, Jeff reported one 10,000-ton transport, four medium-sized (about 5000 to 6000 ton) freighter-transport and eight smaller freighters of 1000 tons each. Six fighters overhead ignored the PB4Y-1.

A QUICK KILL - On March 3, 1945, Wood and Crew Eight were only 2 1/2 hours into their patrol when they came upon a torpedo plane code-named "Kate" off the southeast coast of Formosa. Woody dived in, attacking, and William Finady in the top turret, Harold Gronquist manning the port waist single 0.50 caliber gun, and Leon Bashist in the tail turret, all opened fire. After a total of only 150 rounds fired, many hits were seen in the center

section of the fuselage. These hits set the Kate on fire and it fell off on its starboard wing and crashed into the sea. A very nice way to begin a patrol.

Later, and nearing the end of his 1100 nmi patrol, Stan Wood made contact with one Sugar Charlie of 600 tons, a 150-ton Sugar Dog, and a 50-ton self-propelled barge. This group was positioned about 50 miles south of Hang Chow Bay on course 220 degrees



and speed six knots. The PPC made four bombing and strafing runs, scoring two direct hits with 100# high explosive bombs on the SC and one direct hit on the other two vessels, sinking all three. A "well done" to George Gruner, the bombardier!

Beginning in early March, the patrols covering the Okinawa sectors had ringside seats to the greatest show on earth. Our Fast Carrier Task Forces were striking Okinawa with a vengeance. The "softening up" of an island targeted for amphibious assault was awesome. This was just further evidence that the landings on Okinawa were a coming event for sure.

On March 4, 1945, Fulwider flew an 1100-mile patrol well to the east of Okinawa. Almost 300 miles from the island, he attacked a picket boat. These were tough little

converted steel-hulled trawlers of about 150 tons. Well-armed, they had 12.7 mm and 20 mm rapid fire guns and some had 37/40 mm cannons. Usually, they also had armor plate protecting their gunners. Equipped with radar, they were a sore point beginning with the USS *Hornet* carrying the Doolittle Raiders for their attack on the Japanese homeland. Now the B-29s hitting Tokyo resented their presence considerably. Bill Fulwider made four attacks, missing with his bombs, but silencing the intense machine gunfire. There was only slight damage to the vessel.

PATROL PILOT PAUL DOWNS A PAUL - I too flew an 1100-mile patrol on March 4th beyond Okinawa to Amami Ō Shima. Takeoff was at 0410(I) from Clark Field with a full load of fuel and ten 100# GP bombs. "Lotsa" rain and low ceilings this day and it proved to be a hindrance of some considerable degree. Approaching the south end of Amami Ō Shima, we made contact with a convoy of four destroyers, three FTBs of 5000 to 6000 tons, and one 1500-ton SC. From their position and course, it appeared that they were about to enter a harbor where nine SDs were anchored. Due to the rain and poor visibility, I had stumbled upon these ships and, from the intense AA gun fire immediately received from the DDs, I knew it would be a "no-go" for an attack. No surprise, no attacks upon escorted convoys was my rule and usually observed.

As I sighted the ships, I also saw a "Paul," an improved model anti-submarine and scout airplane very similar to the single engine twin-float plane called a Jake. Quickly attacking the enemy aircraft, I found that this Japanese pilot was alert as he made a sharp maneuver partially deflecting my firing pass. On my next attack, he failed to take evasive action, apparently due to being hit during our first pass. We then drilled him good with our 0.50 caliber guns while closing to point-blank range. The Paul nosed down, hitting the water and bouncing up. Then the enemy aircraft nosed down further, crashing into the sea and bursting into flames. Two depth charges then exploded, throwing up a geyser of water a hundred feet or so into the air. During this engagement, the destroyers continued banging away with intense heavy anti-aircraft gunfire. We were not hit and I was pleased to create some degree of annoyance to their gunnery officers and the convoy commander.

On the return leg of my search, I found and made a total of eight bombing and strafing runs on two Sugar Dogs and two luggers. They were spaced along a seven-mile stretch southward from the north end of Okinawa. I worked over these vessels for 15 minutes, dropping all ten bombs and firing 1700 rounds. No hits were made with the bombs as the rain and poor visibility made the line-up very difficult. Only slight damage was claimed on the steel-hull Sugar Dogs, maybe a little more damage on the luggers.

As we passed by Naha Airfield, I saw one twin-engine airplane over the field. But I felt quite sure that with all the screwing around with the small ships, they would be well alerted so I decided to pass this opportunity.

Besides, my stomach was churning up terribly. Upon arrival at Clark Field, we had really enjoyed the fresh fruits and vegetables available for purchase from the local Philipinos. I particularly liked the watermelons. It was such a treat after being on dried

rations for months. But we paid the price. About 99.9 percent of the camp had diarrhea. The open-air head/latrine was continually filled and with a line waiting. Now, just hurrying to clear Okinawa, I was eagerly awaiting a chance to leave the cockpit to go to the waist gun station and set on an empty 0.50 caliber ammo box. Actually, they made a very good potty by simply spreading the top apart to fit one's posterior.

Unfortunately, two Japanese fighters chose this time to come out and do battle. I usually stayed with the policy of not trying to run for it when tussling with fighters. Running only gave them a better chance to set up for their choice of the attack. Better to maneuver to deny those options. So here we went "round-de-round" and my stomach growling more fiercely at each turn with my antagonist. I made the decision, the hell with it; if they were going to get me, I would at least go to my end with my bowels relieved. I turned the controls over to my two copilots and told them to do their best. Back in the makeshift head, I rode the 0.50 caliber ammo box joyously while my worthy copilots did a very commendable job up front. Also, the thought occurred to me that since it was still raining, those Zeke pilots were most likely having line-up problems as we had experienced during the shipping attacks. Such added to my more favorable thoughts while thoroughly purging my internal plumbing system.

The fighter pilots finally gave it up and most probably claimed a shoot-down of one B-24 painted Navy blue. And my thirst for fresh produce subsided considerably.

We continued to utilize the Fleet Air Wing's pool aircraft for some patrols and utility flights. The early 32XXX series show up in pilot logbooks as late as May 1945. And they, too, required engine changes. On March 4th Hemphill flew BuNo 32276 from Clark Field to Tacloban. The next day he flew our "fat cat" (in this instance the name meant a PB4Y-1 stricken from the records as destroyed but still in service unofficially). It flew and performed like a jewel as all the guns, gun turrets, and armor plates had been stripped from the airframe. Very much fun to fly.

As was customary while at Owi, our flight crews would sometimes fly a test flight on several airplanes before flying one back to our current operating base. Hemphill flew BuNo 38859 on a test run on the 6th. Then on March 7, 1945, flew my airplane, BuNo 38889 back to Clark Field via Tacloban.

On March 5th Hagen sank a 300-ton Sugar Dog by direct hits with 100# bombs off the China coast at Swatow. One bomb knocked out the side of the vessel and a large number of 55-gallon steel drums were spilled out. As the ship settled into the water a great



many more drums were seen floating away. Sorry we didn't get this ship when the drums were still full.

A TWOSOME OF TOPSYS - It was Waldeck and Crew Seven that made the kill of the day for March 5, 1945. About 150 miles west of Okinawa, George sighted a Topsy transport plane (a Douglas DC -2) at 30 miles distance, cruising at 10,000 feet. The patrol plane was at 6000 feet and the PPC turned to intercept the twin-engine Japanese plane. It took 20 minutes of climbing and pursuing at 160 to 170 knots airspeed to close. Then, at 1000' range, Robert M. Golden in the bow turret and Leonard E. Holtzman in the top turret each fired 200 rounds. Both engines of the Topsy were set afire and the transport plane made a violent turn to starboard and began a steep dive. Following the doomed airplane, the PB4Y-1 reached speeds in excess of 250 knots. A left turn was made by the enemy plane as it further steepened its dive and struck the water from 3000 feet vertically.

Two hours later and positioned about 50 miles east of the northern tip of Formosa, Carl K. Thorp, copilot, saw a second Topsy at one o'clock high and ten miles. Waldeck put the patrol plane in a climbing turn to intercept the Japanese transport plane. At 500 feet range, Golden, still in the bow, and Edward S. (Sloan) Bomar in the top turret, blew the DC-2 into pieces with 250 rounds of 0.50 caliber API rounds. Debris flew all around and pieces of an engine narrowly missed the PB4Y-1. The Topsy burst into flames and fell off on the port wing as it began a death dive. The port landing gear fell out and one man jumped out just before the plane crashed into the sea.

Although some PPCs were tempted to make a victory pass at very low altitude over the camp upon return after a shoot-down, very few did. Waldeck was one of the few, as "Flash" Gordon relates:

"Waldeck got permission from the tower (I think) to buzz the camp area. We entered a rather steep dive for a PB4Y-1 and when Waldeck and Thorp attempted to pull it out, it didn't respond as expected. I was in the right waist and the "G's" put me on my knees. I must have looked like Kilroy looking out. It was scary. When we landed, Capt. Jones and Whit met us. They weren't too happy!"

This episode reveals why it was frowned upon by the Commanding Officer. Often it was a return at night which added hazards. Also, the PB4Y-1 just might be over-stressed due to unknown damage incurred during combat.

Wright had the patrol along the west coast of Formosa and on to the China coast. The Skipper came upon some ships anchored off Formosa but the numbers, types, and location were not recorded in the copilot's or PPC's logbooks. Wright recorded missing a Topsy in poor weather and visibility but made no claims. Hence, no Aircraft Action Report was filed nor an entry made into the War Diary.

Other logbook entries for March 5th tell of Hagen knocking off a Sugar Dog. Bittenbender flew his patrol up to Ishigaki Shima and Iriomote Jima with his bow and top turrets inoperative (cause for aborting in my book!).

WOOD WRECKS A FREIGHTER - On March 6, 1945, Wood and Crew Eight scored very well. Besides that they made a more reasonable takeoff time at 0700 for a 800-mile patrol to Hong Kong. About 50 miles east-northeast from this British colony at 1145(I), Woody found a 200-ton Sugar Dog. He made two bombing and strafing runs and blew up the small freighter by a direct hit with a 100# bomb. It was loaded with oil drums.



Shortly thereafter and nearby, they sighted a 2500-ton FTC. Again making two bombing and strafing runs, eight bombs were dropped as 900 rounds were fired into the medium-sized freighter-transport. Four of the 100# bombs were direct hits. It came to a stop and several small fires were seen as oil spread around the ship. Wood evaluated the vessel to be seriously damaged. However, the next day both Waldeck and Wright found the FTC beached and destroyed. An unbiased observer, Lt. Holt of VPB-119, also confirmed the destruction. George Gruner, bombardier, does it again!

GENERATING AERIAL COMBAT - While still near Hong Kong, Wood saw four Oscars on a course that would take them into Kai Tak Airdrome. With the odds seemingly favoring the Japanese army fighters, the PPC headed his patrol plane for a layer of broken clouds at 2000 feet. The single-engine Nakajima Type I fighters trailed the bomber at a discreet distance. Just short of the clouds, Stan Wood turned to attack the flight of four (when you're on a roll make the most of it). A ten to fifteen minute dogfight now began.

Because of the clumsy and non-aggressive runs by the Oscars, Wood decided these pilots must be aviation cadets on a ferry flight.

Each half-hearted run by the fighters was met by the PB4Y-1. During one such encounter as the range closed to 300 yards, Chester M. Osiecki in the bow and William H. Finady in the top turret scored hits into the center section of an Oscar's fuselage. These 0.50 caliber projectiles caused the starboard landing gear to fall out to a 3/4 down position and smoke poured from the engine. It headed into a cloud and was not seen again.

Another Oscar was hit repeatedly in the center of its fuselage and left the fight. With this, the remaining two sorry asses decided to make a run for it and they too disappeared into the clouds. Well, at least they were instrument qualified.

The patrol bomber then circled for ten minutes looking for the enemy aircraft but nothing was seen. Having fired 1100 rounds, Wood judged that one fighter was probably destroyed and one was damaged. Throughout this busy day there were no hits taken into the Liberator.

RUNNING UP A SCORE - Still on the 6th of March, Adler and Crew Five conducted a run-and-shoot operation. Beginning just off the coast at Hong Kong, they conducted the shoot-out for about 150 miles along the China coast to the east-northeast almost to Swatow.

The action began at 1100(I) ten miles east-northeast of Hong Kong by an attack upon a 500-ton Sugar Charlie. Dropping six 100# bombs and strafing with 1400 rounds, the freighter caught fire and was beached. Burning out of control, it was gutted. It took only one bomb hit to do the job. The others missed due to a release malfunction.

Thirty minutes later and crisscrossing six miles up the road, a 100-ton lugger was strafed with 1200 rounds. It burned readily and was destroyed. Within ten minutes of this target, a 200-ton Sugar Dog was attacked, dropping one 100# bomb and strafing with 500 rounds. The bomb missed but the strafing set the little freighter on fire and it burned furiously to destruction.

Nearby, another SD of the same size was then bombed and strafed. As with the previous small vessel, the bomb missed but 700 rounds of APIs set it on fire and it too was destroyed.

At high noon the mayhem continued. A small coastal lugger was set on fire with 500 rounds of 0.50 caliber gunfire. Add one more Japanese logistics transport to the destruction.

A bigger cargo ship was next, a 450-ton steel-hulled Sugar Charlie. The bombs failed to release again but slight damage was gained by 800 strafing rounds. The finale was a 250-ton SD and though the one bomb dropped missed, 800 rounds did some damage.

There was some cost to the guys with the white hats. Hits with 7.7 and 12.7 mm machine gun fire were taken in the right and left wings and fuel cells. The after station also was hit for only minor damage. However, the airplane was out of commission for two weeks to change fuel cells. Thankfully, the self-sealing fuel tanks worked as designed.

The camera jammed, unfortunately, so no photos of these actions were taken.

A total of 5900 rounds were expended by Crew Five this day. And for a 650 nmi patrol which normally would have taken about nine hours or so, Adler's flight time for the day was 11.2 hours. Fuel consumed was also well beyond that normally expected for the short patrol by about 400 gallons. But it was well worth it.

A RARE AND WILD OCCASION - On the sixth of March, West would run the China coast sector. We did not have passengers along just for the ride and thrills very often. But on this day Ira B. West's passenger was a full commander by the name of Wells and a member of Seventh Fleet Staff! He was an "old guy" (anyone over the age of thirty) and an Annapolis graduate who had served in WW I. Had he known of the happenings to come this day, he may very well have declined this mission.

Off Swatow, West launched an attack against a steel-constructed 100-ton lugger. Making eight runs, he brought the vessel to a stop with 2400 rounds of 0.50 ammo. Bombs were dropped, but due to electrical release problems, all missed. In addition to a very poor weather day, 1/2 mile visibility and 1000' overcast, now two Oscars came out to defend their coastal vessel. As West turned into the approaching fighters, they reversed course and disappeared into the clouds. Belay that regarding the defense of one of their own.

West now turned his attention to a barge and was rewarded by return 7.7 mm machine gun fire. One projectile hit into the steel bottom of a seat occupied by Cdr. Wells. He was stung but not bloodied. He would have a souvenir to verify his tale of a wild day as the projectile was retrieved and given to him.

But the thrills continued. A 250# bomb fell free from its rack and landed on the bomb bay doors. The arming vane spun from the wind whipping through the bomb bay and the patrol plane crew now had an armed bomb loose and unsecured in the airplane. Ens. Herbert and Ordnanceman Schultz hoisted the live and heavy bomb onto the catwalk. Sager, the plane captain, now opened the bomb bay doors manually, permitting Herbert and Schultz to heave the bomb into the East China Sea below. Heroic and fast thinking by these three men saved the airplane and crew from certain disaster. It is doubted that Cdr. Wells ever took another PB4Y-1 flight. He did now have a story to last a lifetime.

GALLOWS HUMOR - March 7th was a day of mixed events, including one humorous, depending upon one's position. Aboard the PB4Y-1 it appeared funny as all get out. However, for the Japanese fighter pilot in a Frank there could be no joy at all.

Jameson departed Clark Field at the gentlemanly hour of 0922 for a patrol along the Chinese coast. Approaching Amoy while cruising at 3500', he saw a single-engine Army Type 4 fighter, code-named Frank, on a crossing situation at 2500'. Jameson quickly added full power on the engines and turned to attack the enemy aircraft from the rear. The Frank turned back to the original course of the patrol plane as the range closed to 600 yards. James Garrison in the bow and Willard Dodsworth in the top turret each got off good bursts. The fighter made no attempt to fight the four-engine bomber but just tried to get away. He dropped six small bombs and started to descend. Smoke streamed from his airplane and though there was no increase in speed, the fighter did maneuver back and forth. Evidently, the Frank was damaged significantly since fire broke out in the port wing root while the bomber closed to 300 yards. The bow and top turrets fired effectively and the enemy aircraft set up to ditch. He made a good landing in the water and the pilot then crawled out first on the wing root and then back onto the fuselage. As the fighter slowly sank the pilot slid further back on the fuselage. Last seen, he was sitting straddled on the aft fuselage as the airplane sank. No lifesaving equipment was seen and since the pilot could not be seen in the water, he obviously could not swim and succumbed in the cold water.

Waldeck made the best find of the day. His logbook notes that he sighted an enemy convoy of five destroyer escorts, two large tankers of about 10,000 tons, and one small freighter of 1000 tons off the China coast. The exact position was not recorded.

NOT ALWAYS THE VICTORS - Still on March 7th, Noon ran into more than he bargained for on his patrol well north of Jameson's shoot-down. About 40 miles south of Wenchow and just off the coast, he came upon two large landing craft of 1700 tons each. He immediately began an attack, intending to drop five of his ten 100# bombs on the first landing craft. But the airplane was in a skid as he was trying to line up on the ship and he held his bombs but did strafe with 1000 rounds.

At the same time, the ships opened up with heavy, medium, and light anti-aircraft fire, scoring hits upon the patrol plane. A large hole was opened up in the starboard wing by a 40 mm hit, four holes were punched in the tail by 20 mm and 7.7 mm shells, and hits were made in number three and four engines. Noon jettisoned his bombs and got out of there. The two damaged engines were cutting out but it was not necessary to shut down either one. It would be six days before this airplane would fly again.

This incident did point out that a well-trained and alerted naval vessel was a dangerous opponent. There was little chance for surprise in this engagement as there was 20-miles visibility and most likely these ship were radar-equipped.

Hagen made a 0430 takeoff on the 7th for his patrol covering the southern end of the Ryukyu chain. At Sakishima Gunto and in the immediate area, he launched a number of attacks against several small vessels. Tied together at a pier, two 50-foot landing barges received the Hagen treatment during four bombing and strafing runs. Two 100# bombs

were dropped, one of which landed between the two, and blew them 100 feet apart. Together with 1125 rounds of 0.50 caliber fire, they were seriously damaged.

The next targets were two sea trucks and a barge. Seven runs were made, dropping three 100# bombs which missed, but 700 rounds of APIs created minor damage.

One small freighter, a Sugar Dog, received 1600 rounds from strafing during eight runs, causing serious damage. Lots of shooting, but no sinkings, although his activities were certainly a hindrance to the flow of Japanese war materials.

On the same day, I flew a patrol and counted one 6000-ton and two 1500-ton freighters in Kiirun. Two small Sugar Dogs were also moored there. I did take a short run down "Interstate One" on northern Formosa to strafe three trucks.

Waldeck also made some good sightings on the 7th. Along the China coast, he found two large tankers of about 10,000 tons, a 1000-ton FTD, and five destroyer escorts. We did like to offer up fresh meat for our submarines.

On March 8, 1945, the Skipper took off at 0720 loaded for bear. He had six high explosive 500# bombs on board. Just before noon and about 50 miles southwest of Macao he found a small Sugar Charlie grossing 400 tons. Making a bombing run from 1200 feet altitude, one of the three bombs dropped made a direct hit. The freighter blew apart and sank. This attack is surprising as virtually all of our bombing runs were at very low altitudes of 100' or even less. It may be that this ship was heavily armed, as both copilots made entries in their logbooks of sinking an "armed Sugar Charlie." A more likely explanation is that the bombs had instantaneous fuses installed vice the usual 4-5 second delayed fuses.

A lugger accompanying the SC was seriously damaged by strafing. A little later and just 20 miles south of Macao, Wright strafed another lugger and a sea truck. Also, on the return leg, they sighted a Sally in the vicinity of Kiirun but were unable to engage.

AN OVERLY CONSERVATIVE EVALUATION - On March 9, 1945, Didier and West scored very well against a convoy found midway between Amoy and Foochow close in to the shoreline. Both of the PB4Y-1s were loaded with two 500# and five 100# GP bombs. Both patrol sectors were relatively short, 750 and 650 nautical miles, respectively.

Early in his search, Didier had knocked off a 100-ton Sugar Dog 40 miles south of Swatow. One direct hit with a 500# bomb did the job.

At 1255(I) and midway between Amoy and Foochow along the coast, Didier made contact with one 6000-ton freighter (FTB), one 8000-ton freighter (FTA), and one armed patrol craft (PC). They were steaming in column in the order as above on course 220 degrees, speed 8 knots. An attack was made on the lead ship, dropping one 500# bomb and

strafing with 500 rounds. The bomb exploded within five feet of the bow of the FTB. The big freighter-transport then made a turn to starboard.

All vessels were ready and opened fire with accurate medium and light gunfire. Hits were taken into the patrol plane from 20 mm, 12.7 mm, and 7.7 mm machine guns. Didier's emergency bomb release cable and pulley were shot away, the elevator control cable frayed to one strand, and large holes were opened up in the fuselage forward of the cockpit and starboard wing flap. Other smaller holes were made in the starboard rudder and port wing. Didier was able to make a safe landing back at Clark Field by utilizing the auto-pilot elevator control cable to make pitch corrections. The airplane was out of commission five days for repairs.

West and Crew Twenty-Three arrived four minutes after Didier's attack and he chose to go after the same ship. He made a run in at 30' altitude attacking from stern to bow. Pulling up to clear the ship, West released two 500# bombs. One high explosive hit at the base of the superstructure and the other bomb missed. His gunners strafed with 850 rounds, scoring many hits. However, the Japanese gunfire was not fully suppressed, as they hit the PB4Y-1 with the same caliber guns as had damaged Didier's plane. The VHF was shot out, holes were made in the port wing, starboard wing leading edge, the rear bomb bay door, number three propeller, and in the fuselage near the navigation table. This airplane was also out of commission for five days.

The assessment of these attacks by our ACIO was that only slight damage was done to this ship. The statement in the Aircraft Action Report and War Diary attributed this to "no other evidence of damage." I object to this evaluation on grounds that neither airplane could remain in the area to witness the subsequent results. Given a half hour or perhaps less time, there is little question in my view that the FTB would have displayed a fully blossomed fire in the hull due to the 500# bomb blast aft in the superstructure. Most likely the bomb explosion five feet off the bow punched a hole in the ship. Evidence of this damage would take hours, perhaps most of the day, before a settling at the bow could be identified. And the ship did go dead in the water.

I agree that a damage assessment should be on the conservative side. At the same time, the blast effects of a 500# bomb generates a very intense heat for a short time and a substantial fire almost always follows. A merchant ship, inducted into the Imperial Japanese Navy as a wartime expedient, can be well-armed topside for anti-aircraft defense. Training damage control teams to suppress fires requires expertise and time. The vessel in question may or may not have made it into a port.

On the 9th, an incident occurred which indicated that there were times when the Japanese fighters would rise to the occasion. Becker and Crew Twenty-One departed Clark Field at 0940 for a 900 nmi patrol along Formosa and on into the East China Sea. Checking into Kiirun to see what might be found there, "DD" Becker made a prize contact. Here at anchor in the harbor were three destroyer escorts guarding six FTAs. A big find, indeed, and the DEs and/or shore batteries greeted the patrol plane with heavy caliber anti-aircraft

fire. Becker tried to catch a Val doing an anti-submarine sweep at the harbor entrance but the pilot wisely sped for protection over the DEs and harbor guns.

The PPC turned the big bomber to resume the sector search when two Oscars arrived with clear intent. With no hesitation they began making head-on runs from the one o'clock and eleven o'clock positions. John H. Byrne in the top turret scored on one Oscar, getting hits in the forward fuselage. The Japanese pilot broke off and departed the area followed very shortly thereafter by the other Oscar.

No sooner had the Oscars departed than three inline-engine Tonys approached from the PB4Y-1's eight o'clock position. They positioned themselves to begin making bow-on runs and proved to be quite aggressive. The attacks were not coordinated but were closed to 200 yards before breaking off. During one attack, Malcolm L. Farrell in the bow turret made hits into the Tony's wing root and smoked the fighter. It departed to the south, heavily smoking, and was not seen again. The other two army fighters, at times previously identified as Me 109s, continued with several more single attacks and then departed.

The final count was no damage to the bomber, 1000 rounds expended, one Oscar damaged, and one Tony probably destroyed. The Japanese really didn't want those six big freighter-transport reported.

EXTRA FIRE POWER - The close out for March 9th was an impromptu affair between Ettinger of VPB-104 and Lyle of VPB-119. The One-O-Four PPC had already blown up a 100-ton Sugar Dog 25 miles south of Swatow. Continuing his patrol southwesterly along the coast, he came upon another small SD. Here he was joined by the heavily armed PB4Y-2. Ettinger missed on one run, dropping a 100# GP but then the two patrol planes poured in .50 caliber machine gun fire to set the vessel blazing. They did not wait for the SD to burn to the waterline so this attack was classified as serious damage.

Continuing in company, they sighted a 200-ton seagoing tug. Lyle heavily strafed the large (for its class) vessel and Ettinger followed up with two direct bomb hits to blow the ship up.

How and why these two joined together is not known. Perhaps a scheduling mistake by the wing? But the higher command never commits an error and besides the two aircraft were incompatible due to airspeeds. Since the search sector was only for 675 nautical miles, it is likely that one or both of the PPCs had expanded their sectors somewhat. Whatever, it was very nice to have the extra fire power of the PB4Y-2 along.

On March 10, 1945, I broke a cardinal rule which I regret to this day; when making an attack against a well-defended target, make one run and keep right on going.

I was assigned a 700-mile sector covering the China coast running from Hong Kong to Hainan. It would be a day of opportunity as we had a good bomb load of three 500# and three 250# bombs. With plenty of fuel, this would be a no-sweat day.

Fifty miles north from the northeast tip of Hainan, a Japanese dive bomber code-named "Val" was spotted at three to five miles cruising at 400'. I was at 200' and possibly due to the haze, the enemy pilot did not see us. As we closed on his tail, the rear-seat gunner evidently saw the big bomber and his pilot then dived to 100' off the water. Since we out-gunned him and had the speed advantage, I decided to get some good photos of this kill. We closed to 400' range while flying at 50' altitude and I directed David Gleason in the bow and Allen Anania in the top turrets to begin firing in short bursts.

Soon two objects fell from the dual-seated plane and I first thought that the crew had jumped out. Then there were two bomb or depth charge explosions, one just under our port wing and the other a bit aft. The first explosion very nearly got us and I was both frightened and angered. Adding power to the engines, I shouted over the intercom, "Get him!" We closed to point-blank range and I then saw tracer flashes into the engine and wing root immediately followed by a burst of flames engulfing the Val. Being so low on the water, the enemy aircraft quickly hit with a big splash. At the same time there was a smaller



splash where the rear-seat man hit after jumping out at 15 feet. Also, we saw the pilot thrown forward from the aircraft as it hit the water. There was a blossom of flame, then a cloud of smoke. We were very close and we did get some outstanding photos.

As we pulled up from this spectacle, I saw a beautiful modern ship of about 4000 tons, classified as an FTC. She was dead ahead and I directed Webber, our bombardier, to open bomb bay doors and plan to drop all bombs set for 30-foot intervals. This would be an easy kill as we had surprise and the escorts, two gunboats (PGs), were several miles behind this prize. A Sugar Charlie was with the gunboats.

Since our speed was already up, we closed rapidly and everything looked good to really nail this beauty. Thus far, there was not a single shot fired at us, confirming that we had achieved complete surprise. As the patrol plane was pulled up to clear the superstructure, I saw men running to man their guns. But it was too late, they'd had it, or so I thought.

A VERY BAD DECISION - As usual, I rolled the PB4Y-1 to the left and stuck my head into the bubble side window expecting to see this good-looking freighter-transport blowing up, but good. Not so, the bombs had hung up due to bomb bay door creep which prevented an electrical release. Damn!

I began a steep turn, pulling hard on the elevators to make another run, and told Webber to set up to make a salvo drop. This would be a manual release dependent only on a lever and cables. You could drop right through the bomb bay doors if need be. As we swung around, I saw a Jake setting there fat, dumb, and happy. We would get the Jake later.

As the ship came into view again, I realized that the airplane was not lined up properly and we were too close to the target. I increased the bank and nosed down more steeply. Now rolling out late and still a bit nose down, I had given Webber a poor run. All bombs fell out together to hit about 50 feet short of the ship. Throughout this maneuver all of our forward-firing guns had jammed. Not a single round was flowing at the FTC. On the other side of the situation by now, the Japanese had manned their guns. And one could see the incoming tracers. Not a happy sight. We were hit by 12.7 mm machine gun fire which holed an aileron and bomb bay. The number three engine was knocked out and we shut it down and feathered it. Worst of all, Webber was badly injured. He would be evacuated back to the States and was still in the hospital when the rest of the crew returned home in late May. It was a long painful trip back to Clark Field. Webber's left leg was shattered and we did the best we could to apply first aid and morphine to ease his agony. The enemy gunners on the ship and the Jake's flight crew must have thanked their Shinto and Samurai ancestors for their narrow escape. There was no damage assessed due to the bomb drop and the strafing created only slight damage, if any.

SHIFTLESS SAMURAI - At the time of our engagement with the Val, Fulwider and crew were doing battle over Sinchan Island in the Hong Kong area. His first target was a 150-ton tugboat. Making four bombing and strafing runs, he missed with his bombs but did some damage by 1000 rounds of machine gun fire. A steam pipe was hit for sure as a white cloud was seen in the bridge area.

Attention to the tug was dropped when three Oscars arrived overhead, apparently to do business with the patrol plane. These so-called fighter pilots were rated as amateurs as they made no attacks and did not fire their guns. Fulwider could not let them get away with this so he pursued and made the attacks. Catching one fighter high and in a stall, Jennings R. Opie in the top turret scored hits into the fuselage area. Immediately heavy smoke flowed from the engine and the fighter fell off out of control, passing below the PB4Y-1. This Oscar was lost from view momentarily as Fulwider engaged another army fighter. Then four crewmen in the patrol plane were attracted to a splash followed by an explosion. Unfortunately, they could not say positively that this was caused by an airplane hitting the water. Crew Twenty was credited with a probable only.

The bow turret had been out of commission throughout the aerial engagement. Now the top turret also jammed. However, a PB4Y-2 of VPB-119 was present and had made alternating runs on the tug earlier. He now joined in with the Oscar tussle. Fulwider asked for and received "top cover" from this allied four-engine fighter. Before retiring from the scene, the VPB-119 crew would also be credited with an Oscar probable.

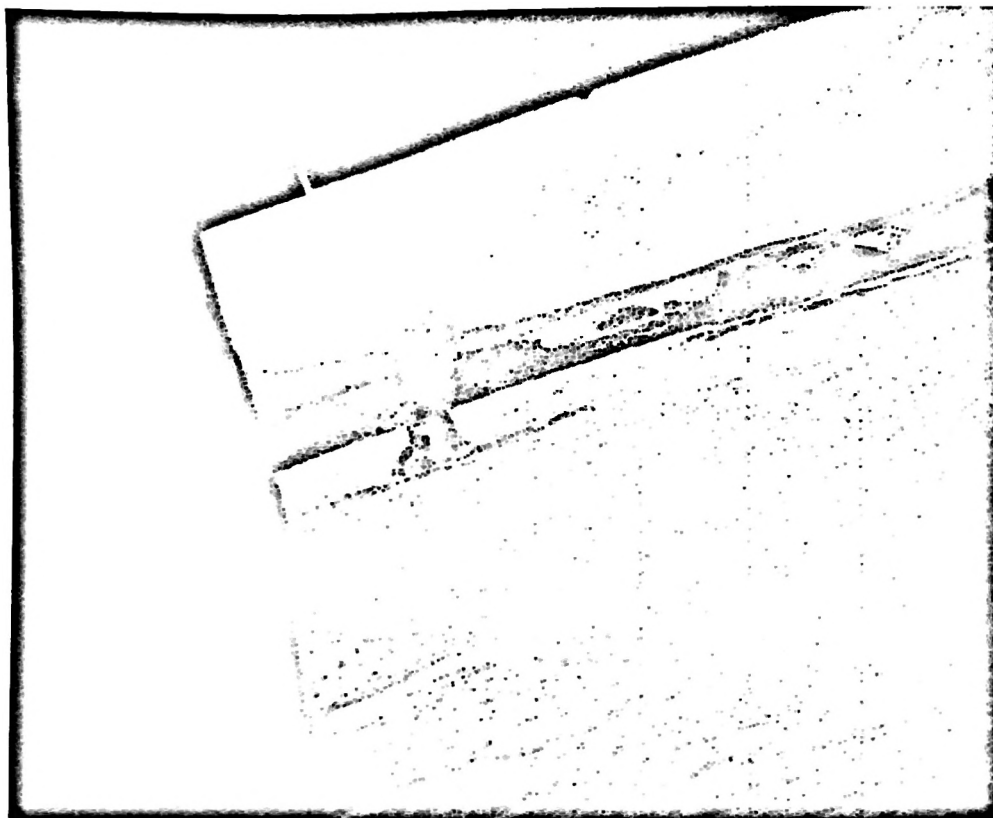
On the next day, March 11th, Hagen made a massive attack upon "Little Toot" close in to Hong Kong. In a very determined way, he made three runs, dropping two 100#, three 100#, and a grand finale of one 500# bomb. The crew of this 40-foot little tugboat must have thought the heavens had fallen in for sure. All bombs missed, but it was brought to a dead stop by 1000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. Ed did not believe in returning bombs back to base. Heading for home, he found two luggers at Pratas Reef way out in the middle of the South China Sea. The PPC dropped his last bomb, a 500# high explosive, at the two small vessels, sinking one and damaging the other. Some days are better than others.

Also on the 11th, Whit Wright did a ship count in Kiirun. At this busy and very important Japanese harbor, he saw four destroyer escorts, one destroyer, one 10,000-ton freighter, one 9000 to 10,000-ton tanker, one 6000-ton tanker, one 5000-ton freighter-transport, and one 1500-ton Sugar Charlie. They also pursued a twin-engine bomber, a Sally, but were unable to close to firing range.

On the same day, Bittenbender made a good find on his patrol to Okinawa. His logbook entry for this day notes, "Saw plenty of stuff." Bitt lists seeing eight destroyer/destroyer escorts, a 3000 to 4000-ton freighter, sea trucks, and other small craft. He did strafe the small wooden coastal vessels. Two U.S. Army passengers rode along, looking over their next prospective action. One wonders if they knew just what awaited them.

The next day, March 12th, Wood's patrol to Okinawa was not much better. Seeing a 150-ton Sugar Dog entering a harbor, he made a low-level attack, dropping one 100# bomb and strafing with 50 rounds. He had flown into a hornets' nest. Heavy, medium, and light anti-aircraft guns from the shore opened up and bracketed the PB4Y-1. A miss with the bomb was excusable as Wood's primary mission at this point was to evade damage. This he accomplished and continued with his patrol. The Japanese gunners had been ready but their aim was poor.

But one patrol had a good day on March 12th and on the other side of Okinawa. Ettinger made a 0445 takeoff for this 900-mile sector search and had a good load of bombs to handle the ships encountered, ten 100# GP bombs. All at the same location he found one 500-ton Sugar Charlie, two 100-ton Sugar Dogs, and one 75-ton lugger.



Attacking the largest vessel first, he scored a direct hit and the ship blew up. It appeared that the SC was loaded with gasoline. Just before the explosion, the crew of the ship was able to board a launch and started for the shore. A strafing run sank the small boat and all hands went down with it.

The next target was an SD and it also blew up after a near miss and a direct hit. This crew also manned a launch or lifeboat and it too was strafed. It was well hit but did not sink. All of the escapees from the Sugar Dog were killed, however.

The next two targets were bombed and strafed but only damaged. One bomb hit directly into the Sugar Dog but it failed to explode. A near miss on the lugger brought it to a stop but, as with the SD, the extent of the damage could not be determined.

While making the runs on these last two targets, the flight path of the PB4Y-1 took it over a highway. Two three-ton trucks had the misfortune to have been parked there and received a hail of 0.50 caliber machine gun fire. Each truck had a full load of troops and some were seen scrambling up a bank alongside the road to escape the wrath of Ettinger and company. The extent of the damage to the trucks and casualties to the troops was undetermined.

A Val arrived at the scene, apparently attracted by the rising smoke. Ettinger turned to pursue but the Japanese dive bomber pilot ran for Tontan airfield and the PPC declined to take the bait.

Our genial and competent Air Combat Intelligence Officer, Lt. Travis E. Baker, was finally to receive some help. Except for the month of January 1945, keeping up with the preparation of the Aircraft Action Reports and the other ACIO responsibilities required a great deal of overtime. Lt. Robert E. Cummings, an ACIO, reported on board to lend a hand. He was a very welcome addition to our squadron.

As good as Clark Field was, and we did enjoy the long and wide runway, there were some drawbacks. The aviation fuel was flown in by a continual line of C-47s. The 55-gallon steel drums were off-loaded and the long and tedious manual refueling took place. About 50 or more drums were required to refuel one PB4Y-1. And there were 12 or more patrol planes to be fueled daily, plus all the other operations.

The short dirt strip right next to our camp hosted a considerable number of the Army's C-47s and Marine SBDs. One night a group of Japanese troops came down from the hills and distributed one hand grenade each into the tail sections of a considerable number of the transport aircraft. This action did not contribute to our sense of security.

There were other diversions of considerable enjoyment. Two small towns near our camp, Angeles, five miles away, and San Fernando, a 20-mile drive, provided an insight on just how others beyond the boundary of the good old US of A lived. A teeming and thriving population of several thousand were busy restoring their lives after liberation from the Japanese. Little shops lined the streets offering a variety of foods (with little sanitation evident), trinkets, and colorful cloth items. The narrow streets themselves were one long mudhole. Drainage and road paving were not known nor practiced for sure.

We did have one trip to Mount Arayat for a bar-b-que. There was a park of sorts set upon the top of this extinct volcano about 4000 feet high. It had a very nice swimming pool, a cool clear creek, and a pig roasting over a bed of coals. The pig was being cooked by a patient Philippino turning a green bamboo pole extending through the pig from its mouth to its--other end. It would prove to be delicious. Insuring a successful outing, there was plenty of beer cooled by stowing the cans in the very pretty, fast-running creek. Setting on the bank with your feet in the cool water, carefully guarding your stash of beer, was a pleasure not experienced for some long time.

Besides, it was a great relief from an ugly scene encountered en route to the park. Traveling the 25 miles by jeep, four of us came into a small village just after an incursion by some Japanese troops. Entering, we drove by a mangled body of one enemy soldier who had the misfortune of being caught by the villagers. They had beaten him to death with clubs. The Philipinos were very proud of their accomplishment. Another Japanese trooper had been captured by our U.S. Rangers and placed in the local jail. He was a pitiful sight,

emaciated and wearing rags. This was an example of the enemy forces that had conquered virtually all of the Western Pacific?

The ranger captain in charge of the group who had subdued the enemy troops was pinning his insignia back on. Best not to be identified as an officer during a fire fight. He explained that from time to time, groups of Japanese soldiers would break out from their "fight to the death, never surrender" encampment seeking food more than anything. But, no question about it, they were dangerous. The rangers had killed all of them except the one now in jail and the one caught by the citizens of the village. No way to fight the war from our perspective. Our kills were made without the gore.

Our memories were stirred by hearing train whistles at night! Obviously, a railroad had been restored into operation and I assume it was a main line running from Lingayen to Manila. These sounds reminded us that there was another world beyond the muzzle blasts of our 0.50 caliber guns.

After the landings at Lingayen, our ground forces had overrun an airstrip near Clark Field that contained 20 or 30 Japanese aircraft of various models. None of these airplanes had any fuel in them. The Japanese forces had no choice but to leave them as they retreated down the Luzon plains or back into the hills. They were all in flying condition except for a good strafing by a P-38 pilot. He claimed that he was unsure of his position and believed these airplanes to be fair game (well, I can understand that!). But it was a great experience to see up close and even crawl around the airplanes we had been fighting in the skies over the Philippines and elsewhere. One unnamed pilot entered the nose compartment of a Betty (everyone's favorite bomber) and began tinkering with the bomb sight. It seemed a very simple device until it started growling and/or winding down. All hands vacated the premises in double time.

Our Wing Commander, Captain C. B. "Doc" Jones, acquired an Oscar. He had it stripped of paint, polished, and made ready for flight. It was one slick little fighter. Many people claim that "Doc" Jones flew his plane at least once before being found out and stopped, but this cannot be confirmed. In any case, there were too many eager fighter pilots in the area and the stars and bars on the wings and fuselage of the Oscar would not have been seen through the gunsight of any P-38.

It was back to work on March 13, 1945. Burton burned a lugger two miles off the Pescadores. Another patrol plane passing through this area later saw the lugger gutted with bodies strewn about the deck and a number floating in the water nearby. Anchored off Amoy he found six Sugar Dogs in a line, beam to beam. Attacking with bombs and machine guns, he damaged three. They also saw a single recco airplane and gave chase but could not close to firing range.



At Yonaguni Jima located 60 miles east of northern Formosa, Didier sighted a Dinah that had landed, wheels down, on a beach. This twin-engine reconnaissance airplane was undamaged and it had a good supply of gasoline in its tanks. Two hundred rounds set it afire, destroying it.

Becker had an Okinawa sector on the 13th and was trailed by three enemy aircraft for five minutes after passing Naha airstrip. There was no attempt to close and engage. Not all Japanese pilots flying fighter airplanes were Samurai. "DD" then blew a 75-ton lugger to bits with a 250# bomb. Next the PPC attacked a 150-ton Sugar Dog. Missing with a bomb, he strafed with 500 rounds for slight damage. Later, two sea trucks were also strafed for minor damage.

Hemphill, on patrol to Amoy, made contact with a convoy of one destroyer, two destroyer escorts, two gunboats (PG), three 6000-ton tankers, four Sugar Charlies, and three Sugar Dogs for the best contact of the day.

For the first time, the Commanding Officer and the Executive Officer (me) were assigned to fly on the same day. Who would be tending the store? Somehow, things around the camp would be just fine in the gentle hands of Captain C. B. "Doc" Jones. For whatever reason, I had missed my "third day" to fly and would take a patrol on the 14th vice the 13th.

Wright had the China coast patrol from Hong Kong northeast to Swatow and Amoy on March 14, 1945. This sector normally would take 9.5 to 10 hours. However, once he covered the area to be searched, he retraced part of the sector. It would take him 13.7 hours. He also took off three or four hours later than normal, most likely to be on station at a time least expected by the enemy. A change of routine for the hunt this day.

Wright attacked three 100-ton Sugar Dogs anchored at a small island at the entrance to Amoy Harbor. He made three runs, dropping two 500# and five 100# bombs, and strafed with 2000 rounds. One direct hit blew up one SD and the other two were burned to destruction.

At Swatow he strafed two 75-ton sea trucks and sank one. The other appeared to be undamaged.

Over Hong Kong, five Oscars met the Skipper but did not attack. It appeared that the odds favored the Japanese but they may have been from the same reluctant group previously encountered by other recent patrols at Hong Kong.

Leaving Hong Kong, Wright flew all the way back to Amoy. Here he now found a 300-ton trawler converted into a gunboat (PG) a few miles offshore. He attacked by strafing with 3000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo and a few fires were started that soon went out. At the end of the attack, the trawler was running in circles, streaming oil on the water,

apparently out of control. Most likely all of the crewmen had been killed or otherwise incapacitated. The full extent of the damage could not be determined.

I took off about four hours earlier than Whit for a patrol to Okinawa. I carried what now seemed to be the standard bomb load of two 500# and five 100# bombs. At a bay on the southeast side of Okinawa, I saw 11 small boats in a large "V" formation, apparently practicing maneuvers of some kind. Initially, I believed these very fast small boats were motor torpedo boats. Closer to them during my attacks, it was obvious that they were too small for MTBs. And, instead of torpedoes, they had two objects on their sterns which I believed to be depth charges.

I made a number of bombing and strafing runs that seemed more like firing passes on airborne enemy aircraft rather than surface vessels. I blew one to bits by a direct hit. Two more were sunk by strafing and one more by a near miss. Two were damaged by strafing and went dead in the water. A total of 3500 rounds were fired and five 100# bombs were dropped during these attacks.

Later I learned that these very effectively camouflaged 18-foot boats were special attack or suicide boats and the Japanese had large numbers of them. They were armed with one 7.7 mm machine gun and two 250# high explosive charges. They had created many problems by night attacks during the Lingayen Gulf landings and later at Okinawa. Their mode of attack was to run in fast and when very close to a large enemy ship, the high explosive charges were released. Several of our landing craft were sunk or damaged by these vessels. However, a "flycatcher" operation provided an effective defense by our destroyers.

STRIP SHIP QUICK - Tom Lusk, copilot for Hank Noon, made a very interesting entry into his logbook on the 14th. Noting a flight time of 3.5 hours in PB4Y-1, BuNo 38809, he stated, "engines 3 & 2 went out (returned)." With two engines inoperative, this model airplane does not fly unless very light. In this instance, they had to have been still very heavy. So, it must have been "strip ship quick" day aboard as the airplane descended. They also must have had sufficient altitude to trade off for time in order to accomplish the lightening of the Liberator. Examining other pilots' logbooks, the indications are that the airplane did not fly again for 30 days. It would take that long to assemble guns, armor plating, bomb bay fuel cells, and lots of other stuff. The belly turret may have been jettisoned as we had painted the mounting bolts red for a quick removal if need be. I also observe in Lusk's logbook that they did not fly again until March 17th. Recovery time?

On March 15th and 16th Burton took a busman's holiday. He flew in a L4 (a Piper Cub painted olive drab) from Clark to Fort Stotsenberg to Clark to Subic Bay to Clark. The purpose? Just a scenic tour.

A COMPLACENT JILL - On March 15, 1945, Wood got off at 0430 to conduct a search to just 40 miles south of Shanghai. With full tanks and three 250# and five 100# bombs, he would cover the sector in 13.4 hours. At 0830(I) and off the southwest coast of Formosa,

Wood saw a Jill, a single-engine carrier attack airplane, on an opposite course at 1000'. Letting it pass overhead, Woody then reversed course. He then began climbing from 500' to make a tail attack on the Jill. The Japanese pilot must have had his head up his ass. Passing that close head-to-head and not seeing a large enemy aircraft is not conducive to one's longevity.

Closing to 100 yards, the PPC ordered "open fire" and all gun stations except the starboard waist began shooting and making hits on the Jill. Three hundred rounds were expended and fire broke out in the center section. The enemy attack plane began a turn to port then fell into a spin, crashing on the shore in flames.

On the return leg, Wood found seven Sugar Dogs at anchor in a rocky cove off Foochow. Three bombing and strafing runs were made, dropping five 100# bombs and firing 500 0.50 caliber rounds. One direct hit sank an SD and the others were damaged by gunfire. The attack was discontinued due to rough terrain and turbulent weather.

On the same day, Bittenbender got off even earlier than Stan Wood, 0408, for the Okinawa sector. He had a light load for the 960-mile search, five 100# bombs and 3000 gallons of fuel. About 15 miles north of Okinawa, they found five Sugar Dogs, seven sea trucks, and three luggers. A Val was providing cover for this group of small freighters and coastal vessels. The "cover" ran for home as the PB4Y-1 appeared on the scene. Bitt made one attack, dropping three 100# bombs and strafing with 800 rounds. The bombs missed, but some light damage was made on the small vessels. Return medium and light gunfire was received from the small ships. Hits were taken in the waist gun ammo feed, tail, and fuselage. One gunner received minor lacerations from 20 mm fragments.

An hour later they came upon two sea trucks of 125 tons each off the northeast coast of Okinawa. Attacking, they destroyed one and damaged the other.

March 17, 1945, started off well enough, with Jameson finding a 4000-ton tanker (a Sugar Baker) 50 miles northeast of Foochow. A destroyer was trailing the SB about seven miles astern and, fortunately, was unable to participate.

Attacking with a bombing and strafing run, five bombs were dropped but missed. An additional strafing pass was made and a total of 900 rounds were fired. Only slight damage was claimed. The SB responded with heavy and light gunfire. Hits by 12.7 mm guns severed hydraulic lines and holed the bow and tail turrets and vertical stabilizer. There were no personnel injuries but still not an auspicious start for this day.

GET YAMAGATA - But the 17th of March was to be a big day for Crew Two. To begin with, it was a 0700 get-up for a 1000(I) takeoff rather than the usual "Oh dark hundred hour" arising from my cot. The briefing at the Wing Quonset hut was even more of a break in the usual routine prior to a patrol. Instead of only issuing the code books, assignment of sectors, and weather briefing, our mission for the day really got our attention. We were to search for and intercept an Emily four-engine flying boat. Informed that this airplane would

be en route to Shanghai carrying high-ranking Japanese officials, we were to shoot it down if at all possible. This would be a tremendous feat and we were all elated.

These flights were in addition to the regular searches and John Burton and I were the only crews from VPB-104 to fly one of these special missions. The sectors where the Japanese transport flying boat were most likely to be found were assigned to VPB-119. My elation faded considerably with this allocation as I felt most strongly that we should have had the better sectors for the intercept. John and I, approaching the end of our second combat tour, were very experienced "top guns." The PPCs of VPB-119 were at the beginning of their tour even though a number were second tour combat pilots. Second thoughts though recognized the realities. The PB4Y-2 was the better airplane for doing this job than our older, slower, and less gunned PB4Y-1s. Also, detracting from the initial exciting anticipation was the knowledge that our return would be well after sundown with the additional hazards of operational flying in the forward areas. It was just plain harder at night.

Burton and I sat in the shade under a wing, talking, while waiting for the 1000 takeoff time. After awhile, we decided the hell with waiting any longer, let's go. Each did have a 1000-mile sector to cover. I took off at 0915 and headed north over the Luzon plains, climbing to cruise at 8000'. At the time, I did not know that Burton had a very close call. During a very critical time during his takeoff, just prior to lift-off, an engine failed. The PPC knew that the airplane was just too heavy to fly at this point and the end of the runway was just ahead. With no choice in the matter, Burton chopped the throttles and let the big patrol plane roll while braking as best he could. Beyond the end of the runway, the airplane rolled on over a dry rice paddy, generating clouds of dust. Still in control somewhat and coming to a stop, he simply made an 180-degree turn and taxied back onto the airstrip. At our line operations, they unloaded all their gear and manned the standby airplane. It was then off for the patrol.

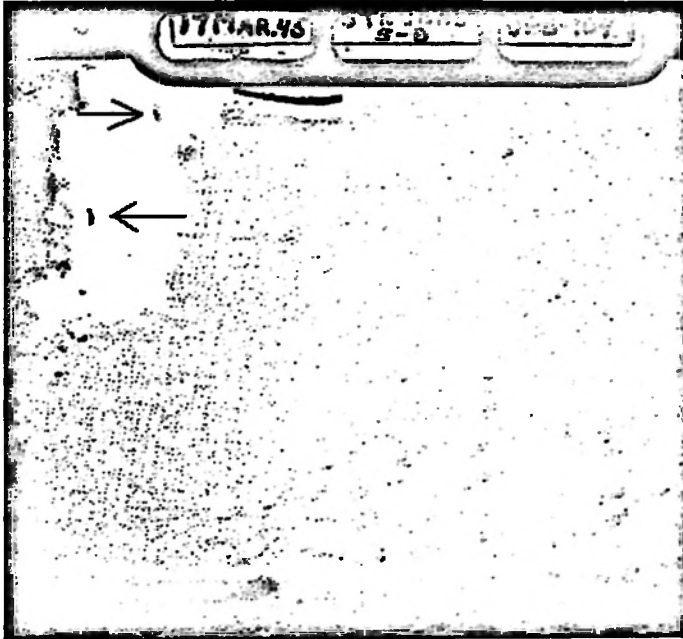
Had this occurred at most any other airfield, we would have lost an airplane and most probably the crew. A cool group, Crew Ten.

I was approaching the end of my sector and would soon turn westward towards the coast of China. Letting down in order to be close to the water for the track along several Japanese bases, I flew through a super-cooled cloud. Instantly, we collected a thin layer of ice on the leading edges. It was a surprise but should not have been. However, thus far in our tour we were in a tropical mode of thought. Now at 30 degrees north latitude, it was time to make some adjustments.

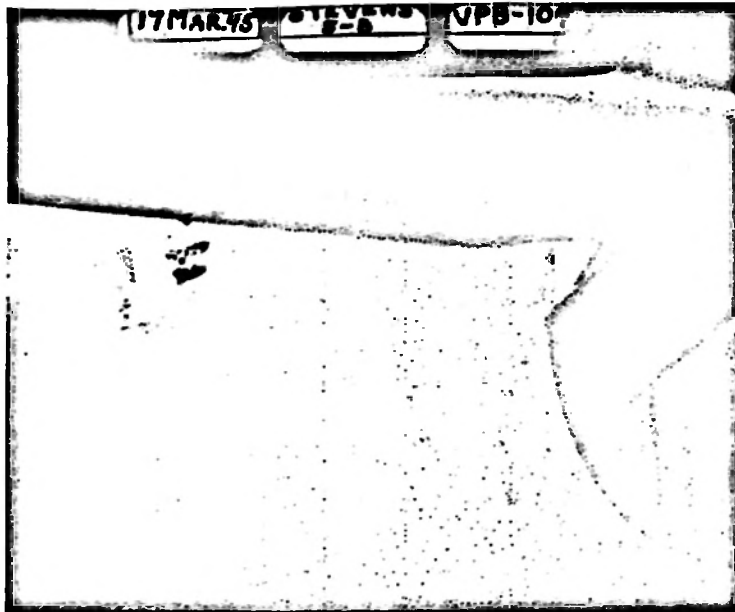
The weather was foggy as I turned southwesterly to follow the coastline. I had planned to enter Hang Chow Bay to look for shipping but this had to be abandoned as visibility was still very restricted.

A little further down the coast, the fog cleared, although there was some haze limiting visibility. I then saw a medium-small freighter of 3000 tons steaming away from the

coast to rendezvous with a destroyer about three miles offshore. Deciding to attack, I added power and dropped down to about 100' altitude. The destroyer began firing heavy and accurate AA fire but we were not hit. It was clear that the FTC was completely surprised as there was no gunfire from the ship. The top and bow twin fifties opened fire at about 2000 yards and both were hitting very well. I could see tracer flashes on the bridge and superstructure and it was a very pretty sight indeed.



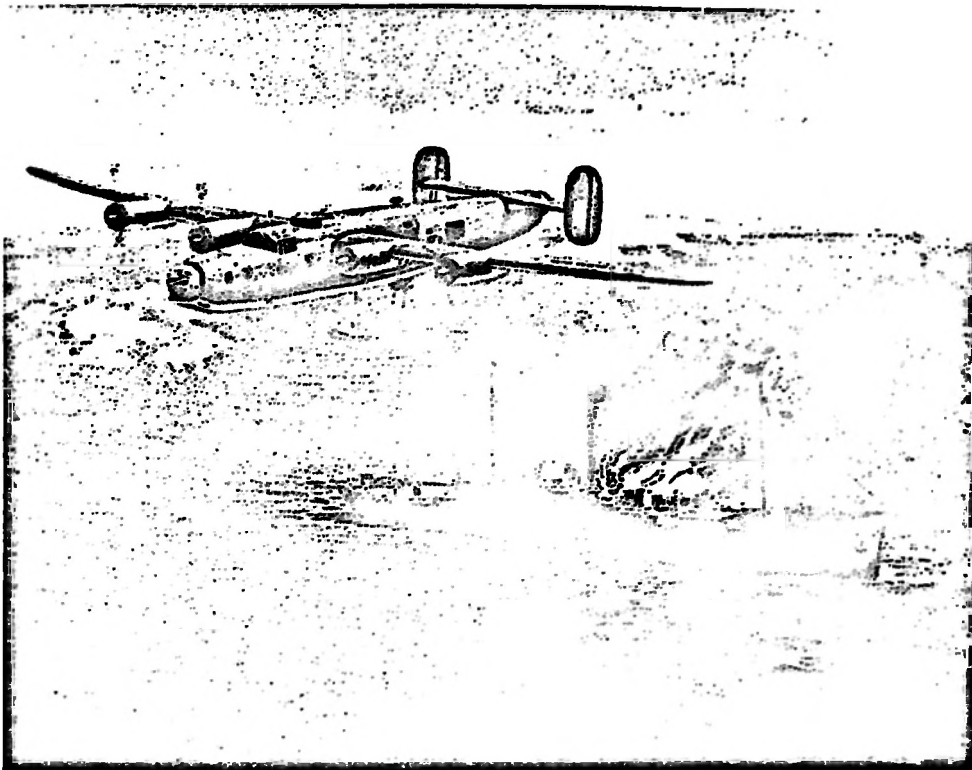
Three bombs have bounced off of the ship.



Bombs have exploded and the "overs" producing geyser.

At bomb release point, I made the usual pull-up to clear the ship and then looked back to see the explosion on the freighter. We had dropped ten 100# high explosive bombs and a number had fallen long and/or bounced off the ship and were in flight behind us. I should have told our bombardier that we had a good tail wind and our ground speed was much faster than normal. But five or more bombs had hit home and I was sure this would do the job. Also, 1000 rounds had been fired into the ship.

To insure a good photo to confirm the kill, I reversed course and flew upwind to beyond the now-burning freighter. Another reversal and, adding full power, we made the



strafing and photo run. The destroyer continued firing but still scored no hits. Later identified as the *Koshu Maru* (AGS-2), the FTC had made an 180-degree turn and was now dead in the water. It was burning furiously and the crew had gone over the side. The patrol on this sector the next day confirmed the sinking.

This kill improved my humor considerably and it was about to be further elevated. No more than three minutes after clearing this action and reducing power on the engines, I saw two Jakes in formation on an opposite course and about 1000 feet above our altitude. As they passed by, power was increased one more time and I reversed course and started a climb. Approaching the twin-float seaplanes from below and slightly to their right, I joined the formation as number three man in a right echelon. Very close, we could see every detail of the single engine reconnaissance and ASW airplane. It had a co-linear array radar antenna on each side of the fuselage. The rear-seat man was setting there with a BIG 20 mm gun pointed up and aft. He looked over at us, looked back aft and then quickly looked at the big four-engine bomber again. Too late. Thomas Yoakum, Adrian Fox, and Marx Stephan, in the bow, top, and port waist gun stations, fired off a total of 225 rounds. We followed the riddled Jake down and watched him crash into the sea. On a second pass we got a photo of a portion of an outer wing panel in the water with the red "meatball" showing.



The leader of the Jake flight was smart (that's why he was the leader). He ran for the destroyer as I started a chase. He began tight circles over the ship and I had no idea of how long that could go on. So I left the saved and savior and resumed my patrol, now in a very happy frame of mind. So what if the PB4Y-2 pilots had the better sectors. Mine turned out to be just fine.

Thirty-six minutes later at 1650 and south of Wenchow, I sighted the objective of our hunt. The Emily was on an opposite course off our starboard bow and about 1500' above our altitude. Full power was set on our engines and I began to climb for an interception. My first thought was to approach head-on for no deflection shooting. But soon it appeared that we were climbing well enough to turn into the big fast seaplane and try to stay with him.



Crossing his bow only slightly below the Emily, we opened fire with the bow and top turrets. All four guns were firing well and I could see tracers bracketing the seaplane's starboard-side engines. Some tracers went spiraling out indicated that one of the gun barrels had been well worn. Continuing and tightening my turn, we flew into his portside and the deep hull of the Emily presented a very big target. The gunners now sprayed hits from the bow all along the fuselage of the huge seaplane. I flew right into the seaplane's left side and closed to the point that an Emily gunner later stated that he could see the pilot's face in the Liberator. He also said he was 90 percent sure that he shot us down. We fired a total of 600 rounds at the enemy aircraft.

As I was running out of airspeed and preferred not to ram the target, I pushed hard on the elevators and we dropped fast. Just as soon as we regained adequate airspeed, maximum ailerons were applied to roll left on a course to pursue the enemy. Losing a thousand feet or so below the Emily, we were also now several miles behind. I got right down on the water in hopes that they would not see that I was pursuing and perhaps I would have less headwind than they. Knowing that the big seaplane was faster, I wanted every advantage possible.

Our engines were howling but it appeared that we were gaining very little or, perhaps, none at all. The top turret gunner said that one engine on the Emily was trailing smoke but no other damage was apparent. After 20 minutes my copilot asked how far I intended to chase the enemy aircraft. I allegedly replied, "All the way to Tokyo, if necessary." His question did jar me into the realization that we had run our engines at high power for a considerable period of time. We were a long way from home and it came down to breaking off the chase now or facing the distinct probability of a night ditching. It was with a very heavy heart that I pulled the power off to maximum range cruise and headed for home.

I gave careful thought to stripping ship to gain range but decided we had sufficient fuel. We did make it back to Clark Field, nursing the engines for all the range I could from the fuel remaining. Later I learned just how close it had been. Gleason, our plane captain, "dipped" the fuel tanks as a part of his post-flight inspection. From his graduated probe he found the remaining fuel in each of the four main fuel tanks as; zero, fifteen, thirty, and thirty gallons. Uncomfortably close.

I was one sick and meek Patrol Plane Commander the next day. To have missed the chance of a lifetime was unforgivable. I am not sure whether it was this day or the following day, but during lunch I noticed that the Wing Commander, his staff, and our Commanding Officer, seated at the head table, were very gleeful. They were laughing and generally seemed in a self-congratulatory mood. Soon I realized that I was the object of their gaiety.



Lt. Stevens learns that the Emily went down.

Captain C. B. Jones motioned me up to their table with a wave of his hand. His first words to me were: "You got him, yes, you got him! The information we have is that the Admiral went down." I was stunned. Involuntary words shot out of me, "No shit!" From the depths of despair, I was now floating in space. There were a hundred questions that came to mind, but I knew better than to ask.

All of the pilots, and our radiomen even more so, were aware that our intelligence experts were breaking the Japanese codes. There were just too many indicators. But, it was so very "tippy top" secret that it was never discussed. And most certainly not in the

presence of the more senior officers. But I was wild to learn more of the incident. Within a day or two I found an opportunity to talk with one of the Wing staff officers. Standing outside the Wing Operations Quonset hut, I pleaded for more information about the incident. His response was, "I just can't do it, that old man [the Wing Commander] would skin me alive if I said anything." I continued to probe and ask innocent (?) questions and finally gained something from him. A report had been received that a Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO) Unit had reported that the Emily had gone down. The story was that both pilots had been killed during our attack and a non-pilot navigator had taken over the controls and made a crash-landing on the China coast. All personnel on board had been killed in the crash-landing. This was not totally correct but at least I learned of SACO and its valuable contribution to the war effort.

SACO was a U.S. Navy operation with teams located mostly in the coastal areas of China. They functioned as "coast watchers" and also weather observers, gathered intelligence, were saboteurs, and cooperated with and provided assistance and support to the Chinese guerrillas. Shortly thereafter, a U.S. Navy team of SACO visited Clark Field and briefed the flight crews primarily on survival should we go down in China. It was very informative and interesting. I became particularly attentive when one of the team members stated that they were having (or had) a lot of fun interrogating survivors from VAdm Yamagata's Emily. Unfortunately, I was unable to gain further information from them.

As time went on, years actually, more information dribbled in. I will introduce these sources and then complete the story.

Cdr. Ralph T. Briggs, USN (Ret), has spent all his adult years working in Naval Intelligence. The two of us collaborated to produce an article published in the U.S. Naval Institute's *Naval History* magazine regarding the interception of VAdm Yamagata. It was a real education for me to learn from Ralph the functions and capabilities of our Naval Security Agency. Their accomplishments were amazing and their contributions to the winning of WW II remarkable. And not so incidentally, he was manning a radio circuit December 4, 1941, and copied the "Winds Message" signaling Japan's intent to go to war. And this in itself is an astounding story.

Mihoko Yamagata, the Admiral's granddaughter, is married to an American lawyer and lives in San Juan Capistrano, California. By Japanese custom, she retains her family name. About ten years ago while preparing an article on the interception of the Emily for publication in the U.S. Naval Institute's *Naval History* magazine, she telephoned me. Since that time, a friendship has been established and she has provided so much information about VAdm. Yamagata, his life, and military accomplishments. It was she that told me that his final destination was not Shanghai but Tokyo. Here, the then Commander-in-Chief, Fourth Southern Expeditionary Fleet, would have an audience with Emperor Hirohito, be promoted to a four-star admiral, and be assigned as Under Secretary of the Navy.

Mihoko also traveled to Kyoto during a visit to her mother and grandmother's home in Sakurayama, Zushi, where she interviewed Nobuyuki Taniguchi. He was a Chief Flight

Petty Officer assigned to the Emily during March 14 through 17, 1945, and was one of the five survivors. He was captured, interrogated, and held as a POW in Kunming and later Chongqing. Released at the end of the war, he was promoted to Warrant Officer. As a businessman, he lives quietly with his family in a small community near Kyoto. A most gracious and humble man, he still bears some emotional scars from his wartime POW experiences. This interview provided vital information on the final happenings aboard the Emily and the death of Vice Admiral Seigo Yamagata, HIJN.

A most informative document surfaced well after the preparation of the USNI *Naval History* article produced by Briggs and myself in 1989. Lieutenant Frank Balsley, USNR, was a member of SACO Camp Eight which was located just 60 miles south of Haimen where the seaplane made a forced landing. At the time of the forced landing of the Emily, Lt. Balsley was in the Haimen area. He prepared a report of the incident which was forwarded to the U.S. Naval Unit, Headquarters, Fourteenth Air Force. This report, attached in the appendix, contains information gained from the Haimen Guerrilla Raiders Group and a complete listing of the personnel on board.

More information on the Emily event was gained by the Doolittle China Expedition conducted by Mr. Bryan Moon during the Spring of 1994. This group was proceeding to Lin Hai, China, to search for B-25s and other artifacts. Knowing of the Emily incident, Moon decided to explore Haimen to locate the Emily. Dispatching two members of the party to Haimen, they positively located the remains of the Japanese flying boat deep in the river mud and silt. There were several older citizens of the fishing village that well remembered the arrival of the Emily and the melee which occurred. The fascinating report of this sideline expedition is also included in the appendix.

Over the years the remnants of the Emily had settled deeply. Thus, it was impossible to retrieve any parts or artifacts. However, an exhaust clamp from an engine was purchased from a Chinese gentleman. The cost was 13,000 yuan.

Nobuyuki Taniguchi's report of the H8K2-L seaplane transport provided information regarding the flight from Ambon, Netherland East Indies, to our meeting off the China coast. The airplane itself was an outstanding performer. It could carry a maximum of 60 passengers plus 10 crewmen. Powered by four 1825-horsepower engines, it had a top speed of 220 knots. The airplane was equipped with self-sealing fuel tanks, well armored, but carried only one 20 mm and two 7.7 machine guns. A fighter escort was not provided for any portion of the trip.

The airplane departed Ambon for Surabaya on March 14, 1945. Here they boarded the Admiral, his staff, and other passengers. A total of 33 Japanese would make the trip, departing on the 15th for Singapore. After remaining overnight, the Emily set forth on March 16th for Hong Kong. Due to poor weather there, the flight was diverted to Hainan, well short of Hong Kong. After landing, they hit a reef and damaged the underside of the hull. During the night, repairs were made and on the fatal day of March 17, 1945, a departure was made for Taipei located on the northern point of Formosa. At the seaplane

facilities there, the water conditions made a landing questionable. Circling and debating an alternate plan, an air raid warning prompted a departure for Shanghai even though it was acknowledged that fuel for the trip would be close.

Initially, a 140-knot cruise at 13,000 feet was established but weather forced a descent to below the cloud layer. Flying along the coast of China, a B-24 was sighted which made an attack upon the big flying boat. Taniguchi manned a 20 mm gun and fired at the enemy aircraft. The gunfire from the B-24 was fierce with bullets flying through the airplane. The Chief Engineer, a Navy captain, died instantly from a round that went through his chest. He died with bubbles of blood coming out of his mouth.

The enemy aircraft came so close he could see the pilots' faces. He saw his bullets striking the airplane and was sure that the B-24 crashed. It had dropped from sight very quickly. But fuel was short, and the Emily pilot saw what he believed to be the river at Wenchow. After landing on the water, two engines were shut down and they nosed into the bank at a small village. It was dusk and the high tide was running out and soon the airplane was setting on the mud.

One of the passengers, a doctor, could speak Chinese, and from a fisherman determined that they were near Lin Hai. Two of the staff and two crewmen left to find the nearest Japanese troops. As they jumped off the wing, about 200 Chinese troops began firing and killed all four. Cdr. Ashiwara then organized a suicide squad to fight the Chinese troops. As they jumped from the wing carrying guns and swords, they were shot dead. Taniguchi was firing the 20 mm gun as additional opposition arrived, some approaching from junks. Only five staff officers remained on board.

Hit three times with small caliber bullets in the arm, Taniguchi lost consciousness. He awoke and wrapped his wounds with his scarf and heard the Admiral say, "This is the end, destroy all classified documents and material and then burn the flying boat." He asked Taniguchi to send a radio message. The message was sent to Surabaya, Saigon, Hainan, Shanghai, and Formosa and it read as follows:

"We engaged in a battle with an enemy plane and made an emergency landing due to the fuel shortage. The location is the shore of Huangpu River, near Lin Hai. We will make attack as a marauding unit. Long live the Emperor! 16:30."

Taniguchi went to the forward fuel room, soaked his scarf with fuel, lit it, and threw it under the fuselage fuel tank. He then went back to see the Admiral, sitting with four members of his staff. He heard him say:

"All of you have assisted me well so that I could serve the Emperor and our country. I deeply appreciate your support. You are still very young and have a future. Escape this situation and serve the Emperor. Thank you."

Vice Admiral Seigo Yamagata then drew his sword from a pinkish-brown sheath and without hesitation performed "seppuku" in the classical manner.

The smoke and fire was making it very difficult to breath. More Chinese were coming, some from more junks, screaming and firing into the airplane. Taniguchi kicked open a hatch and dove into the water, swimming for the opposite shore. Much of his escape was made by swimming underwater as the Chinese were firing and nearly hit him. Crawling up on the muddy bank opposite from the Emily, he was soon captured. During one period of interrogation, he was shown a photo of 20 bodies lying on the bank beside the destroyed flying boat. He was asked which was the body of the Admiral. He answered that none of them were as he had remained aboard the burning airplane.

Lieutenant Frank Balsley's report of the incident is, unquestionably, most accurate as he was a trained intelligence officer and on the scene. He also had access to the Chinese troops in the area as a source to gain the full story. Pertinent excerpts follow:

The seaplane was number 92 of the Fourth Fleet. It was attacked by an American aircraft which resulted in one engine being shot out. This damage definitely caused them to make the forced landing. He didn't know what kind of an American plane it was but from all descriptions it sounded like a gigantic Flying Wombat! The Japanese pilot landed to make repairs on the Haimen River, thinking it was the river at Wenchow. There were 33 aboard, the senior being Vice Admiral Seigo Yamagata. He was en route to Japan for a new job.

Chinese troops rushed to the scene and a melee ensued which resulted in the burning of the plane and the escape of twenty and the massacre of eight and the burning of three. All were hunted down and killed except five that were captured and then rushed to Lin Hai.

The following day, the 18th, a 4000-ton transport and two Japanese gunboats attempted to recover the plane and passengers. The Chinese mustered 2000 troops and opposed them. Four Japanese airplanes arrived overhead but neither the troops, ships, nor planes could find the seaplane as the Chinese had camouflaged it. In the evening an American airplane came on the scene and the Japanese withdrew. A later report said that the transport was sunk by an American plane at 1700.

The "Balsley Report" was forwarded to Fleet Air Wing Seventeen by the U.S. Naval Unit, Fourteenth Air Force, via Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet.

The Moon Expedition's source at Haimen was a 69-year-old man who had lived all his life there. His account aligns with the other information with only minor deviation. He did state that when the seaplane arrived overhead, it was obvious that it was in trouble and knew it could go no further. When the Japanese first landed, they attempted to pass themselves off as Chinese or at least Allies. This did not sell and as soon as the militia arrived, the locals headed for cover and the battle was on.

Of interest is that one group of Japanese, having escaped and tired, hurt, and hungry, sought help from an older Chinese. Giving him several watches as an act of good faith, they asked for food and water and to not turn them in. Wrong. He promptly notified the authorities and they were captured. Many of the locals wanted to kill them but some one in authority convinced them it was best to hold them as prisoners.

Fearing reprisals, the Haimen Chinese floated two barges to alongside the Emily and stretched matting over it. It was well that this was done, as later the Japanese, thinking the saga had occurred up-country, took revenge and bombed another town on a river unmercifully. Lack of coordination between the Japanese forces saved Haimen at the expense of an innocent town miles away.

The Emily was a goldmine to the Nationalist Chinese Government as well as the locals. All four engines were pulled out and their parts then served the Chinese Air Force very well. The portion of the fuselage that was not destroyed by fire was salvaged and used for many purposes. The wings, tail section, and debris from the fuselage were all put to good use.

A final observation indicated that for anyone to escape from the Emily it had to have been after dark. And for certain, the locals would have shown no mercy to any of those escaping the battle with the militia.

There is one remaining mystery. This event is not recorded officially or publicly anywhere that I have been able to determine. On occasion, I have even been challenged as to it having actually occurred. Except for the VPB-104 Aircraft Action Report and War Diary, it is a non-event. There were articles published in the *U.S. Institute Naval History* magazine; a book, *Log of the Liberators*; and the *Air Classics* magazine of February 1994. All of such information was provided by me. It may be that it was intended to go no further nor higher than Commanding General, Fifth Air Force. An "ULTRA" message seems to indicate this. I have been given to understand that Winston Churchill was highly displeased with the shoot-down of the big one, Admiral Yamamoto, by USAAC P-38s. He called it an assassination and thought it terribly wrong in complaining to President Roosevelt. At some time in the future I will research this to determine, if in fact, the authorization went no higher than the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force.

A STAFFIE SEES ACTION - On March 18, 1945, Hagen put on a bit of a show for Lt. Clifford, USNR, a member of Fleet Air Wing Seventeen's operations department. A rare event for a staff member to make a trip with the working stiffs. About 40 miles southwest of Macao, a 300-ton Sugar Dog was found at anchor in a small harbor. Hagen attacked the SD by making three runs. One 500# bomb was dropped on the first pass, two 100# bombs on the second, and only strafing on the third. After a direct hit with one of the small bombs and strafing with 400 rounds, the small freighter caught fire. On the return leg 1.5 hours



later, the vessel was a mass of flames with smoke rising to 1000'. Several explosions were also observed deep within the hold of the SD.

Later, and to keep things in balance, Hagen attacked a 200-ton Sugar Dog at anchor in Zhanjiang Harbor. Making two bombing and strafing attacks, he missed with a 500# and then with three 100# bombs. Slight damage was made by firing off 400 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. A PPC should not make it look too easy with a staff member present.

On the same day, Waldeck found two 50-ton landing craft off the coast at Swatow. He made nine bombing and strafing runs, dropping six 100# bombs singly, and fired 1300 rounds. One landing craft was set afire and sank. The other made it to the beach thoroughly riddled but perhaps repairable.

Still on the 18th, the Skipper had the 1050 nmi mile patrol to Amami Ō Shima which took 14.6 flying hours. North of Okinawa, he caught a 75-ton sea truck and burned it to the waterline. Not up to the Commanding Officer's standards, but at least he did not come home empty-handed.

A NEAR THING - Ettinger had a close call on the 19th. Off the southeast coast of Formosa, he set fire to a 100-ton Sugar Dog. Five hours later Fulwider, passing by, observed the small freighter to be gutted by fire and was by then a drifting hulk.

Continuing his patrol, the PPC was "feeling" his way along the Chinese coast in fog and low ceilings. Suddenly, the pilots saw that one cloud was filled with rocks! A high hill,

poking up into the overcast, frightened the search plane crew back out over the water and well clear of the coastline.

LEADING OUR ALLIES INTO BATTLE - On March 20, 1945, Didier made an important contact 30 miles south of Amoy. At 1144(I) he found one very large freighter-transport of 10,000 tons escorted by three destroyers and two gunboats (PGs) on course 240 degrees and speed ten knots. Continuing his patrol, he saw 24 U.S. Army Air Corps B-25 Mitchell bombers over Amoy. Jerry established radio contact with the leader of the twin-engine medium bombers and informed him of the Japanese convoy. Our PPC then led the bomber formation to the enemy ships and watched their low-level attacks. All vessels were hit and the FTA was pounded heavily. The big transport ship began to burn furiously and exploded several times. With this level of protection, the Japanese certainly thought highly of the one big transport ship.

Didier's sector then took the PB4Y-1 by Swatow where nine fighters were seen on the airstrip. Here Crew Sixteen made one strafing attack, firing 300 rounds and definitely damaged two fighters. Heavy and light accurate AA fire was received from the batteries on the airstrip and one large hole was torn in the nose-wheel doors.

West flew a patrol on the 20th with the additional purpose of plotting Japanese radar installations. Lt. Clarence Heinke, the Squadron Electronics Officer, on his own initiative, had established a program to acquire, locate, and verify enemy radar sites and details of their emissions. On average, there were three PB4Y-1s equipped with special radar intercept gear. Our four Aviation Radar Technicians (ARTs) were assigned to these airplanes each time they flew a patrol. On this day, "Baron" Heinke would fly with crew Twenty-Three to operate the gear and acquire the data.

Our quiet and gentlemanly professor from Ohio achieved results from his program of considerable significance. He and his team detected 66 new radar stations, pinpointed 85 and verified 257. Intelligence, patience, and persistence by the Baron paid big dividends in the ECM arena.

West would receive AA fire from Samachow for his efforts.

March 21st did not start out too well for Hemphill. An hour and one half after takeoff in BuNo 38789, number three engine failed. Returning to Clark Field, they manned the standby airplane, BuNo 38869, the Skipper's airplane. Assigned the sector running to 60 miles south of Shanghai, Hemphill made a number of contacts and noted such in his pilot's logbook. No position was entered, but three groups of enemy ships were found and reported. The first was one FTB escorted by one DE. Then another freighter-transport was seen, also escorted by a DE. The last convoy consisted of one DD leading one FTB, one SA (a large tanker of 8000 to 10,000 tons), and one Sugar Charlie of 1500 tons. While no kills were made, it was a good day performing our primary task of long range search.

On the 21st, Burton damaged a number of small ships while patrolling along Formosa and the China coast. Off Wenchow, he attacked a 2000-ton tanker (SB) and a 200-ton Sugar Dog. Making three runs on the small freighter (SD), he scored with one 100# bomb, causing oil seepage from the hull and setting it afire. It was destroyed.

The attack upon the Sugar Baker was not as successful due to bomb release problems. Making ten runs, he dropped a total of six 100# bombs which missed. However, 1700 rounds were fired at the SB and several fires were started. Slight damage was assessed.

Later, along the west coast of Formosa, he damaged a small lugger by 200 rounds of 0.50 caliber gunfire. Twenty miles south of the lugger, Burton made ten strafing runs, firing 1800 rounds to set fire to and destroy a 100-ton Sugar Dog. A lot of shooting, 3700 rounds for the day.

While Burton was working on the east coast, Noon was doing a job on the west coast of Formosa. Covering a 1050 nmi patrol in 14.5 hours, he took some time off to strafe a Sugar Dog moored alongside a cliff which precluded a bombing run. He figured that 400 rounds created slight damage to the small freighter. Another 30 miles down the road, strafing, he blew up a locomotive traveling on a track running along the coastline. The Japanese in a small motor launch nearby watching the locomotive blow, probably knew their turn was next. It was strafed by the patrol plane and was damaged considerably.

On the 21st, Waldeck had the Okinawa sector and recorded in his logbook seeing 30 ships/vessels of various types. Also, there was lots of activity around the airstrip but he doesn't say just what.

March 22, 1945, was a dismal day for VPB-104. No Aircraft Action Reports, no War Diary entries, and none of the pilots nor crewmen made logbook notations. Just encountered the ordinary hazards of flight in the combat zone with little to show for it. Although a negative sector did have some meaning for the higher command, it only meant hours of boredom for us (but don't stop looking!). Hagen lost an engine near the end of his sector and had a long trip home during his 12.4 hour patrol.

Things picked up on March 23rd. Tent mates Wood and Adler generated items for the AAR forms. Wood got airborne at 0420 but Adler had a more leisurely breakfast as he did not lift off until 0530. Wood's kill was a 100-ton Sugar Dog off the southeast coast of Formosa. He made six bombing and strafing runs to beach the vessel, completely destroyed and lying on its side.

Adler arrived off the west coast of Formosa at 0858 and worked northward for the next hour, covering 66 miles. The first attack was against a 200-ton Sugar Dog. It was hit by two 100# GP bombs and strafed with 800 rounds. It burned readily and, engulfed in flames, was destroyed.

A 50-ton lugger was missed with one bomb, but strafing with 700 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo did the job. The crew jumped over the side at the first sight of the PB4Y-1 and the small vessel, out of control, ran up onto the beach and was wrecked.

Next a 150-ton steel-hulled SD was missed with three 100# bombs, but the crew lost control and the small freighter was forced upon a rocky reef by a 30-knot wind. The pounding on the rocks destroyed it after being strafed with 500 rounds of armor-piercing incendiary bullets.

The final kill by Adler and Crew Five was a relatively large lugger of 100 tons. It felt the impact of 350 API rounds and all the crew abandoned ship except several that were killed and still lying on the deck. It too was beached and destroyed.

About this time, Commander H. M. Drake, USN, Operations Officer of Fleet Air Wing Seventeen, flew a patrol with Lt. Holt of VPB-119, covering Hainan. Attacking targets on shore, they were shot down and all hands on board were killed.

On March 24, 1945, I too had a staff officer from FAW-17 as a passenger, the Wing Flight Surgeon, Lieutenant Commander J. A. Tyburcey, Medical Corps, USN. I'm not sure as to how this all came about. But knowing the person, Capt. C. B. Jones, I rather suspect he became irritated by the lack of knowledge or the realities of our patrols on the part of his staff. Typically, his solution was most practical—get them into the airplanes and fly a mission. Ours was a patrol the good doctor would remember, at least I sure as hell did.

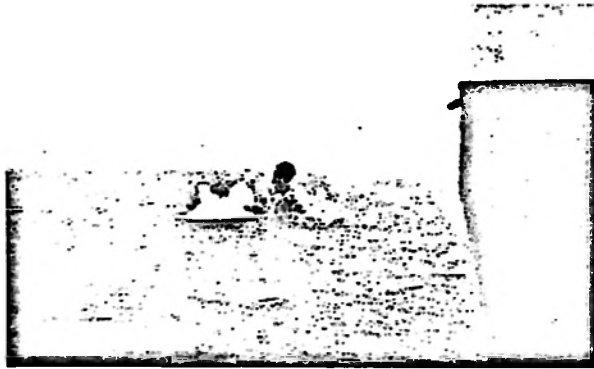
I flew my own airplane this day, BuNo 38889, on the 1050 nmi sector into the East China Sea carrying four 250# high explosive bombs. Near the end of my sector and about midway between Shanghai and Okinawa, cruising at 2000 feet, my radar operator called out a contact at 28 miles. It was a gloomy day, visibility about five miles, low overcast, and windy with rough seas. As there were multiple contacts, I let down to 50 feet for a run in on the ships with full power on the engines.

Visual contact was made at about five miles but being so low, I did not have a clear picture of the situation. I pulled up to 200 feet or so and saw one destroyer immediately in front of us, then one FTC of 2000- to 3000-tons and on beyond two FTBs of 5000 to 6000 tons; two destroyer escorts, and three 1000-ton escorts of an unidentified class completed the count. Late in the war, the Japanese began building a 1000-ton ship specifically designed for convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare (ASW). We simply referred to these ships as gunboats (PGs) and let it go at that. The convoy was on course 330 degrees and speed was ten knots.

Now all ships in the convoy opened up with heavy, medium, and light AA gunfire. The heavier guns were firing moderately and the lighter guns were intense. I had to make a decision quickly and it had better be the right one—our lives depended on it.

Regardless the choice, we would fly directly over or alongside the destroyer. Flying straight over the DD to attack the smaller vessel, the FTC, just didn't seem worth it. I would have preferred to go after one of the bigger FTBs, but it would be a long trip right through the whole damn convoy. I quickly rolled the airplane to the left to take on the "Tail-end Charlie," a 1000-ton ASW escort. Passing very close by the destroyer was no joy at all. It was a real close-up of the Terisuki-class destroyer and some would call it a beautiful ship. It looked very ugly as our gunners fired our 0.50 caliber guns into it.

The gunboat was rolling and pitching in the high seas and had her whistle blowing full blast (a signal for help?). Jack M. Saunders, Crew Two's replacement bombardier, formerly with Hemphill, laid the bombs into the PG beautifully. One bomb hit short (but not by much), the second into the hull, and the final two into the deckhouse and bridge. It really blew! And in tri-color with the dull gray of the bomb explosion, the white cloud from



the boiler explosion, and then the black column of the magazine exploding. Lee Little, leaning out of the waist hatch, reported that he saw the ship break in the middle with the fore and aft masts meeting at their tip tops. It sank very quickly. We had fired off 2000 rounds of APIs at the ships in the convoy.

In hindsight one can be much bolder. Perhaps I should have flown right through the convoy to knock off one of the large freighter-transport. With the ships pitching and rolling, they may not have hit us. This self-critique did not last long. After breaking further left to clear the enemy ships, I began a circle at about five miles distance to make sure of the count and classifications. We were at 1000' altitude and back to cruise speed. And then WHAM! That destroyer had laid a five-inch burst just very close. When you can hear the explosion of heavy AA shells, they're entirely too close.

Our passenger had observed the entire episode from a squatting position between the two pilots. I turned to ask just what he thought of the show. He stated, "I just didn't realize that you could fly a big airplane like this so close to the water." Could it be that he did not see those enemy ships banging away at us? Well, different strokes for different folks! But now I did question the value of the Wing Commander's on-the-job training program for his staff officers.

Continuing the patrol and as we were approaching the northeast corner of Formosa, I saw an Oscar cruising along the coastline on a northerly heading. I asked my copilot for full power on the engines and to trail the cowl flaps and took a course for an intercept. We had not closed much at all before he apparently saw us. He added power and pulled off over the hills and far away. That Samurai apparently thought his odds were poor against a blue B-24.

After landing back at Clark, the good Flight Surgeon invited me to his tent for a drink. I thought at long last, I will finally get a ration of medicinal brandy. He pulled out an unlabeled bottle of reddish fluid of questionable origin. He was not reluctant to call it what it was, "Tuba." He said it was a gift from a Philippino patient of his. But this stuff was poison. It could make you blind. There were warnings everywhere not to touch the stuff. Well, if the Flight Surgeon responsible for our health and well-being could drink it, who was I to question the "health benefits." What a jolt. It was raw, vile, and certainly not fit for human consumption. A disappointing end to something less than a totally successful day.

We knew it would not be long before the landings on Okinawa. On March 24th, Noon and Crew Four watched the big guns of our fleet pounding the beaches. It was awesome. How could any defenses survive this treatment?

By now Captain Jones had prepared his welcome for his favorite squadron and its commanding officer. A four-foot by five-foot sign had been placed in front of Whitney Wright's tent. It was a masterpiece of humor, considering the time and place:

- Patronize -

- Fleet Air Wing 17 -

Deluxe hotel service - Excellent cuisine

Soft beds - valet service - The best ACORN

and CASU Service - Gas oil bombs and

ammunition - first aid -

Free aerial excursions to China Formosa

Ryukus - See the Japanese Empire in

cherry blossom time - At our expense

Expert briefing & free daily travel folders

If you don't like our SERVICE we will provide excellent alibis from our inexhaustible supply prepared by experts

If you like it tells us and the HIGHER COMMAND

Warning - Take shower before using swimming pool

The Management.

Whit Wright was quick to respond with a sign of his own. After being painted on the back side of Doc Jones's sign it was set into place in the front of the wing headquarters hut:

**"Fox Hole" Jones, Commanding General Says -
"JOIN JONES' JOKERS**

**If you're too old to enjoy
- this war -
You'll be damn old for the next war"**

When deeper fox holes are dug Fox Hole Jones will fall into them!!!

Membership "Jones Jokers"

**Steal an Oscar from the Army
Strike or burn a few planes
Give a good gripe on logistics**

"Jones Jokers" Privileges

**Week days at Clark Field
Sunday evenings at Angeles
The Golden Gate by '48**

- OUR MOTTO -

"When I was in the Aleutians - - -"

Then there was the mystery of the oil pressure dropping during a pre-dawn departure. It was still dark and about an hour into the patrol when Allie Lymenstull picks up the story:

"The oil pressure started dropping on one of the engines and I got out the Aldis lamp [used for sending blinker messages] and inspected the engine. There was no sign of an oil leak. But the pressure was still dropping so I recommended that our PPC shut the engine down. He did and feathered the propeller and we headed back to base. After landing I climbed out onto the wing and engine nacelle. Inspecting everything, I could find no sign of an oil leak.

"We manned the standby airplane and flew our patrol. When we got back, we were told all that was done to the engine was fill it with oil and it ran fine. We were accused of flying with no oil. An investigation was started and we provided our pre-flight check sheets which showed all oil tanks as full. Also, our procedures were explained. I would open the oil tank covers and check the oil level gauge. Then a second mechanic would follow and double-check and close the cover.

"The CASU's gas crew service sheets showed that they had filled the oil tanks and had gassed the plane. Everything proved a fully-serviced airplane. A lot of questions were asked but there seemed to be no answers. I asked the Pratt & Whitney representative if the plane could be revved up

during the ground check, taken off and flown for an hour with no oil in the tank. He said absolutely not, you wouldn't even get off the ground before the engine seized up. That ended the inquiry but the mystery remained. The engine worked fine thereafter but, to this day, I cannot figure out what happened."

On March 25, 1945, Wright had the long haul on the Shanghai sector and would log 15.2 flight hours (whew!). From the pilots' notations in their logbooks, they indicate contacts were made with three Japanese convoys south of Shanghai. Destroyers with these ships took the PB4Y-1 under gunfire. Numbers and types of vessels seen were not shown.

At 1330 and 60 miles south-southwest of Shanghai, Wright attacked a 2500-ton freighter-transport. He made two bombing and five additional strafing runs on the FTC. Two 100# bombs exploded beneath the ship and 3000 rounds were fired into it for slight damage. The Japanese crew fought back and, among other projectiles, fired off two "parachute" contraptions. One opened at 150' and the other at 50'. Supposedly, the patrol plane was to fly into these things to self-destruct. The invitation was declined.

However, conventional medium and light anti-aircraft guns did score some hits upon the PB4Y-1. Accurate 7.7 mm machine gun fire hit into the wings, fuselage, engine accessory section, and bomb bay fuel tanks. The patrol plane was out of commission ten days.

On the same day Jameson tussled with seven luggers and three sea trucks. These were spread out over a 10-mile area 50 miles southeast of the south end of Formosa. Two luggers were set afire and another slightly damaged. Surprisingly, these very small vessels fired back with light machine guns. More damage would have most likely been done to them but due to the 1/2- to 3-mile visibility in rain squalls, lineup was very difficult.

Waldeck and Crew Seven made a number of very good contacts on the 25th. The positions of the three Japanese convoys were not given in the pilots' logbooks but numbers and types were. The first consisted of a large transport (TA) and freighter-transport (FTA) of 8000 to 10,000 tons each, escorted by two destroyers (DD), and two destroyer escorts (DE). The next convoy had one 5000-ton FTB and one 3000-ton FTC accompanied by two DEs and one DD. The final convoy sighted was made up of two FTCs, two DDs, and one DE. The destroyers in this group laid in four very close bursts with their five-inch guns.

Our patrols were witnessing and hearing over VHF voice circuits the daily pounding of Okinawa. We wondered if the island would be sunk. Hagen had the Okinawa sector on the 26th and simply commented in his logbook, "big operations."

Action picked up on March 27, 1945. Ettinger had a busy day patrolling the east coast of Formosa. On the northeast corner, he strafed a six-car troop train and brought it to a stop. There were two additional troop trains and one freight train in the yard but severe

turbulence prevented more runs. Fred Himsworth, manning the top turret at the time, relates this account:

“Four troop trains were on a railroad track just off a rocky beach at the base of some very high hills. We attacked from the seaward side but got off only a few damaging rounds when we were hit by a severe downdraft. Quickly, it forced us down to the water, almost crashing. The jolt forced me up into the top of the turret, breaking my earphones. Our PPC wisely decided that further runs were not worth the hazard and we continued on our patrol.”

Their next target was high on a beach in the middle of the east coast of Formosa. A 100-ton Sugar Dog was well camouflaged and shored up, undergoing repairs. Two 100# incendiary clusters and 500 API rounds set it blazing and destroyed it. This must have been very discouraging to the repairmen.

Koshun airfield on the southern end of Formosa was next to receive Ettinger's attention. Dropping two incendiary clusters and strafing with 400 rounds, he destroyed two



aircraft parked in revetments. A Zeke and a Kate burned fiercely. A Jill was also hit by 0.50 caliber gunfire. It appeared that the Jill had been previously damaged and it was not credited to Crew Nine.

Around the corner of the southern tip and ten minutes later, two 75-ton luggers were attacked. Five 100# high explosive bombs and 800 rounds did the job as both were destroyed.

It had been a good show for the Fleet Air Wing Seventeen staff officer riding with Ettinger. Lieutenant W. Zimmer, USNR, had ridden through it all and surely had plenty to say about the day. Unfortunately, his comments were not recorded.

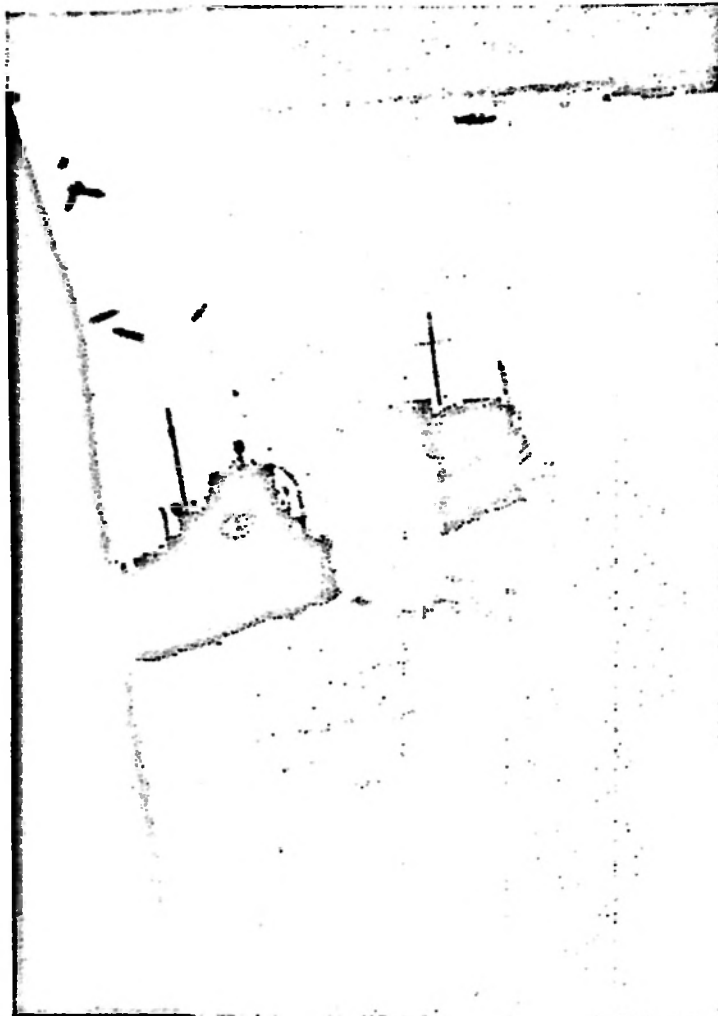
Meanwhile, on the west side of Formosa, Noon began at the north end and worked south. The first victim was a 100-ton Sugar Dog steaming north at ten knots. One run was made, dropping two 100# GPs and firing 300 rounds. A direct hit with one high explosive bomb blew up the small freighter.

Midway along the coast, another SD received the same treatment with the same results for another 100-ton freighter blown to kingdom come.

Noon's next contact had more substance, five Sugar Charlies of 400 tons each and four 100-ton Sugar Dogs. These small freighters were close in to the shore at Takao which had a substantial number of AA batteries. Making one bombing and strafing attack, the patrol plane dropped two 100# bombs and strafed with 2000 rounds. The bombs missed but all four SDs received slight damage from the 0.50 caliber gunfire.

In the harbor of Takao, two 10,000-ton tankers, one 5000-ton freighter, and two destroyers were seen. An important contact that was radioed back to base.

West and Didier finished off March 27th with a joint attack upon a 150-ton landing craft. Located just off the entrance to the harbor at Wenchow, they made six bombing and



Empty cartridges flow from the tail turret.

strafing attacks. Five 100# bombs and one 500# bomb were dropped, exploding just off the port bow and starboard side. During these runs, 850 API rounds were fired. An estimate of the damage could not be made as the PB4Y-1s were forced to depart due to gunfire from the shore. Hits were taken by West's airplane into the bomb bay, port wing, and rudder from accurate medium and light machine guns. I am not sure how or why the two were together for this action. But additional hitting power is most welcome.

On March 28th, Becker had the patrol up the China coast all the way to the entrance into Hang Chow Bay, 1025 nmi. Off Foochow, he added to the damage already inflicted on a 3000-ton FTC (the AAR does not indicate the circumstances of the previous damage). On the first bombing run, he scored a direct hit with a 100# bomb which exploded at the base of the freighter's superstructure. Three additional strafing attacks were made,

exchanging 1000 rounds of 0.50 caliber for ten hits into the patrol plane from the FTC's 7.7 mm machine guns. The Japanese gunner scored into the aft fuselage, rudder, and stabilizer. A week later the PB4Y-1 was able to fly again but serious damage was made on the Japanese freighter.

On the same day and about 100 miles north of Becker's encounter, Jameson attacked a 2000-ton Sugar Charlie (large) and a 60' picket boat. These vessels were anchored close together inside a cove with high cliffs on three sides. Five 100# bombs were dropped on the first attack but missed due to the terrain. Six more strafing passes were made, firing 900 rounds, but no damage was seen. Returning gunfire, the picket boat put 12.7 mm hits into the patrol plane's vertical stabilizer and fuselage for minor damage.

The Commanding Officer closely examined the photography later and determined that the SC(L) was actually a 1000-ton collier evidenced by coal on the deck. A vessel not seen before.

On some days it just doesn't pay to get out of bed. March 29th was one such day for Waldeck. Manning BuNo 46729 for their patrol, an engine cut out at lift-off. The circuit and landing was a real sweat job, hot and heavy setting it back down (this would have been fatal at Tacloban). The engine was "fixed" and it was off again for the search sector. Two hours into the patrol, he had engine troubles again and the course was reversed, landing back at Clark after 4.1 flight hours. By this time, the standby crew had departed to cover the sector.

Burton's day was not much better. At the end of their sector, while looking over Oagari Shima, they received heavy AA fire. Shortly thereafter, number three engine failed. It was a long, long hike back home. Ogari Shima had an overabundance of anti-aircraft ammunition and, isolated, the troops had nothing better to do.

On March 30, 1945, I flew a patrol along the western coast of Formosa, by the Pescadores, and on to Hang Chow Bay. It was then back down the China coast to Amoy. A little north of Amoy I made contact with one Sugar Charlie (L) closely escorted by three destroyers. I decided one SC(L) was not worth tangling with three DDs. Looking over Amoy Harbor and the airstrip, we received heavy anti-aircraft fire. Not a productive day.

On the 30th, Fulwider and Crew Twenty found nine luggers with sizes varying from 60 to 150 tons, conveniently arranged. At Yonaguni Jima, located 60 miles off the northeast of Formosa, these vessels were anchored together in groups of four and five, about one mile apart. Setting up a figure eight pattern going from one bunch to the other, Fulwider made six runs. Four 100# bombs were dropped but all missed. However, strafing with 2700 rounds, seven luggers were set on fire and destroyed, the other two were damaged. Have a nice day, Bill.

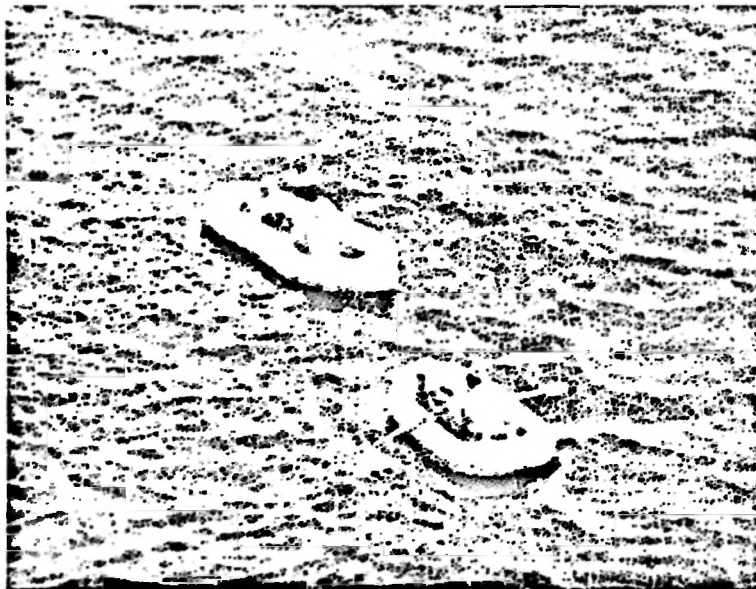
Ettinger finished the month with a 150-ton Sugar Dog kill about 40 miles southeast of Wenchow. The crewmen of this small freighter had the audacity of returning machine

gun fire and holing the patrol plane in the tail and engine cowl flaps. On the second run, the gunners were silenced. Then two other crewmen rushed to man the gun and were killed by strafing from Crew Nine's 0.50 caliber guns. A total of ten low-level attacks were made, dropping four 100# bombs singly and shooting with 1500 rounds. One 100# bomb hit and exploded just forward of the superstructure, strewing the deck with debris. Stretch Ettinger left the area with the SD burning from the bow to the deckhouse, trailing oil and listing. It was considered to be destroyed.

A special mission was flown by Noon and Bittenbender on March 31, 1945, which was, by far, one of the greatest stories of VPB-104's history. The two PB4Y-1s departed Clark Field shortly after 0300 for Yulin Bay, the main seaport on Hainan Island. They were to find and then track a Japanese convoy previously sighted there of one Sugar Able (two stack), a 40,000-ton tanker, three Sugar Charlies, five destroyers, and six destroyer escorts. At the morning briefing, they were also told that a USAAC B-25 had been shot down the day before and there could be survivors. This would be an eventful day.

Two PB4Y-1s were assigned for mutual fire support inasmuch as the importance of the convoy and the location near Yulin Bay, Hainan, would, no doubt, produce fighter protection by the Japanese. Also, a lifeguard submarine was expected to be on station, the USS *Chub*, to effect the rescue of the B-25 crewmen should they be found.

Arriving off Yulin Bay, the submarine was sighted and the patrol planes began a search for the survivors from the prior day's USAAC air strike. Soon, two rubber life rafts



were found with three airmen logging a little "sea duty" time. Noon and Bittenbender then started a circle overhead to assure the lifeboat sailors that they were seen and thereby

indicate that help was on the way. At 20 miles, the submarine could not see the survivors so the "combat air patrol" made low passes to provide a course for the submarine. At the same time, the crewmen in the waist hatches of the Liberator pointed and motioned for the airmen to paddle hard towards the lifeguard vessel.

As it appeared that the rescue was proceeding well, Bitt left to locate the search mission's objective, the reported large and important convoy. In Yulin Bay, about ten miles from the life rafts, he sighted two destroyers, three gunboats, the very large tanker of 40,000 tons, and a number of small craft. The PPC sent a contact report to base radio and returned to the rescue scene. He decided to maintain a lookout in the direction of Yulin Bay in case the destroyers put to sea. They could be a serious threat to the rescue operations.

Aboard the submarine, the overall situation had generated apprehension well beyond a reasonable degree. The Commanding Officer, Commander Cassius D. Rhymes, USN, had been on the bridge all night, searching for the downed army flyers. He had blown the ship's whistle and used a searchlight, trying to attract the airmen's attention and some sort of a signal as to their position. And this at times only two miles offshore from Hainan. If this was not enough, the surrounding waters were quite shallow and known to be mined. Shortly after dawn, the two Navy patrol planes arrived overhead. This eased the C.O.'s concern somewhat, but the rescue would now take place in broad daylight and clear skies. And there was an additional burden. Due to the shallow water, the rescue would have to be a surface pickup. Most certainly, there was no room for error.

A deployment of sorts was set, with Earl Bittenbender circling overhead the life rafts at 4000' and Hank Noon providing CAP at 2000' for the submarine. Four B-25s appeared but could not stay because of their fuel situation. Two PB4Y-2s of VPB-118, based with us at Clark Field, added to the combat air patrol's fire power but once the action began with the Japanese fighters, they left to "resume their search mission."

As the submarine was approaching the airmen in the life rafts, an aerial melee began of considerable dimensions. A total of four Oscars, two Franks, and one Jack arrived with destructive intent. The Franks and Jack were modern, high-performance fighters just recently operational. The Oscars, though older models, were still a formidable threat. Noon and Bitt decided to continue their individual covering responsibilities. Noon would stay low over the submarine and Bittenbender would fly high CAP generally over the life rafts and function to break up any coordinated fighter attacks.

The action can be best described by quoting directly from the Aircraft Action Report filed the day after the action. The following is the verbatim report by Bittenbender:

"At 1120(I) I heard someone report enemy planes and spotted two fighters while heading westward to the north of the sub. They were approaching from 285 degrees high. Montoux, my bow gunner, saw another fighter (this plane will be referred to as 'Oscar-1') making a beam run on the

sub from starboard to port. He saw one burst of strafing which was short about 200 feet. I started down when the two fighters were first observed (these planes will be called "Frank-1" and "Oscar-2"). They were sighted again at 12 o'clock high on a northwest heading. We started climbing after them. Frank-1 moved over from 12 to 11 o'clock high and range closed to 600 yards. My bow and top turrets fired at both planes, damaging Frank-1 as it dropped a phosphorous bomb well ahead of us. Frank-1 was hit in fuselage, wings and engine. Montoux observed a stream of smoke with intermittent heavier puffs from the engine of Frank-1 which pulled out of range.

"Oscar-2 was hit immediately as the firing began by Montoux and by Everhart, the top turret gunner, as well as Bourgeois, the starboard waist gunner. As range was closed to 400 yards, Oscar-2 was hit in the fuselage and a particularly well-concentrated fire into the cockpit. This plane immediately made a very violent wingover to starboard, going into a steep dive toward Yulin Bay. Smoke was observed by Bourgeois, coming from the engine. It appeared to level off close to the water and was not again observed.

"We then resumed circling the sub at 1130(I). Two PB4Y-2s were approaching the scene from the northeast. Five minutes later, as the life rafts came in alongside the sub, the sub reported four enemy fighters to the northwest. Montoux saw another Frank (Frank-2) at 12 o'clock high, heading east. I was at 4000 feet, heading west. The PB4Y-2s and B-25s had left and Noon began leaving the sub as it reported all the survivors had been taken aboard. We turned up into Frank-2 as he dropped a phosphorous bomb which exploded a mile ahead, about 500 feet below us. Frank-2 then pulled up into the sun then started an overhead vertical run on us. Montoux and Everhart began firing at 2000 feet range, each firing one burst. Frank-2 circled and made another run from 4 o'clock high. Brown and Everhart each fired a burst as range again closed to 2000 feet. Frank-2 immediately broke off to starboard and disappeared as Oscar-3 was observed at 11 o'clock 500 feet above, range 600 yards, both of us headed west. I started to close in as Montoux and Everhart opened fire with intermittent bursts. Oscar-3 began giving off spurts of smoke coming from the engine. It could not out-climb us, indicating engine damage. It leveled off as Oscar-4 came in on a high head-on run from 12 o'clock. I had previously spotted Oscar-4 at 1:30 o'clock high, about 2 miles away, also heading west, flying at 6000 feet. As he had moved up to 1 o'clock ahead, he made a steep left turn into me and I turned into him.

"I immediately warned the gunners of Oscar-4 coming in for a run. They ceased firing at Oscar-3 and swung around to Oscar-4, putting concentrated bursts into its engine. I saw the tracers exploding in the engine

as the plane came toward us. Everhart had begun firing at a range of 2000 feet. Oscar-4 returned the fire as the range closed to 1000 feet, and continued firing as he came on in. I started nosing down and to the left. As Oscar-4 crossed our starboard wing at 50 feet above, Montoux and Everhart got hits in its fuselage and tail. Bourgeois observed large holes in Oscar-4's tail as it sped by. Oscar-4 began smoking heavily, large puffs indicating engine trouble. Smoke kept increasing as the plane lost altitude heading seaward behind us.

"The gunners observed one 20 mm firing from each wing of Oscar-4 and two 12.7 mm in the engine cowling firing through the propeller. During this second encounter with the fighters, we observed one of the Oscars bombing and strafing the sub as it crash dived, following the completion of the rescue. Two depth charges, apparently 200 pounders, were dropped, exploding 200 yards off the sub's starboard beam, with delayed action fuses. The Oscar's heavy and continuous strafing straddled the conning tower as it was submerging.

"A Jack had also been observed in the area during this encounter, but it did not participate in the engagement. As we left for base, two fighters trailed us for a short time and then headed back toward Yulin Bay."

Summarizing Bittenbender's engagement, one Oscar was destroyed and two Oscars probably destroyed. One Frank was damaged. The PB4Y-1 was badly damaged. The tail section had taken one or two 20 mm hits in the lower vertical fin, the starboard fuselage and tail turret were holed, the trim tab and fabric of one rudder was torn away, the starboard wing and leading edge was hit by 12.7 mm gun fire, and a wing fuel cell was holed, as well as the flap and other wing areas. One crewman, Howard Brown, received a scalp wound. They had fired a total of 825 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo at the fighters during the engagements. This airplane would fly again but many parts indicated required replacement including the fuel cell, a difficult task.

As Noon remained low on the water covering the submarine and life rafts, they missed most of the action above them. He did report a total of eight phosphorous bombs exploding overhead. Try though he did, the slower patrol plane could not defend against all feints and maneuvers by the Japanese fighters. What attacks the Japanese were able to make upon the submarine caused no damage.

Commander Rhymes had cleared the bridge once the enemy fighters appeared. Although the one Liberator had lowered and tightened his protective umbrella, two "Zeros" did break through to spray the conning tower. Of greater concern was the patrol plane's report of two Japanese destroyers clearing the harbor at Yulin Bay. Unable to see the destroyers, the immediate concern was his gang on deck to fish out the airmen now coming alongside. It did not take long to get them aboard and down below. Once accomplished, the boat was turned to seaward and full speed set on the four engines. When sufficient

water depth was gained, the submarine dove and considerable relief was felt by all of the crew. Even the airmen guests were pleased, more so due to learning of the home port of the submarine, Perth, Australia, than gaining depth below the surface.

The finale for this event occurred a month later at Clark Field when two of the survivors made an appearance there. They had come to personally thank the patrol plane crews for their part in the rescue. Of course, Noon, Bittenbender, and their crews were not there to receive their gratitude as they were off on another patrol.

March 1945 had been a good month for the squadron. We had flown a total of 1810 hours. The replacements for struck aircraft had arrived in a more timely manner. We began the month with 15 PB4Y-1s and finished the month with 15. A total of 104,100 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo had been expended. The numbers of ordnance dropped came to 386 100#, 24 250#, 27 500# bombs, and 4 100# incendiary clusters. Fifty-nine ships were sunk including two FTCs, four SCs, twenty-three SDs, and numerous smaller craft for a total of 12,950 tons. Seventy ships were damaged including one FTB, three FTCs, one SB, four SCs, twenty-four SDs, and many small craft totaling 25,895 tons.

In the air, nine enemy aircraft were shot down, five probably downed and four were damaged. On the ground, three aircraft were destroyed and two were damaged. Also, one locomotive and one six-car train were destroyed. Two troop trucks were damaged.

It had been a good month for our scoreboard. Of equal importance, perhaps more so, the substantial improvement of Clark Field over Tacloban was a blessing. The ordinary hazards of flight had been greatly reduced.

CHAPTER EIGHT SHIPPING TARGETS FADE ENCROACHING ON THE USAAC

On April 1, 1945, U.S. ground forces began landing on Okinawa. A fierce battle was joined which brought great loss of life to both nations. Here the Japanese would begin massive attacks by suicide aircraft which proved very costly to our U.S. fleet. From VPB-104's limited view, the completion and start-up of the fuel pipeline to Clark Field was the big event. No more shuttle flights by C-47s off-loading 55-gallon drums for the manual fueling of our aircraft.

The airfield at Puerto Princesa, Palawan, became operational on this date and VPB-111 began operation of their PB4Y-1s from there. On April 15th VPB-109 would also base there and, in theory, these two Liberator squadrons would reduce our patrolling effort considerably. In fact, there was to be no immediate change whatsoever. We continued to fly 1050 nmi searches to the northwest and southwest as before. And at the Island of Kerama Rhetto, just off Okinawa, PBM flying boats set up shop also on April 1, 1945. Their sector searches had little or no effect either.

It appears that the search sectors set forth in Commander, Aircraft, Seventh Fleet, Operation Plan No. 1-45, dated 20 March 1945, Annex D, Search Plan K, was mostly a drill for the staff officers. The actual patrol sectors seemed to be that as established by Commander, Fleet Air Wings Ten and Seventeen.

In accordance with the subject Operation Plan our mission was: Forces under Rear Admiral F. D. Wagner, USN, to conduct normal day-to-day operations in the Philippine-China Sea-Formosa area. It all sounded so official and inspiring. We Patrol Plane Commanders would continue to go about our business as before. Captain C. B. "Doc" Jones would chastise us when we failed to cover our sectors and praise us for making the kills. These two elements were not always mutually supportive.

Didier and Crew Sixteen made the first kill of the month with a small score 45 miles southwest of Macao. A 75-ton riverboat was sunk by strafing and three 100# bombs.

Right off though, we lost an airplane due to a combination of poor weather and radio failures. The control tower at Clark Field knew the PB4Y-1 was nearby as they had made radio contact just prior to the airplane's radio failure. The next day, a search was made and Ettinger found the wreckage of the airplane on a beach not far from Clark. Richard Jameson, the PPC, had made a wheels-down landing at night after being airborne over 15 hours. Initially, it appeared that no one had survived as the airplane had broken up and strewn wreckage all about the area. Soon Crew Twenty-Two made their presence known and all were accounted for with no injuries. They were recovered the following day and returned to home base. It had been a very successful crash-landing by the PPC. But also a very close call.

BIG JOHN BAGS A BIG TUGBOAT - On April 2, 1945, Burton flew a 1000 nmi sector to just south of Shanghai which took 14.6 flight hours. About midway between Wenchow and Hang Chow Bay, he attacked a 700-ton seagoing tug. Making a total of ten bombing and strafing runs, the vessel was beached and destroyed. One 100# bomb exploded under the stern which caused the tug's boiler to explode. A total of 1000 rounds were fired into the ship as it was beached, burning furiously. The crew were seen abandoning the ship.

Three and one half hours later Burton found one 100-ton Sugar Dog and two 75-ton luggers steaming together between Pescadore Island and the west coast of Formosa. The patrol plane's crew fired off 2200 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo during 12 strafing runs, bringing all three vessels to a stop. Fires were started, oil trailed from each ship, and there was no sign of life left on board. All three were considered to be destroyed.

During this patrol Burton, along with others, also searched for Commander Bales, Commanding Officer of VPB-119. He had failed to return from patrol and was designated as missing in action (MIA). He had served in VB-106 as Executive Officer during the 1944 Soloman Island campaign. A highly experienced combat pilot and a strong leader, he would be missed by his squadron.

On April 3rd, Burton began a transport mission, flying Fleet Air Wing Seventeen's lightweight PB4Y-1, BuNo 32165. The trip returned to Clark Field on April 9th after visits to Mindoro, Tacloban, Samar, Los Negros, Palau, Samar, and Mindoro for a second time. We never did learn of the true purpose of this circuit. The passengers were Navy officers of lieutenant to commander rank. There were indications that all were intelligence officers. Most likely they were on an intelligence gathering or distributing effort. Whatever the purpose, flight crews were not always fully informed.

Also on the 3rd, Wright and Wood conducted flights more in line with our mission. Wood, on a 1050-mile search, scored a direct hit with a 250# high explosive bomb on a 100-ton Sugar Dog. The small vessel broke in two and quickly sank.

Wright also had a 1050 nmi sector and also made a direct hit with a 100# bomb on a 150-ton oil barge. Exploding in the forward part of the vessel, it then nosed down and sank. The next target, a 100-ton sea truck with a steel hull, was more difficult to bag. Missing with his last bomb, nine strafing runs were then made, expending 3000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. The entire wooden superstructure and interior was set afire. The crew was apparently killed and the ship, being completely burned-out, was considered to be destroyed.

Wright also sighted and reported two enemy convoys near Shanghai during this patrol. The numbers and types of ships were not noted in his logbook. However, it was noted that the escorting destroyers responded to the intrusion with accurate, heavy anti-aircraft fire.

Bittenbender's notation in his logbook for April 5, 1945, describes a more dangerous encounter. Stated with objectivity and clarity, "Patrol sector nine. Short but ran the gauntlet of our Fleets at Okinawa." Make no mistake about this. Coming upon one of our Fast Carrier Task Forces was the most frightening thing a patrol plane could encounter.

Our bombardiers had become more efficient and/or practiced. On April 5th, Heider attacked a steel-hulled 150-ton Sugar Dog. Making five bombing and strafing runs, a direct hit with a 250# bomb was made into the bridge and a 100# bomb was laid under the stern. These hits plus 1000 rounds of ammo brought the little freighter to a stop, trailing oil, and with a small fire burning forward of the bridge, but only slight damage was assessed. Our ACIO's evaluations were very conservative.

The next day Hagen continued the string of direct hits. Finding a 200-ton Sugar Dog anchored near an island at the entrance to Hang Chow Bay, he made three bombing and strafing attacks. On the third run, Earl Harris, bombardier, laid a 100# bomb in to make a direct hit which blew up the vessel, sinking it. Nearby, Ed also made three attacks upon a 100-ton lugger underway at six knots. One bomb exploded under the small vessel, lifting it up in the air and rotating it through 180 degrees. It made for the beach, trailing oil, and seemingly in a sinking condition. But again, the squadron intelligence officer assessed it as only slightly damaged.

West flew sector six this day and strafed trains on Formosa. The damage was not determined and no AAR was filed.

Also on April 6, 1945, Noon bagged two 150-ton Sugar Dogs near the end of his 1000 nmi patrol approaching Hang Chow Bay. He made three bombing and strafing attacks but missed with the six 250# bombs. Determined to do a job on these two small wooden freighters, he then made about 20 strafing runs firing a total of 3000 rounds. Initially underway on a northerly course at seven knots, both vessels were brought to a stop, burning furiously. Located about 50 miles off the China coast, there was no place for them to go except down.

On the 6th, Ettinger and crew saw through the grass so to speak. Outbound on their 1000-mile search while flying by Iriomote Jima they noticed a small batch of foliage on the shore. This batch of greenery was different in that there was a line from it extending out into the water. Closer inspection proved the foliage was covering a 75-ton lugger. It was destroyed by gunfire.

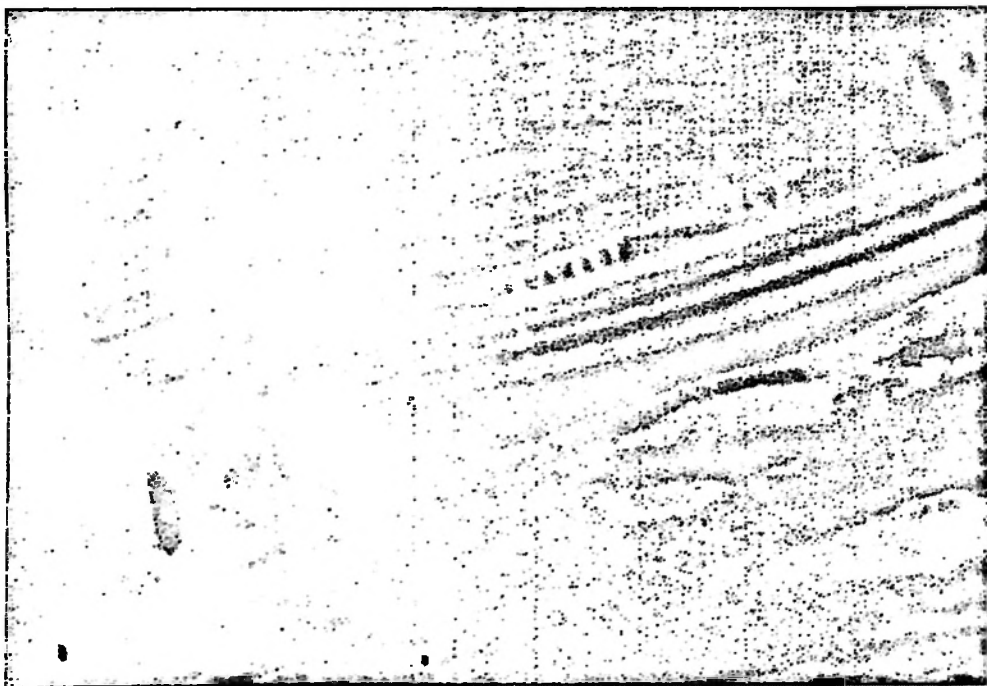
KAMIKAZE BIG TIME - April 6, 1945, saw a massive effort by the Japanese Kamikaze Attack Forces at Okinawa. It was the heaviest raid by the suicide airplanes yet and 34 ships of our fleet were damaged. There was good reason for this all-out effort. A Japanese surface force of the battleship *Yamato*, one heavy cruiser, and four destroyers had transited the Bungo Channel and set course for Okinawa. Here, it was planned that the *Yamato* would beach herself and pound the invasion forces until its own destruction. One of the

largest battleships ever built, should the plan have succeeded, such would very well have created havoc.

Fortunately, on the 7th of April this most massive Kamikaze force ever assembled was spotted by patrolling U.S. Navy aircraft and the air-sea battle was joined. Every aircraft that could carry a large armor-piercing bomb or torpedo was launched against this force. The 60,000-ton mammoth was pounded by airborne weapons until the ship slid below the surface with all hands perishing. Only one destroyer was to escape back to the Japanese homeland. Another "decisive battle" of the Japanese general staff had failed.

A DIFFERENT BREED OF SEAMEN - Meanwhile on April 7, 1945, back with the minor leagues, Stevens and Wood launched at 0548 and 0550 to fly the "hot" sector around Hainan. Since it was a relatively short sector of 900 nmi, each aircraft was loaded with six 100# and four 250# bombs. It would not be a very good day for me.

Close in on the south coast of Hainan, we came upon a 25-ton tug towing an empty open-hull barge, two 200-ton trawlers, and two 150-ton Sugar Dogs. These last four small cargo vessels were of steel construction. Intending to "clean house," the patrol planes began an attack on the closest target, the tug and tow. I made a drop on the barge and



missed as Wood dropped on the tug and he too missed. There was some very minor damage by strafing but, never mind the small stuff, lets keep right on going for the good-looking small freighters.

My target was a trawler and to this day I can see that Japanese seaman atop the deckhouse with his 12.7 mm machine gun firing at me. With his legs widely spread (well braced) he did a job on me. And all this time I was wondering why he didn't jump over the side as so many crewmen of the smaller ships did. My bow turret being out of commission may have contributed to his bravery (and my airplane had the radar belly vice the twin 0.50 caliber turret). Whatever, his good shooting put a 12.7 mm projectile through the forward armor plating, shattered hydraulic lines, and opened up my instrument panel. This was the frightening part, the real hurt was that he also shot out my number one engine. Starting for home and not far from Hainan, I sighted a PBM flying boat off my port bow. The PPC of this patrol plane apparently recognized my sad state and escorted me home. A very nice, warm, comforting feeling although at this lighter weight the Liberator was doing just fine.

Meanwhile back at the shoot-out, Wood scored a direct 250# bomb hit on a Sugar Dog, sinking it. I do hope it was the one that banged me! He made a direct hit on one other Sugar Dog but the bomb bounced off the deck of the ship. The other vessels were strafed for slight damage.

Continuing the patrol, Woody found four more 150-ton Sugar Dogs and one small lugger off the west coast. All bombs previously expended, he made four strafing attacks, burning the lugger and causing minor damage to the small freighters. They were also of steel construction. Wood's bow turret had failed now and he also took hits into his number two engine but it continued to function. This was a different breed of seaman at Hainan. Or did Wood and I try for too much without a full bag, inoperative bow turrets?

On April 8, 1945, Wright flew his own airplane, BuNo 38869, to Shanghai. He logged 15.2 hours for this very long haul but made no contacts. There was no record of the fuel remaining after the landing at Clark Field, but it couldn't have been much.

The next day, April 9th, West found a 400-ton riverboat anchored on the China coast 150 miles west of Hong Kong. He made one attack, dropping three 100# bombs and strafing with 450 rounds. He scored two direct bomb hits creating a very large explosion followed by the riverboat burning to destruction. The next day Wright found the sunken wreck to confirm the kill.

Bittenbender conducted his patrol to Okinawa on the 9th quite differently. He did the navigating and let his copilots do the flying. There were no casualties.

A FREIGHTER SHOOTS WELL - Fulwider made a 0445 takeoff on April 10th for a patrol which returned along the east coast of Formosa. There he came upon an FTC of 2000 tons and flew right on in to make a strafing attack. Firing 1000 rounds, he detected little damage to the ship but the medium-sized freighter opened fire with 20 mm and 40 mm guns from five to six stations. Hits on the PB4Y-1 were received in the nose, port wing and fuselage, instrument panel, auto-pilot control panel, auxiliary power unit, IFF, and other hits which burned electrical wiring and created hydraulic leaks. Of more serious concern

was a hit into a wing fuel cell which caused fuel to pour from the wing down into the bomb bays in large quantities.

In addition to the aircraft damage, the PPC, copilot, and bow gunner received minor injuries from the shrapnel of the exploding 20 mm and 40 mm shells. It was a very dangerous situation but the fuel soon cleared. The airplane's structural integrity was not damaged nor were the engines. Upon return to base, the airplane was out of commission for ten days. It was quite unusual for an FTC to be so heavily armed and to shoot so accurately. This could very well have been an AA trap. The squadron had made a great many attacks upon shipping in the Formosa area. Apparently it was pay-back time.

On April 10th I had a short sector, circling the entire big island of Formosa. Enjoying an excess of fuel, I cruised all the way with 35" MAP and 2300 RPM with an auto-rich carburetor setting on the engines. This gave us a speed of 160 KIAS which provided good maneuvering to take advantage of the small targets as we approached them. I made a drop of two 250# bombs on a 100-ton Sugar Dog. One bomb entered the hull on one side and passed right on through and exploded alongside the hull on the other side. We also let go with 1000 rounds on this very small freighter. I was granted only slight damage by our reviewing intelligence officer. Shortly thereafter we did burn a lugger. No question about destroying this one as it burned thoroughly.

FASTEN SEAT BELTS - Flying very low over the coastal roads, we strafed any number of inconsequential targets. We did catch one 1934 open-top Ford four-door sedan traveling along at about 30 miles per hour. As we opened fire on this moving target, the driver pulled off the road and slammed into a ditch. Casualties to the four passengers were not observed as they were catapulted from the car. Very amusing from our perspective.

I became convinced that the Japanese now had proximity fuses for their heavy anti-aircraft shells (which they did). Receiving fire from numerous AA batteries along our "path of pleasure," one set of guns had us well bracketed. Throwing out "window" (tin foil strips) the radar-fused shells triggered on this and now exploded just behind our airplane and kept doing so until we cleared the area.

We did do some good by sighting and reporting one 40,000-ton tanker in Kiirun. The rest of the activities for the day were only minor irritations for the Japanese.

AN ALLIED ALTERCATION - On April 12, 1945, Burton and Crew Ten gained notoriety both locally and internationally. A distinction not easily achieved. Flying sector six in BuNo 38801 would take them along the east coast of Formosa during the return portion of their search. Here they gained a radar contact of a substantial surface force and at the same time heard airborne fighters being vectored by a fighter director-controller. The voices on VHF radio were, without question, very British.

Genial John Burton altered course to check out this unknown surface force and at the same time made voice contact with the fighter director. Gaining permission to proceed

through the area, he planned to pass just within visual range, about five miles, of the "radar unknowns." After all, at the wing morning briefing there was no report of Allied Task Forces in the area and Formosa was a bastion of Japanese military forces. This was clearly a hostile area. The PPC was required to verify this radar contact, friend or foe.

Now, as the PB4Y-1 was passing astern of a major force of combatant ships and while cruising at 8000', a flight of Spitfires attacked the lonely patrol plane. Fortunately, their gunnery was not all that good and no hits were taken by the Liberator. Attacking from the six o'clock position, the British fighters did press home their attack but made only one pass. Burton did not report whether he returned gunfire or not. After the one firing pass, the RAF Fleet Air Arm Seafires apparently recognized the patrol plane as a friendly and departed. Thankfully. A single big bomber at 8000' is at a considerable disadvantage relative to a flight of Spitfires/Seafires (or any other fighter!).

As stated previously, our Wing Commander was very supportive of his flight crews (he did own us). After Burton's debriefing with the Wing's Intelligence Officers, Doc Jones released a message stating, among other things, that the Spitfire's "strategy, tactics, airmanship, and gunnery were equally poor and ineffective." Classic "Doc" Jones. His message was sent on circuits that assured delivery to all commands within the Pacific Theater of Operations. Now the "stuff hit the fan" internationally and at the higher levels of command. The British took exception to the message, not to its authenticity, but as an "insult to the Crown, the Royal Navy, and Allied Harmony."

Burton was ordered to report to Commander Aircraft Seventh Fleet posthaste! He traveled to Manila and bummed a ride out to the flagship anchored in the bay. Having never seen an admiral before, the young lieutenant was duly impressed. Perhaps subdued in his presence, but he was not overawed to the point of accepting admission of wrongdoing. Rear Admiral Frank D. Wagner asked why he approached the British Task Force so closely? John stated his position firmly, even though more than a bit nervously, that it was his job to identify unknown surface forces. Period. Though he did wonder at the time if the Admiral was aware of the battleship *Yamato* suicide foray five days previously.

Admiral Wagner then stated, "The trouble with you young aviators is that you are too impetuous!" Burton wisely declined to state the reply he had in mind, "The trouble with you admirals is that you don't know what the hell a patrol mission is all about!" Burton did not change the conduct of his aggressive patrolling.

With the addition of more patrol squadrons and operating bases, VPB-104 could afford the luxury of two-plane sections for patrols when deemed necessary or advantageous. This was a considerable comfort for the flight crews due to the increased defensive capability against fighters and more hitting power against Japanese targets.

On April 12, 1945, Didier and Hemphill covered the sector along the China coast in the vicinity of Wenchow. Now this was a pair! What devilment one could not think of, the other could. At Wenchow they found two 100-ton trawlers under way on course 340

degrees and speed eight knots. Between the two PB4Y-1 aircraft they made a total of six attacks, dropping ten 100# and one 500# bombs, and strafing with 4000 rounds. One



trawler blew up and sank and the other was left burning furiously. Both vessels were considered to be destroyed.

On this day Bittenbender set a speed record of sorts. He covered his 700 nmi sector in 7.9 hours. He also found some enemy vessels at Miyako Jima, one transport and five Sugar Charlies.

BOMBS APLENTY - On April 13th Wright went out expecting lots of business. He carried a total of twenty 100# bombs, ten in the bomb bay racks and ten more stowed on the catwalks throughout the airplane. About 50 miles southwest of Macao, he attacked and destroyed one 75-ton lugger, one 150-ton sea truck, one 75-ton sea truck, and one 75-ton riverboat. These small vessels were spread out over a 40-mile area. Ten runs were made and all vessels were destroyed. A total of eight bombs had been dropped and 1400 rounds fired. The other 12 bombs were dropped on barracks and a radar station on Hainan. Here the Japanese responded with heavy AA fire and holed the PB4Y-1.

The next day Wood made a direct hit with a 100# bomb on a 100-ton Sugar Dog anchored near the southwest coast of Formosa. Returning four hours later, the small vessel was still burning and considered to be destroyed.

Off the northeast tip of Formosa, Wood sighted a Betty that apparently had just taken off from Shinchiku aerodrome. With an altitude advantage, the PB4Y-1 dived down towards the bomber at 230 knots and "open fire" was given at 300 yards. The bow turret fired 200 rounds as the top turret got in 600 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo at the fast

twin-engine airplane. Hits were seen in the starboard engine, fuselage, cockpit, and tail. With the damaged engine streaming smoke, the Japanese pilot wisely ran for home. The top turret gunner of the Betty returned fire with his 20 mm gun but no hits were taken in the Liberator. As Wood followed the Betty over the coastline, intense 20 mm and 40 mm AA fire was received from shore batteries. Out-gunned, the patrol plane broke off the attack. Only damage was claimed on the Betty.

I flew an 11.1 hour patrol on this day but made no contacts. On the way home I dumped my bombs on a radio relay station on the island of Miyako Jima. It blew up very nicely.

Shipping targets were becoming more and more scarce. On April 15th Hemphill dropped a 500# and five 100# bombs on a 30-ton lugger. He also expended 1700 rounds of ammo. It was destroyed but the indication of the hunger for a kill was all too evident. Five crewmen abandoned the lugger in a rowboat. The PPC let them live to tell their story of the importance and value of their small vessel. Not many luggers had this much ordnance dumped on them.

On the 16th Noon began working over four Sugar Dogs anchored in a cove on the China coast. He quickly found that the vessels were well protected by shore batteries. Despite the anti-aircraft opposition, one 250# bomb and 600 rounds were let go, generating some damage on two of the SDs. Bittenbender accompanied Noon on this patrol but did not join in on the attack. No damage was made on either patrol plane.

Also on the 16th, Burton made a leisurely departure, 0844, from Clark Field for a patrol around Formosa. Midway on the east coast, he attacked a 100-ton Sugar Dog that was pulled up on the beach. Six bombing and strafing runs were made, dropping five 100# high explosive bombs and five 100# incendiary clusters. Two of the IC bombs were direct hits which started a serious fire. The PPC did not wait to see the final results of the attack. Again, it was a bit of an overkill but there was no assurance of other targets further down the road.

John made one strafing run on a 150-ton powered junk anchored off the harbor of Kiirun. By our rules of engagement, any powered piece of machinery was fair game. However, repeated attacks near the major Japanese port of Kiirun was not conducive to one's longevity. The 250 rounds fired by his gunners generated only slight damage to the vessel.

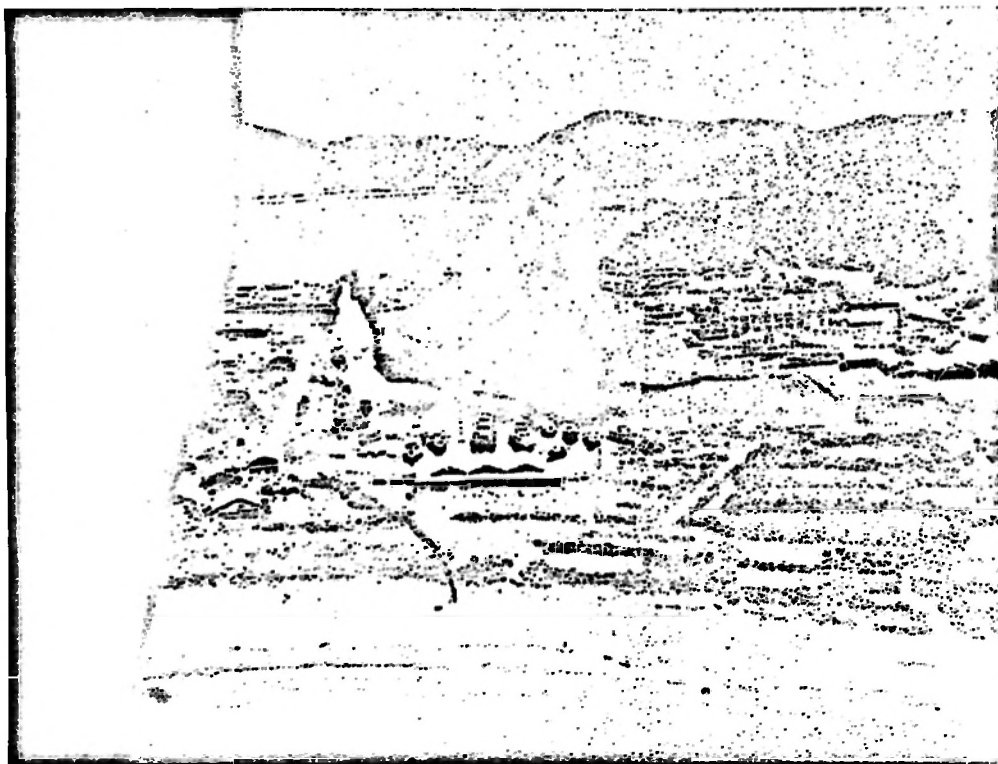
Continuing the circuit around Formosa counter-clockwise, the patrol plane came upon 16 luggers of about 30 tons each. These small open-hull, engines-aft vessels were evenly divided, eight at anchor and the others nose-in on the beach. Three strafing runs, firing 600 rounds, produced small fires on four of the coastal vessels for slight damage.

On April 17, 1945, Wright flew a patrol to beyond Okinawa. It was a very long trek for no contacts. Returning by the still-contested island, the Skipper observed that the Jeep

Carriers (CVEs) were continuing to operate there. The Fast Carrier Task Forces were soon to begin pounding the Japanese homeland.

On the 18th I did the circuit around Formosa in 10.8 flight hours. Off Taipei an attack was made on a 150-ton lugger. Strafing with 400 rounds as we ran in very low, the lugger blossomed into flames just before we released the four 100# bombs allocated. To insure the kill, Jack Saunders made the drop and all bombs exploded close alongside the large lugger. While starting an 180-degree turn for another run, the small vessel sank before I could complete the turn.

Continuing the patrol, I sighted two large freighter-transport and three Sugar Dogs in Kiurun. At the port of Taito I made two bombing and strafing attacks. The six remaining 100# bombs were dropped on a warehouse and we got three direct hits. A considerable



volume of white smoke or steam formed from the wreckage but soon dissipated. Fourteen-hundred rounds were fired into the building and contributed to the destruction.

On a date in April which cannot be identified due to the poor quality of the AAR microfilm, Didier had the patrol to Hainan as a single-plane patrol. Along the east coast, Jerry attacked a 150-ton Sugar Dog. This engine-aft small freighter was loaded with empty

55-gallon steel drums. Five strafing runs were made, shooting 1150 rounds, which eventually sank the coastal vessel. The bombs could not be released by normal means and were then salvo'd but missed. As the SD sank, a number of crewmen were seen prone on the deck, apparently all killed by the strafing.

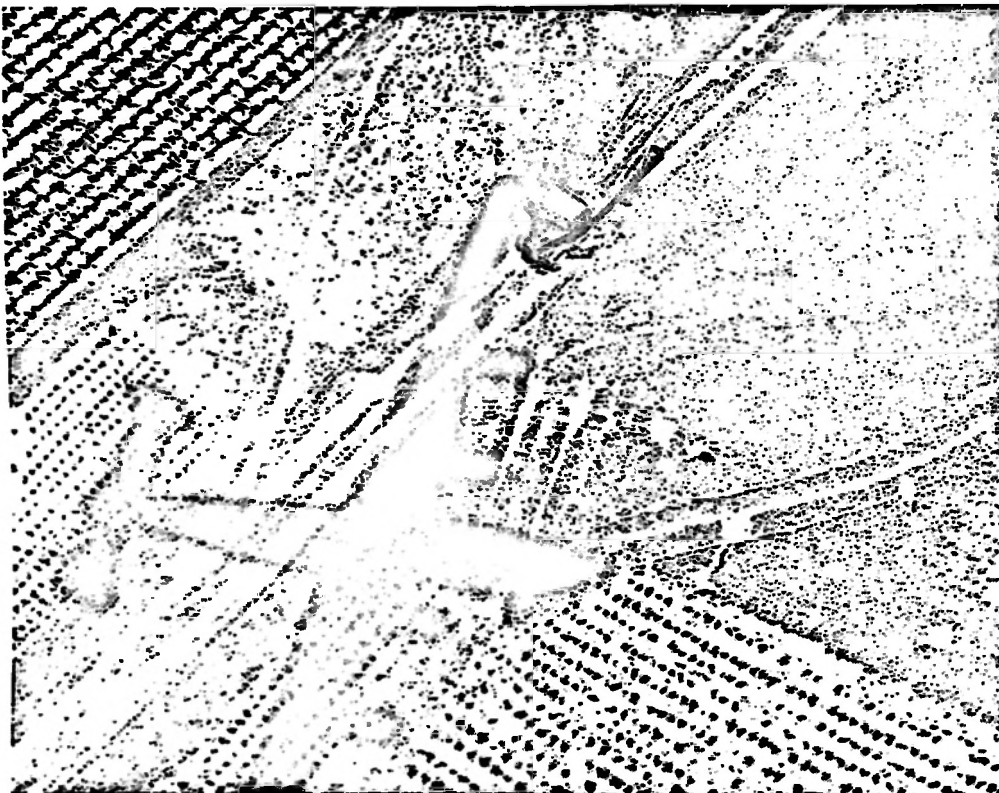
Aircraft Action Report Number 238, dated April 19, 1945, is clearly identified as Didier's and another patrol to Hainan. On this day he attacked four blockhouses (or small forts) dropping five 100# bombs and one 500# bomb, seriously damaging three and slightly damaging one. A total of 1300 rounds were expended during these attacks. He also attacked a Sugar Dog tied to a dock, dropping one 500# bomb, damaging the vessel and dock.

On the 19th Burton had a short sector, 700 nmi, which he covered in just under nine hours. After looking over Hong Kong, he proceeded up the Pearl River to Canton. Nearing the city, he attacked a 200-ton riverboat, dropping one 500# bomb on the vessel anchored near the shore. This near miss did some damage to the riverboat and also toppled two shacks on the shore 60 feet away; more homeless coolies. He then attacked two riverboats of 300 tons each. One 500# bomb exploded under the stern of one, sinking it. The other was slightly damaged by strafing with 350 rounds. The crew ran the vessel aground and then abandoned it.

On the Whampoa docks at Canton, Burton dropped a string of five 100# bombs on a train, destroying the locomotive and damaging two freight cars and a warehouse. Three more warehouses and a number of tents were strafed with 1100 rounds, creating some damage and terrorizing the local populace. The dockside union bosses no doubt applied for extra hazardous duty pay immediately afterwards.

On April 20th Wright had an 800 nmi patrol but due to the extracurricular activities, the flight took nearly thirteen hours (about three to four more hours than that usually required). On the east coast of Formosa, the Skipper found a 100-ton Sugar Dog and a number of luggers. Making three bombing and strafing runs, he dropped three 500# and five 100# bombs, sinking the small freighter and blowing two luggers to bits (tiny bits) due to one 500# bomb exploding between them. A little over 1000 rounds were fired during this attack by the crew of the PB4Y-1. On shore, the Japanese fired 20 mm and 7.7 mm anti-aircraft guns at the attacker and holed the number two engine in the accessory section.

Continuing the patrol, Wright sighted a truck traveling on a northerly route along a highway. Strafing with 500 rounds, hits were made into the engine and fuel tank. These



hits set fire to the target and it burned to destruction. With all this practice, little wonder our gunners were so accurate.

At the port city of Taito, the next victim was a radar station. Making two strafing runs, firing 500 rounds, it was well hit but the damage could not be determined. Now three runs were made firing a total of 1500 rounds at the targets of a railroad station, an eight-car train, and a power plant. Many hits were observed but again a damage assessment could not be made. After my visit to Taito two days prior, the citizens there must have felt justifiably proud of the attention given them.

SALVATION AT GOATEE AIRSTRIP - West and Crew Twenty-Three had a near one on April 21, 1945. "Blockhouse busting" on Hainan in PB4Y-1, BuNo 38926, they had utilized a great deal of military power on the engines. After one bombing attack, Sager, the veteran plane captain, wisely made a check on the fuel gauges. He advised his PPC that, accurate or not, they indicated much less fuel than expected. Ira B. West decided it was best to take drastic action immediately and ordered "strip ship" and set maximum range cruise on the engines as they headed for home.

Another good decision was made to land on Goatee airstrip at Lingayen Gulf. It just looked very questionable whether they could make Clark Field or not. After landing, the fuel tanks were "dipped" and the graduated stick indicated about 30 gallons remaining for each engine. At best, this related to about 45 minutes before a very quiet airplane. Later, it was found that several fuel cells had collapsed which presented false readings early in the patrol. Neither an AAR was filed nor an entry made into the War Diary regarding this incident.

On this day Bittenbender and Hagen flew a two-plane search on sector 5A and, for the only sighting of the day, made a ship count in Amoy. They transmitted a contact report of one destroyer, five small freighters, five luggers, and one torpedo boat. For their efforts, the Japanese welcomed them with a display of anti-aircraft fire.

On the same day Noon flew a patrol which included the island of Sakashima Gunto. Here they bombed and strafed small craft but made no claims of sinkings. No AAR was filed.

On April 21, 1945, Ettinger had the sector which included the China coast where the Pearl River enters the South China Sea. He, too, was attracted to Canton and the visit there can best be told by Fred Himsworth, a radioman-gunner in his crew:

"We could find nothing on the coast so Ettinger decided to go inland. Hedgehopping at about 75 ' for thirty minutes trying to find some trucks we saw nothing but a lot of Chinese real estate and surprised rice farmers. However, nearing Canton, we found a huge four deck side-wheeler riverboat (1000 tons) sailing down the river. As we started a run, the Captain saw that we meant business and he headed the ship into the shore. People started jumping off the bow and ran up onto the beach. Strangely, they only went far enough to clear the ship and then turned to watch us make our attacks. They did not look like troops so we were told not to strafe them.



"The first run was across the beam and we missed with one 250# bomb. It exploded raising a huge shower of mud in the shallow water. The next attack was fore and aft and one 250# bomb was a direct hit. It must have exploded well below decks as it really demolished the inside of the ship. Like a matchbox with a firecracker inside it, the splinters flew everywhere. Obviously, it was not built as strong as an ocean-going ship and it didn't take much to blow it apart.

"Much nearer to Canton we found a very large crane mounted on a barge. Attacking, we scored one hit with a 250# bomb but it did not explode. It did stick into the base of the crane between the tracks and body. I've often wondered whatever became of that crane with the bomb stuck into its base.

"Since Canton was a well-defended city, we then got out of there quickly and headed for home."

BANKRUPTING AN AIRLINE - On April 22nd Waldeck had the sector where our four-engine interceptors functioned very well. Our intelligence team had determined that the Japanese were continuing to operate an airline from Formosa to Shanghai. VPB-104 flew a number of missions for the express purpose of capitalizing on this information. We would shoot down six enemy aircraft before the Japanese shut down this scheduled air service.

Takeoff was made at 0205 in order to arrive and take station about 50 miles north of Kiirun, Formosa, prior to sunrise. At 0717 Waldeck, orbiting at 5000 feet, sighted a

twin-engine aircraft on a northerly course, cruising at 10,000 feet. He immediately applied maximum power on the engines and began a climb to engage the enemy. Knowing that the enemy, identified as a Sally, was faster than the PB4Y-1, the PPC would fly his patrol plane into a position behind and below the enemy aircraft to avoid detection. Surprise was achieved as Waldeck positioned his airplane below and at the seven o'clock from the Sally and closing to 500 feet. At this point, Sloan Bomar, a radioman-gunner in the top turret, relates the action:



ANA's schedule is interrupted this day.

"As we approached from the port quarter, the outline of the plane became clearer. Seeing it was a two-engine military airplane, I momentarily forgot the chain of command and told Goldie (Robert Golden) in the bow turret to take the left engine and I would take the rear gun position. Drawing closer, Waldeck told us to open fire and Goldie hit the left engine immediately, setting it on fire. My bullets shattered and passed through the transparent canopy over the rear gun position then hit the right engine, setting it on fire also.

"The Sally lost speed and dropped back even with our right wing then drifted to the right. This had taken 15 to 20 seconds and probably killed all the crew. I told myself they are finished, save your ammunition.

But the enemy aircraft was still flying and now higher, started drifting towards us. Firing again into it, the airplane pulled up sharply and fell behind as Fred "Flash" Gordon, manning the waist gun, and Michael Bann in the tail turret, added to the firing. It then fell into a death dive with the aft fuselage breaking off and flames trailing from both engines and fuselage. The same thing could happen to us should we be lulled into complacency."

The PB4Y-1 crew had fired 450 rounds and the Japanese crew, completely surprised, had not returned any gunfire at all. It was a decided kill and several beautiful photos were taken.

The Air Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence prepared a detailed report entitled "*Naval Aviation Combat Statistics of World War II* (OPNAV-P-23V, No. A129, dated 17 June 1945)." A direct quote from this document, page 58, subparagraph (d), states; "The PB4Y-1, normally flying unescorted single-plane long-range searches, was one of the Navy's best fighter planes."

Also within this report, it is stated that these patrol planes had a 40 percent hit rate with their bombs. This astounding performance exceeded by far all other combat aircraft models.

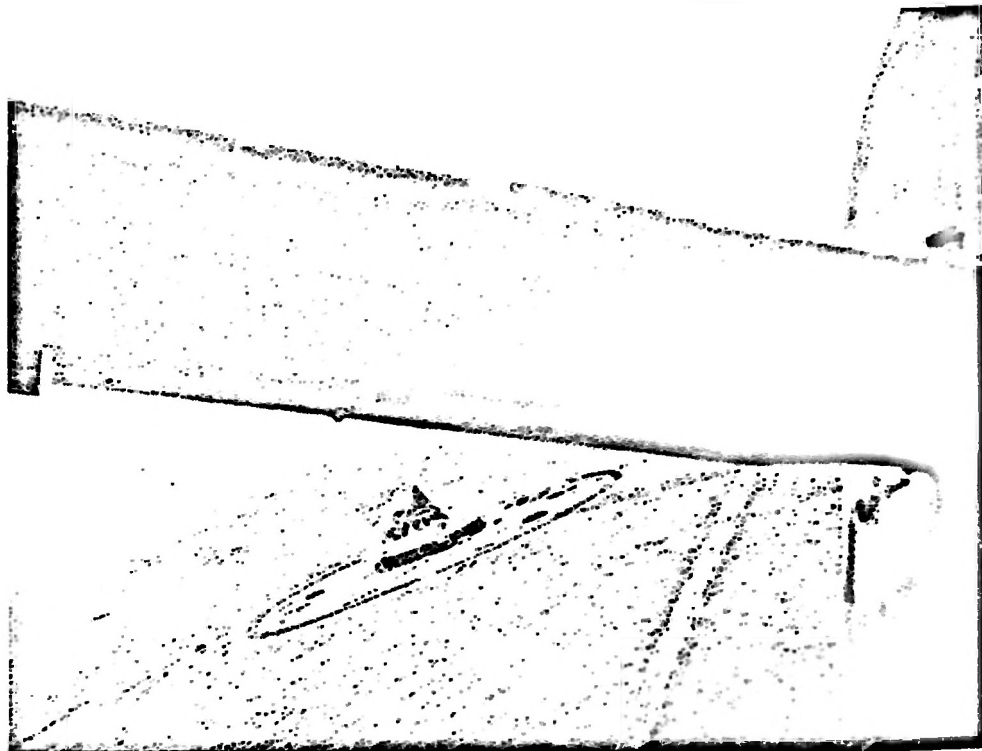
I flew an 11.5-hour patrol on the 22nd and made only one contact, a destroyer escort and a gunboat in Foochow. Also on this day, Wood sank a 100-ton Sugar Dog off the west coast of Formosa with a direct hit by a 250# bomb.

A LARGE NUMBER OF SMALL VESSELS - Continuing the action on April 22nd, Didier departed Clark Field loaded for bear or bison. It had to be something big as he carried four 250# and two 500# bombs in the racks and an additional five 100# high explosives lying on the PB4Y-1's walkways for reload. At 1105(I) he found ten luggers at Ishigaki Shima on the beach, camouflaged with foliage. These small, 18' to 45' in length, vessels did not warrant expending any bombs but he strafed with 300 rounds. The extent of the damage could not be determined.

Continuing his patrol, Didier entered the port of Suao, located on the northeast corner of Formosa, and found 12 100-ton Sugar Dogs and a number of small luggers. Making repeated runs, he dropped, sequentially, two 500#, two 250#, and four 100# bombs. Five luggers were sunk and one damaged. Two Sugar Dogs were severely damaged and three moderately damaged. The crew also fired 1075 rounds at these targets. The Japanese responded by firing 20 mm guns at the patrol plane, putting one round through the starboard aileron.

The following day, Wright conducted a shooting expedition across the central and northern part of Hainan. He made an early departure at 0343(I), carrying three 500# and five 100# bombs in the racks and five more 100# bombs for reload. His first target was an abandoned airfield. Here he strafed with 1000 rounds, firing at two radio stations, a number

of barracks, a network of trenches, and gun positions. The airfield was not completely abandoned as a Japanese gunner put one round through the fuselage of the patrol plane.



Proceeding to the northern part of the island, Whit bombed and strafed seven blockhouses, destroying four and damaging three. Once all of his bombs were expended, he continued to strafe three additional blockhouses. The total amount of 0.50 caliber bullets fired came to 2500 rounds. He logged 12.7 hours flight time for the day on this short (850 mile) sector.

On April 23, 1945, Hemphill flew a patrol to Hong Kong. It was a quiet mission of little significance except for the passenger, Lieutenant Commander Travis E. Baker, our recently promoted ACIO. It is very surprising that the higher command would permit an intelligence officer to be exposed to possible capture and interrogation. Perhaps they weren't aware and our West Texas attorney wanted to see firsthand just what this was all about. And they did bag a lugger.

Also on the 23rd, Burton's copilot noted that the Fast Carrier Task Force's F6F Hellcat fighters were hitting Miyako Jima. But this was our hunting preserve. No wonder the shipping targets were fading away.

On April 24, 1945, the first patrols by VPB-118 were flown from Yontan airfield, Okinawa. The Commanding Officer had arrived there on the 16th for survey and liaison and the first flight crews arrived on the 19th to begin their first armed reconnaissance missions in their PB4Y-2s. Our search sectors would be flown to the north and northeast of Okinawa. No longer would we cover the island nor beyond to Amami Ō Shima. And not so incidentally, VPB-118 would have a field day scoring big time against Japanese shipping. The immense fire power of the heavily-gunned PB4Y-2 was put to good use.

However, we would continue to cover the China coast to just short of Shanghai and the Ryukyu chain up to Okinawa. Again, this would present a situation where the old hands of the first combat tour Bombing One-Oh-Four would be operating alongside but in different squadrons. There were no reports of an aerial meeting between the two.

On April 24, 1945, Hagen knocked off a lugger at the Pescadores. While making this attack, he received gunfire from a walled barracks area. He then bombed and strafed this area but the extent of the damage was not determined. I'll bet those Japanese were sorry they attracted Hagen's attention.

Noon and his crew encountered a serious situation this day while starting an attack upon a Sugar Dog and Lugger in Suao Harbor, Formosa. Before bomb release they were hit by 7.7 mm, 12.7 mm, and 20 mm gunfire into the fuselage from nose to tail. The bombardier, Clifford Weymouth, was hit in the face and neck and, unable to see, salvo'd the bombs. A fire was started in the auxiliary power unit. James Simpson manned a fire extinguisher and fought the blaze as ammunition was exploding due to the heat from this fire. Hit by shrapnel from these explosions, he nevertheless contained the fire and by his actions saved the airplane. A total of five crewmen were injured but eventually all were returned to duty. The PB4Y-1 was out of commission for two weeks.

My patrol on April 26th had been a "nothing" day. Poor weather throughout the sector had produced no action nor contacts. Approaching Kiirun at 4500 feet, there was a solid undercast with the tops appearing to be at about 1000 to 1500 feet. The harbor had been clearly identified on radar and a column of smoke was rising straight up through the undercast, indicating a factory of some kind. I reversed course to get some distance from this aim point to allow Jack Saunders, our bombardier, to set up his Norden bombsight. We made a steady run in with few corrections and dropped the three 500# and five 100# bombs. There was no great upward flow of smoke and/or debris from the hoped-for explosion. Just more of the nothing patrol. Well, at least it must have been a big surprise for the citizens of Kiirun. This was our second and last drop with the Norden bombsight during our six-month combat cruise.

On the 26th Ettinger and Crew Nine had the "All Nippon Airways Special." They had departed Clark Field at 1140, planning to intercept the ANA inbound schedule to Kiirun. Fred Himsworth was in the top turret for this action and here is his account:

"It did not look very promising for an intercept as there was weather from about 1500 up to 8000 feet. We were in an orbit at 10,500 feet, looking but rather guessing that the Japanese flight this day would be down in the clouds flying on instruments. I spotted a plane off our left wing tip about five miles away. It was flying just at the top of the clouds, appearing and then disappearing as it went through the peaks and valleys. We gave chase and caught up with the twin engine transport, a Topsy, in about fifteen minutes. The Japanese were completely unaware of our presence and we held fire until we were no more than 150 feet behind him. We couldn't miss! John Osteen in the bow turret, who was the only one that could bear on him at this time, fired into the right engine and wing. This knocked out the engine and the enemy pilot immediately dove into the clouds. We lost sight of him before another burst could be fired. Our PPC dove down into the clouds to sea level to see if we could find any sign of wreckage in the water.

"We then found the Topsy flying on one engine trying to get back up into the cloud cover. We made several fighter-type runs on him, giving both Osteen and me clear shots. We scored hits all over the plane and set him afire, causing him to crash into the sea.

"We made passes over the wreckage to check if there were any survivors but all we could see was a patch of burning gasoline and a number of crates floating in the water. Whatever he was carrying, it must have been a very heavy load that kept him from gaining altitude on one engine to escape into the clouds. In any case, the Japanese on Formosa would not get their mail from home this day. And the priority cargo for their military forces was now at the bottom of the South China Sea."

BLOCKHOUSE BUSTING - On April 27th Wright had the sector covering the south of Hainan. His first attack of the day was on two blockhouses, dropping one 250# and three 100# bombs and strafing with 500 rounds. One was destroyed and one damaged.

The next target was a large blockhouse and two runs were made on it. Two 250# and three 100# bombs were dropped, scoring four hits. Because of the size of this structure, only serious damage was assessed. Despite strafing with 600 rounds, the return gunfire from the Japanese scored 30 hits into the PB4Y-1. This knocked out the number three engine and holed a wing fuel cell with 7.7 mm and 12.7 mm machine gun shells. Three crewmen were hit and one, Robert Thornton died from his injuries. The other two, Alwin Perret and John Cooper, were treated at the dispensary and released.

It was a very sad night in our tent after this patrol. The Skipper and Thornton had flown together for a very long time. He was the Plane Captain (crew leader) for Wright and was a highly respected and admired person. The entire squadron was saddened and would miss Bob, a quiet and competent gentleman from Alabama.



Hagen also worked over the southern area of Hainan on the 27th. He carried ten 100# bombs attached in the bomb racks and another five for reload. Catching three trucks and one car (a 1937 Ford sedan), he brought them to a stop. Making six runs and firing 1800 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo, he then destroyed all of them. A 30' barge tied to a wharf was sunk with one run, dropping two 100# bombs (one a direct hit) and firing off 300 rounds. His final attack for this day was on a blockhouse. Making two runs, six 100# bombs were dropped and four were observed to land within the walled area. After the dust and smoke had cleared, the building was still standing. Slight damage was assessed. A total of 2500 rounds had been expended during this patrol.

In other actions this day, Fulwider burned a small lugger off the coast of Formosa. One 100# bomb was dropped that went through the hull but failed to explode. However, 2000 rounds did the job very well.

Bittenbender received a good deal of gunfire from Hong Kong as he performed a ship count. Unknown at the time, the PB4Y-1 was holed in number two engine's oil tank. It soon became necessary to shut down and feather the engine. The flight back home was uneventful.

On April 28, 1945, Adler and Crew Five scored on the Kirun-Shanghai shuttle. Taking off at 0152(I), they were also carrying extra 100# bombs on the walkways. Although no shipping targets were found this day, at 0740, while cruising at 8500 feet, they sighted a twin-engine Japanese bomber eight miles away. The enemy aircraft, code-named "Betty," was on a southerly course cruising at 5500', speed estimated at 150 knots. Considering the hour, this shuttle must have made a night departure from Shanghai and hoped to sneak into Kirun just after dawn. It didn't work.

The pilot of the Betty apparently saw the patrol plane and reversed course, increasing speed to about 180 knots. Adler, running downhill in pursuit, making 240 knots, soon closed to 100 yards and the bow and top turret opened fire. As the Japanese tail



gunner began firing, the PB4Y-1 was flown across to the starboard side while 0.50 caliber tracers were flashing, indicating hits into the Betty's fuselage, tail, and starboard engine. Now there was no more return fire and a piece of engine cowling fell from the Mitsubishi navy attack bomber.

The one-sided battle continued on down to 50' off the water. The enemy pilot desperately maneuvered his airplane but the PPC skillfully stayed with him. The crew of the patrol plane continued firing to score many hits. Thomas Yoakum, Duffy McKenzie, Clovis Bass, Dan Collins, and Bernice Hardin, at various gun stations, together fired 1900 rounds during the 20-minute engagement. Finally, the Betty pilot lost control and the airplane hit the water, exploded, burst into flames and sank.

It is somewhat surprising that a Liberator was able to down a Betty even with an initial altitude advantage. In clear skies with 20-miles visibility, the Japanese pilot could have evaded by making better use of its superior speed. Either due to poor judgment, a mechanical problem, or, perhaps, grossly overloaded, the pilot failed to do so. Another option was available. Simply turn into the attacker and shoot it out with their numerous 20-millimeter cannons. Reputation of the Navy Blue Bombers?

While Adler was bagging a Betty, Noon chased a Topsy. But the Japanese transport airplane escaped. Also, Waldeck missed with his bombs but shot up a barge north of Formosa.

The next day I flew a patrol expecting great things (for no particular reason). Loaded with ten 100# high explosive bombs in the racks, I also had ten 100# incendiary clusters lying about in the airplane. But the only shipping attack made was upon a poor, pitiful lugger. We sank it with a 100# high explosive placed under its stern.

We did see three Oscars cruising along in formation over Shinsuki on the China coast but neither side chose to close for an engagement. Not a particularly good day.

Also on the 29th, Burton had the orbit assignment north of Formosa but made no enemy aircraft sightings. Homeward-bound, they did strafe six luggers at the Pescadore Islands.

On April 30, 1945, Wright made a 0156(I) takeoff for the airline interdiction. No contact was made but he did blow up a lugger.

However, Hagen made for a strong April finish. He was assigned an evening intercept of the Shanghai-Formosa Express and made a 1207(I) takeoff. No enemy aircraft appeared but as dusk approached, he sighted four Sugar Dogs of about 125 tons each. The small freighters were on course 090 degrees and speed 7 knots. Since Hagen had extra bombs on board for reload, he utilized them freely. Attacking the first SD, he dropped two 250# and two 100# bombs and strafed with 400 rounds. The vessel was sunk by one direct hit. The next target was left settling and burning furiously from one direct hit by one of the 250# and four 100# bombs dropped. Again 400 rounds of ammo were fired into the ship.

The two remaining Sugar Dogs had joined together, only about 20' apart, for whatever reason. Ed Hagen let go with four 100# bombs and 650 rounds against these two wooden vessels. One was gutted by fire and the other beached itself on the rocky shore. The final score was three sunk or destroyed and one damaged, but the extent was undetermined. I'd bet it was a "gonner" for sure.

About this time we were beginning to qualify our copilots as PPCs. Freeman flew two flights as PPC in late April and others soon followed. It was well deserved as they were very, very well qualified.

During the previous month's sightings of numerous large enemy ship movements, it was obvious that the Japanese were moving their more valuable floating assets to the homeland. The first indication of this decision was the mid-February transit of the heavies--battleships and heavy cruisers--from Singapore homeward-bound. The invasion of the Philippines and wide-ranging operations of the Fast Carrier Task Forces clearly indicated that the Straits of Formosa was now restricted, if not closed. The invasion of Okinawa further added to the choking-off of ocean commerce.

The Japanese leaders had now abandoned more and more bypassed military bases and installations. However, large numbers of troops and combatant materials had been moved earlier to the Japanese main islands for the final decisive battle on their own soil. For the bypassed bases, they would now rely upon small coastal vessels such as Sugar Dogs, luggers, powered barges, and the like for what logistic transportation that was available. For us, that meant larger bombs on smaller targets. And as these smaller vessels were destroyed, we were then forced inland to find releases for "our aggressive natures." The USAAC must have resented our intrusions into their hunting preserves.

Of considerable importance was a logistics flight flown by Noon and crew on April 30, 1945. Flying the Wing's high-speed transport PB4Y-1, BuNo 32165, they traveled to Guam and Saipan where they retrieved our mis-routed shipment from Kaneohe, Hawaii, of seven months before. The most vital cargo was that noted as "medicinal supplies." Within these boxes were bottles that bore labels such as Schenley's Black Label, otherwise known as "Black Death." Another distiller's product was Three Feathers, affectionately referred to as "Old Tennis Shoe." Taken in liberal doses, this medicine was assured to produce the most god-awful hangover known to mankind. For several days, a One-Oh-Four man could be readily identified by his haggard appearance.

During the month of April 1945 the squadron had flown 139 patrol missions, logging 1546 hours. There were also 87 hours flown in test and ferry flights. We expended 133,250 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition, 377 100# general purpose bombs, 62 200# GP bombs, 32 500# high explosive bombs, and 15 100# incendiary clusters.

The squadron sank 51 small vessels and damaged 41, which included one medium-sized freighter-transport. In the air, three enemy aircraft were shot down and one damaged. Due to the reducing number of surface vessels, more emphasis was placed upon land targets. Numerous rolling stock, warehouses, factories, blockhouses, radio/radar stations, and like targets were destroyed or damaged.

One complete new flight crew was received on April 30th as a replacement for Crew Twelve lost on February 18, 1945. Only one aircraft was lost during this period and one was received from the Wing aircraft pool. One man had been killed and two men returned to the squadron after release from the hospital.

The replacement crew that arrived April 30th was led by Lt.(jg) Harvey M. Waldron. Other members of Crew Twenty-Four follows:

Ens. George E. Maxfield
Ens. Kenneth W. Gibson
Byargeon, Herbert D. S1c
Fulton, William N. AMM3c
Harris, George R. AMM2c
McGuirk, Donald E. AOM3c
Phillippi, Daniel B. ARM3c
Scavone, Salvatore (n) S1c
Topczewski, Ervin P. AOM3c

**CHAPTER NINE
RELIEF ARRIVES
MAY 1945**

Our operations in May 1945 were in accordance with the prior Search Plan K and the mission was as stated for the month of April. The BIG change was that we would be receiving relief flight crews as our tour in the forward combat zone had now begun to exceed the normal six-month period. During earlier combat tours, the patrol bombing squadrons were deployed and relieved as a squadron rather than, as now, by crews. There was much controversy over the current rotation system. Most squadron and wing commanders felt that cohesion and camaraderie suffered by the new method of transfer by crews rather than by squadrons. To form up, train, and enter combat together contributed much to the morale and esprit de corps of any combatant unit. At the instigation of Whitney Wright and C. B. Jones, Commander Aircraft Seventh Fleet sent a letter to the Chief of Naval Operations recommending a return to the former system of rotation by squadrons vice flight crews. By proper protocol, this correspondence was sent via the Commander Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet and the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet. Unfortunately, ComAirPacFleet entered a negative endorsement and that was the end of that. Don't fight City Hall!

It was now time to establish the rotation order for the old hands. The Skipper came up with an ingenious plan which pleased only one crew at a time but excited everyone. A drawing would be held on May 2nd after which, a squadron photo would be taken of all the Screamers of One-Oh-Four. A last chance to record such for posterity.

On May 1, 1945, there were no contacts nor engagements by our patrols. Had "get-home-itis" set in to dampen our aggressiveness? Whatever, Bittenbender, returning at night from his patrol, became lost due to weather and was low on fuel. He climbed to 13,000', attempting to get a Radio Direction Finding steer. There was no result from the attempt for a steer but he finally located an emergency airfield on the northern point of Luzon. Laoag had a short and very rough runway but Bitt was able to land safely.

All patrols would make an early takeoff on May 2, 1945, so as to return in time for the first big lottery drawing. I took off at 0252(I) to cover the Tonkin Gulf area, unaware that this would be my last patrol. No contacts were made but on the return leg, I made an attack upon Tung-Mei-Chow, an island off Yulin Bay, Hainan Island. It was clearly a military installation for the protection of this important Japanese harbor. Running in very low, I saw a number of gun batteries and barracks/administrative buildings. A steam whistle was blowing (I could see the white plume flowing upward) which I took as a signal for an air raid for the command there. Our gunners strafed two gun emplacements, firing 500 rounds as I lined up on a mess hall. I assumed this identification as it was lunchtime and men were pouring out of the building at a very rapid rate. Jack Saunders made a beautiful drop and all ten 100# high explosive bombs hit into the building. Although our ACIO's evaluation was "damage undetermined," looking back in my bubble side window I

witnessed a very satisfactory explosion. We landed back at Clark Field in mid-afternoon and in plenty of time for the big event

As many as could, jammed into the squadron's office eager for "The Drawing!" Each PPC wrote his crew number on a slip of paper and placed it in a hat. However, the Skipper had a novel way of selecting a winner. Drawing out one slip at a time, he announced the number and that the LAST NUMBER in the hat would go home first. Talk about suspense!

Crew Two prevailed! The one remaining slip of paper in the hat was numbered "Two." It was all over. In the squadron group photo taken thereafter, Crew Two members were easily identified by the big smiles. We were overjoyed.

Packing up for the trip back to the good old United States of America was simple. Just pull your parachute bag from under your cot and throw a few belongings into it (parachute bags were rarely used to carry parachutes). I did make a visit to our squadron's photographic officer's tent and purloined a copy of most all of Crew Two's combat photos. This action has pleased me for a great number of years now. I have proof positive of my "sea stories."



On May 4th Ettinger ferried Crew Two to Samar for our transportation back home. There were several days of waiting for space but on May 8th we boarded a NATS R5D/C-54 for a straight-through flight to Honolulu. Refueling stops were made at Guam, Kwajalien, and Johnson Island, arriving at Hickam Field May 9th. Sent to Naval Air Station Kaneohe, we again awaited transportation. Our method of travel for the last leg to San Francisco was an Attack Transport Naval Vessel (APA). I considered this to be a bit of an insult for this fine combat air crew. But, we would have swam to the US of A at this point.

It was a great time in San Francisco, believe me. While awaiting our release for 30-days leave and reassignment, we visited with Lee Webber. He was still in a Naval Hospital there but we managed to get him sprung for a reunion with Crew Two. We were unable to find Derral Pedigo who had been wounded during an attack on November 12, 1944.

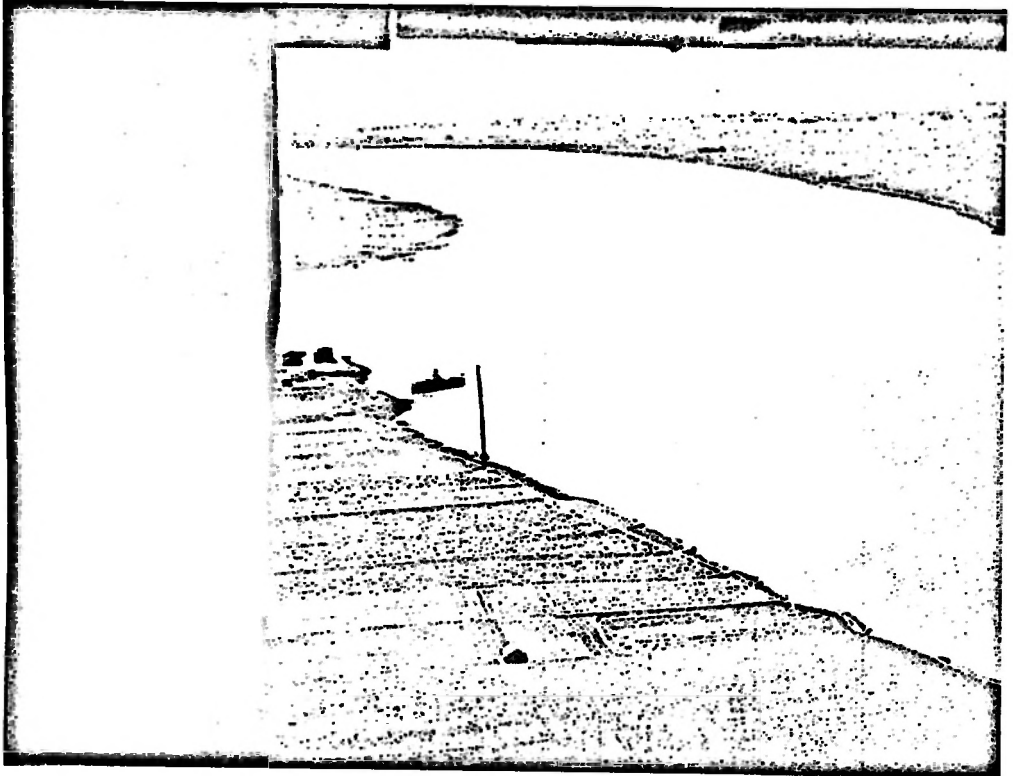
Meanwhile, back at Clark Field the action continued. On May 3rd, Hagen attacked a five-car train in southern Hainan. He made five bombing and strafing runs. Five 100# bombs were dropped, four made near misses, and 1500 rounds of ammo were expended. The train was brought to a stop with steam pouring out of all sides of the locomotive. Hagen also strafed a number of trucks during this foray. The results of these attacks were evaluated as "damage undetermined."

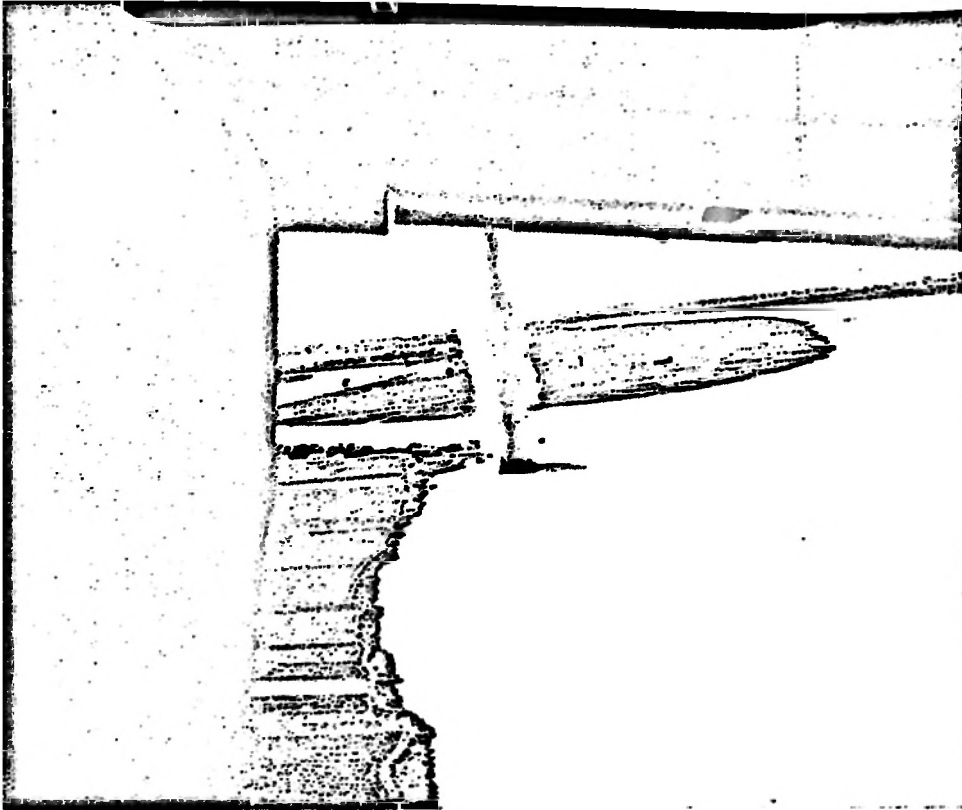
Burton and Crew Ten had an interesting experience with a Val on the northeastern coast of Formosa on May 5th. Sighting the dive bomber cruising along the shoreline at 800', the PB4Y-1 was closed to 400 yards astern and 200' above. The bow turret opened fire and the Japanese pilot immediately made a "split-S" to evade. A very nifty maneuver from this altitude. Burton reversed course and began a chase.

The enemy aircraft was then flown into a valley with 7000' mountains surrounding all sides. A 1000' solid overcast created, in effect, a tunnel which the PPC declined to enter with his less maneuverable airplane. Twice the Val stuck its nose out of the tunnel and twice the patrol plane gunners scored hits into the wings and fuselage. It was not to be seen again and, after waiting an hour, it was assumed to have crash-landed on a riverbed in the valley. This event was evaluated as a possible kill.

Some patrols were still dropping leaflets, a most annoying chore. Bittenbender made drops on Amoy and Swatow, giving the anti-aircraft gunners there some practice. During the fighting on so many islands, the Japanese did not surrender under even the most desperate situations. Why the higher command believed that these leaflet drops would have any effect upon the enemy at all is beyond comprehension.

Although not necessarily included within our search sector assignments, a number of PPCs were flying up the Pearl River looking for shipping targets. One such target, a river boat, fell prey to a PB4Y-1 with a "before and after" recording. The vessel almost made it to its destination.





The squadron also began to conduct photo reconnaissance missions as part of the searches for enemy shipping. A tall lanky member of CASU(F)-57, Alfred Balasi, often joined our patrols with a camera nearly as tall as he.

The flexibility of our missions was paralleled by adjustments in our flight crew manning as required. With the arrivals of the relief flight crews, there was a need for an indoctrination into the realities of flights in the combat zone. So an experienced PPC would fly a patrol with the new crews for a "route check." It was a nicety having an old hand along on the first armed reconnaissance mission. While West flew several check-out flights with the newly arrived, his copilots flew with Crew Twenty-Three on the regular patrol missions. One or both of them were now Patrol Plane Commanders. Also, with Noon's return to the States, Culpepper took over as PPC for Crew Four.

On May 8, 1945, Wright ravaged northern Hainan. Covering his 900 nmi patrol sector in 13.8 hours, he would expend ten 100# bombs and 4000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition. His first targets were three blockhouses spaced 20 to 30 miles apart. Each was to receive similar treatment, three or four bombs and about 300 rounds. All bombs exploded within the walls of the blockhouses. These attacks were considered to be "damage undetermined."

Next the C.O. conducted a "road hazard" operation. He burned and destroyed six trucks grouped as one, four, and one. Each individual truck grudgingly received about 500 rounds and each burned to destruction.

On the same day Hagen departed Clark Field early, 0224(I), for an 800 nmi patrol. At the Pescadorees he sank a small Sugar Dog and damaged a lugger.

West departed four hours later than Hagen and located an unusual target off Fort Bayard, French Indo-China. This 75-ton yacht was attacked; seven 100# bombs were dropped 500 rounds fired. One 100-pounder hit to blow off the stern and set the vessel afire to destroy it. I wonder if there were any Geisha girls aboard the yacht?

At Nampang Island, off the Luichow Peninsula, West decided it was payback time for the usual AA received there. He delivered three 250# and three 100# bombs and strafed with 2500 rounds during this attack. A number of buildings were set afire, as was the grass on the island. Small craft were also hit by 0.50 caliber gunfire.

The living at Clark Field was improving. Quonset huts were constructed for all hands and it was such a luxury after being in tents for the past six months. Soon Clark Field had transformed from a tent city into a community of Quonset huts capable of housing 2500 people. It was well-laid out and became the best camp in the Pacific War Theater (according to Doc Jones). It boasted an open air theater, a barber shop, a library, a ship's store, a chapel, two galleys, and a dispensary to handle most medical services. All this came about under Captain C. B. Jones' supervision and the efforts of Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 606.

There was also a delicacy known as tropical chocolate candy bars. Fred Himsworth describes this treat as follows:

"If you have never tried to eat tropical chocolate, you have missed an enviable experience. It contained something to keep it from melting in the heat and, of course, wouldn't melt in your mouth either. It's taste didn't bear much resemblance to chocolate either. I suppose it was meant to provide the calories needed rather than to please the palate. I can guarantee you that none of our palates were ever in danger of being pleased with it."

Ed Hagen was seemingly a quiet and usually unruffled Patrol Plane Commander. Jimmy Mathews tells of an incident when enough became enough:

"Cruising along the China coast during our patrol we had come under AA fire about six times. Some of it was heavy stuff and had come quite close. It had become almost a routine. Being in the bow turret, I'd see the gun flashes first and announce over the intercom that we were under fire. But I guess our PPC had become annoyed with all the maneuvering required

to evade. Then a 12.7 mm machine gun opened up and Hagen ordered an attack upon this small installation. We wheeled around and dropped a 500# bomb on it. The tail gunner reported that the big bomb hit on the ground and then rolled down a slope into the gun pit itself and exploded. Talk about hitting a fly with a sledge hammer!"

We were using a large amount of explosive power to destroy ever smaller shipping targets. On May 9th Didier had a very short sector, 550 nm, covering the Pescadores Island. Here he destroyed three 25-ton luggers with three 250# and five 100# bombs. The crew fired off 1000 rounds during three low-level attacks.

May 11, 1945, would be a better day for VPB-104. Just about everyone patrolling this day would break something belonging to the Japanese. Wright would work over the southeast area of Hainan this day and carried five extra 100# bombs for reload. The first target was a blockhouse which was hit with three 250# bombs and 300 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. The entire structure collapsed and was judged to be destroyed. The next victims were three trucks and a car parked together in a row. All of these vehicles were destroyed with 2000 rounds of ammunition fired into them. Ten minutes later a radio station and a garage were destroyed with direct hits by two 100# bombs. A truck in the garage was destroyed and two additional trucks nearby were damaged by strafing. Five minutes later two trucks were found stopped on a road. Many hits were observed while strafing with 1000 rounds but the damage was undetermined. A total of 3300 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo was expended this day by Crew One. All of this was not without some cost. Jack Laming, a radio-gunner in Wright's crew, was hit by 7.7 mm fire in both arms and right leg.

West and Crew Twenty-Three took off just two minutes after the Skipper and would operate in the same general area. Ira attacked a blockhouse, making four bombing and strafing runs, dropping seven 100# bombs and firing off 600 rounds. A tower in the center and one corner of this blockhouse collapsed as a result of all seven bombs exploding within the compound. It was seriously damaged. Their next targets were two trucks which were strafed with 2000 rounds. Many hits were made but neither caught fire so only undetermined damage was assessed. Continuing the assaults, West now attacked the military installation where Wright had just destroyed a radio station and garage. West dropped three 100# bombs, one of which hit the corner of the wrecked radio station. Strafing with 800 rounds, they set fire to three barracks and all burned to destruction. West's crew had expended 3600 rounds during these activities.

Continuing the action on the 11th, Fulwider was to score upon some decent seagoing targets. Off the China coast 25 miles southeast of Macao, he found one Sugar Charlie of 300 tons and a Sugar Dog of 100 tons. Attacking the larger freighter first, he made a direct hit with a 250# bomb. It burst into flames from stem to stern and was destroyed. The smaller SD was anchored close to the shore and was strafed with 1000 rounds. A small fire was started and oil drifted from the hull. It was considered to be

seriously damaged. Shore-based AA batteries fired ineffectively at the PB4Y-1 during this engagement.

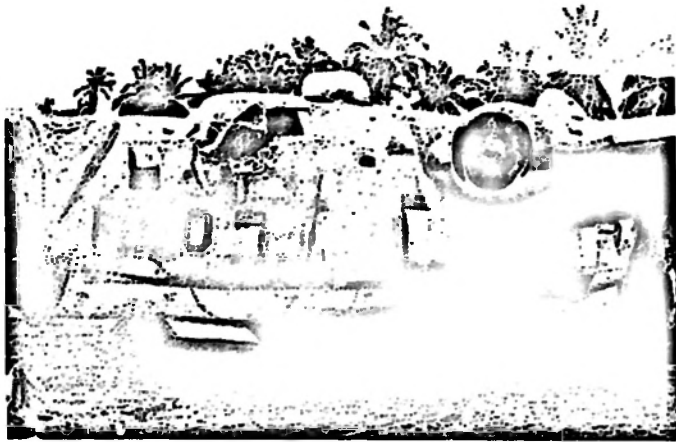
Continuing this patrol, Fulwider sighted a tug towing five loaded barges. Attacking at very low level, Bill dropped four 100# bombs and strafed with 3000 rounds. The tug and four barges were sunk with bomb hits and the fifth barge was destroyed by strafing. Fulwider's crew had expended 6000 rounds against these enemy targets.

Our Air Combat Intelligence Officers and two yeomen must have been overworked as no AAR was prepared for Hagen's actions on May 11, 1945. However, these attacks were recorded in the War Diary. Conducting a "road hazard" patrol between Amoy and Swatow, Ed destroyed three trucks by strafing. These were set afire and blazed to destruction without question. Offshore they sank a 50-foot lugger by blowing off its stern with a 100# bomb.

On May 12th Bittenbender made a strafing run on a landing barge only to find it had already been wrecked. He then made a bomb drop and strafed a radar installation, but this was found to be a dummy station. All this around Foochow for which he received a dose of AA fire for his efforts (but was not hit).

A BLACK 13TH - May 13, 1945, would prove to be a bad day for Bombing 104.

Pre-dawn on the morning of this day Wood and Crew Eight departed Clark Field to search sector 19. They were flying PB4Y-1, BuNo 38870, and would have a very difficult time getting themselves and the airplane back to a landing strip. Leveling off at a cruising altitude of 8000', they had just passed through the "slot" of Lingayen Gulf heading out for their sector. The weather was poor and they were flying on instruments, in and out of rain showers. Suddenly, with no prior indication of trouble, the s--- hit the fan, big time. Initially, the crew thought they had been hit by anti-aircraft fire, origin unknown. It was some time before the problem, a very serious one, was recognized. The number two propeller had separated from its mounting and spun through the cockpit. After creating serious structural and system damage on the port side, it spun over the starboard side without further damage.



The big patrol plane was in trouble. A loose propeller turning at 2200 RPM was lethal. The PPC received serious injuries to his left arm and shoulder. The entire cockpit area was sprayed with bits of aluminum and plexiglass, cutting both pilots. All flight and engine instruments became inoperative. The hydraulic system was spraying fluid throughout the forward section of the airplane. Still in the weather, control of the airplane's attitude was maintained by reference to the magnetic compass mounted in fluid (free to float). After what seemed to be an eternity, they broke out below the weather still in control of the PB4Y-1 as dawn began to lighten the area.

The Plane Captain, Chester Oseicki, and a newspaper reporter, flying the patrol for a story, bandaged Wood sufficiently to stop the flow of blood. Wood, still in command of the flight, decided to try for an emergency landing strip at Lingayen (actually the strip was little more than a caribou pasture). In preparation for the landing, the bombs were salvo'd and an attempt was made to jettison the full bomb bay fuel tanks. However, these 400-gallon tanks refused to leave their attachments. The bomb bay doors were then closed and now the tanks fell onto the bomb bay doors. They rested there throughout the landing but broken fuel line connectors continued to seep raw fuel into the airplane. The landing gear was lowered manually due to the loss of the hydraulic system. Turning into the final approach for the landing, Oseicki reported that the nose wheel, though down, was not locked.

Wood's decision was to make a "go-around" even though it would be extremely difficult on three engines while still heavily loaded and no instrumentation. It was a struggle and very late and very low, the nose wheel was finally locked into the down position. It was a "hairy" landing with caribou running helter-skelter, several bounces, and braking dependent upon stored hydraulic pressure in the accumulator. Once the airplane was brought to a stop there was no delay by the crew in exiting the airplane. After a considerable delay, Army transportation arrived and took Wood to sick bay for a patch-up. The airplane was a strike.

Do you suppose the newspaper reporter ever took another flight in a B-24 painted Navy blue?

The Skipper evidently received information regarding Wood's predicament and quickly manned a PB4Y-1, BuNo 46730, and took off for Lingayen airstrip. Hurriedly gathering a crew, he utilized Perret, the Crew One bombardier, as a copilot (Joe Fisher and Mike Blevins, where were you?). Wright picked up Crew Eight and returned them to Clark Field. A number of other personnel also boarded the patrol plane for the return flight, making a total of 30 passengers for the trip.

There were some good strokes on the 13th. Didier departed Clark at 0519(I) loaded with two 500# and five 100# high explosive bombs installed in the bomb bay racks. Five 100# incendiary clusters were lying about on the flooring of the Liberator. Their sector of 700 nmi would cover the China coast around the Hong Kong and Macao area. A riverboat, 100 feet in length, was sighted underway and Didier made a wide circle to position the PB4Y-1 for an attack. While doing this, the captain of the vessel ran the boat aground and the personnel on board dashed for safety. Two 100# high-explosive bombs made direct hits, blowing the wooden vessel to bits. All that remained after the explosion were small pieces of floating wreckage.

Didier's next target was a 250-ton seagoing tug. On the first pass, one 500# GP was dropped and the crew strafed with 200 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo. The bomb exploded but missed the tug and Didier observed a banner being unrolled at the stern with a large red cross and some writing on it. Making a close pass and taking a photo, the patrol plane ceased attacks and continued with the search mission. Back at Clark the film was developed by the CASU photographic lab and the lettering read as follows, "Rice for Christians." A ploy to escape destruction or a valid mission of mercy? We would never know.

Now turning inland, Didier attacked a large warehouse (300' x 100') joined by two smaller buildings (40' x 60'). Three runs were made dropping five 100# incendiary clusters and firing 200 rounds. One direct hit by an incendiary cluster set fire to the larger building, quickly spreading to the adjoining structures. All three were destroyed. Close examination of the photo shows a zig-zag path leading to a radar station at the top of the hill.

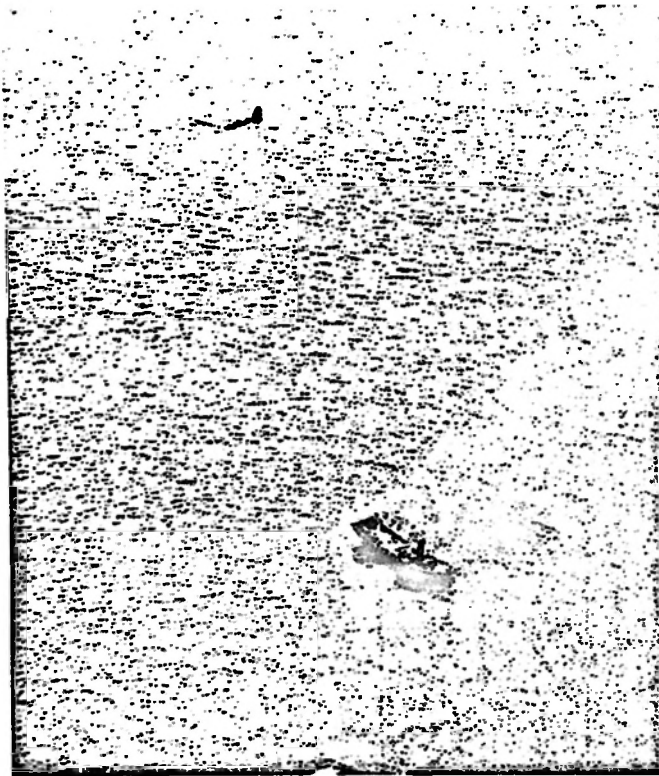


BETTY ON A BARGE - On May 13, 1945, Noon and Crew Four would make history. Or so I believe, as never before had a Betty twin-engine bomber been brought to destruction in this manner.

Hank Noon was well prepared for the very active day that they were to experience. On takeoff, the patrol plane was loaded with six 250# general purpose bombs in the racks and a number of incendiary clusters and GP bombs were stowed elsewhere inside the airplane. The 700 nmi sector search would be along the east side of Formosa and require just over nine hours flight time.

The first target was a 100-foot highway bridge over a ravine. Dropping three 250# high explosive bombs, a direct hit destroyed it. Back over the water they now attacked a 150-foot patrol craft. It was destroyed by a bombing and strafing attack. Four bombs were dropped, two straddling the vessel, as 1000 rounds were fired to assure destruction.

Nearby a 10-ton landing craft was towing a barge with a Betty as the only cargo. Strafing with 500 rounds, both the towing vessel and the barge were sunk. Surely the first sinking of a land-based bomber aircraft in a static condition. There was some small amount of flotation within the Japanese Mitsubishi attack aircraft, as it submerged in slow motion.



The barge has sunk from under the Betty. Now it slowly submerges.

The carnage continued. A 20-car train was rolling along as the big U.S. Navy bomber attacked, dropping five incendiary clusters and strafing with 1000 rounds. The train was brought to a stop as five railroad cars were burning. Two cars on the rear of the train had guns mounted but the gunnery crew jumped over the side. One and a half hours later, a USAAC B-25 reported that the train was still burning.

Back over the Philippine Sea, Noon's gunners strafed a 25-ton lugger with 500 rounds. Only damage was claimed. Forty-five minutes later they strafed a 60' tug with 600 rounds and a sufficient number of fires were started to indicate serious damage to the vessel. The patrol plane returned to base surprisingly undamaged. For some reason, the Japanese gunners seemed intimidated by the flow of 0.50 caliber gunfire from the Liberator.



Well sprayed with incendiary clusters, smoke arises as the train cars begin to burn.

McAuliff and Crew Twenty-Six, having arrived at Clark Field on May 3rd and completed their indoctrination, flew a patrol to Hainan on the 13th. Their bomb load for this patrol was three 250# and ten 100# GP bombs. Attacking a blockhouse on the eastern part of the island, they dropped one 250# and two 100# GP bombs and strafed with 500 rounds. All bombs hit, exploding within the confines of the fort. Again, the ACIO classified the damage as undetermined (we needed a better term than this!). Forty-five minutes later, the PPC launched an attack upon another blockhouse with identical hits and damage assessment. Continuing this hunt, McAuliff strafed a truck, firing off 100 rounds and scoring many hits. Since it did not burn, the assessment was for slight damage. This truck may have been a decoy as light anti-aircraft fire was received from AA guns about a half mile away. The only damage to the PB4Y-1 was a hit into the radome.

On the return leg McAuliff ran out of fuel and was forced to ditch two miles off the Lingayen Peninsula. All personnel aboard BuNo 38869, the Skipper's airplane, reached the shore successfully. A number of the crew received lacerations. Additionally, one man suffered a broken arm and another received a sprained back. The airplane was ditched after 12.5 hours flight time. During the patrol, several climbs were made and high power settings on the engines were used during the attacks. This was the first of five PB4Y-1s that were lost during the month of May 1945.

Another of our relief crews who had arrived on May 3rd, Malloy and Crew Twenty-Five, flew a 1000-mile patrol to Haiphong, French Indo-China, on May 13th. Entering the harbor, they attacked a tug and six barges. The bombs hung up but the barges were strafed with 500 rounds. About fifteen 40 mm anti-aircraft rounds were fired at the patrol plane and one hit into a starboard fuel tank. An undetermined amount of fuel was lost before a transfer could be completed.

Malloy was forced to ditch six miles short of Luzon after being airborne 14.4 hours. Three of the crew were killed in the ditching of BuNo 38879: Lt.(jg) John J. Malloy, Patrol Plane Commander; Clarence O. Whitney, Ordnanceman; and James F. Quinn, Aviation Mechanic. All surviving personnel were injured, some severely, and were transferred back to the States except for Andrew C. Struble, Seaman Gunner. Struble rejoined the squadron and would serve to the end of the war in the "make-up crew," Crew Twenty-Five. His story of the combat, damage to the airplane, and ditching follows:

"We made an early morning takeoff on our third patrol in the combat zone. Soon we discovered a fuel leak and returned to man the standby airplane. This meant that a long day was now going to be a longer day as the patrol to Hainan and Haiphong in French Indo-China was for 1000 miles and the return would now be after dark.

"Approaching Haiphong Harbor, our PPC began a masthead bombing attack upon some shipping. I was in the top turret and immediately spotted some anti-aircraft fire off to our port side. Although we started evasive action we were hit in the port wing and got out of there. Fuel was leaking from the port wing tank and we started transferring from this tank but it became evident that we would be short of fuel and might not make it back to Clark. We began throwing out everything possible to lighten the airplane and our radioman tried to send out distress messages but it seemed fruitless.

"As it became dark, we entered a squall area of rain and high winds and we lost an engine. We then lost another engine and we made preparations for ditching. When the third engine failed, the pilot lost control and we hit the water very hard.

"On impact I was tumbled over and over under water. I fought my way to the surface and pulled the cords of my Mae West and nothing happened. Now I found that I had lost my Mae West, one shoe, and my dungarees, but my belt was still on! Floundering in the dark, we called out our names and gathered together to determine who had survived. Malloy, Quinn, and Whitney were missing and we presumed that they had gone down with the plane. Soon we bumped into a bomb bay fuel tank and it was a great relief, particularly to those that had no life vests. We hoisted Armstrong onto the top of the tank as he had a broken

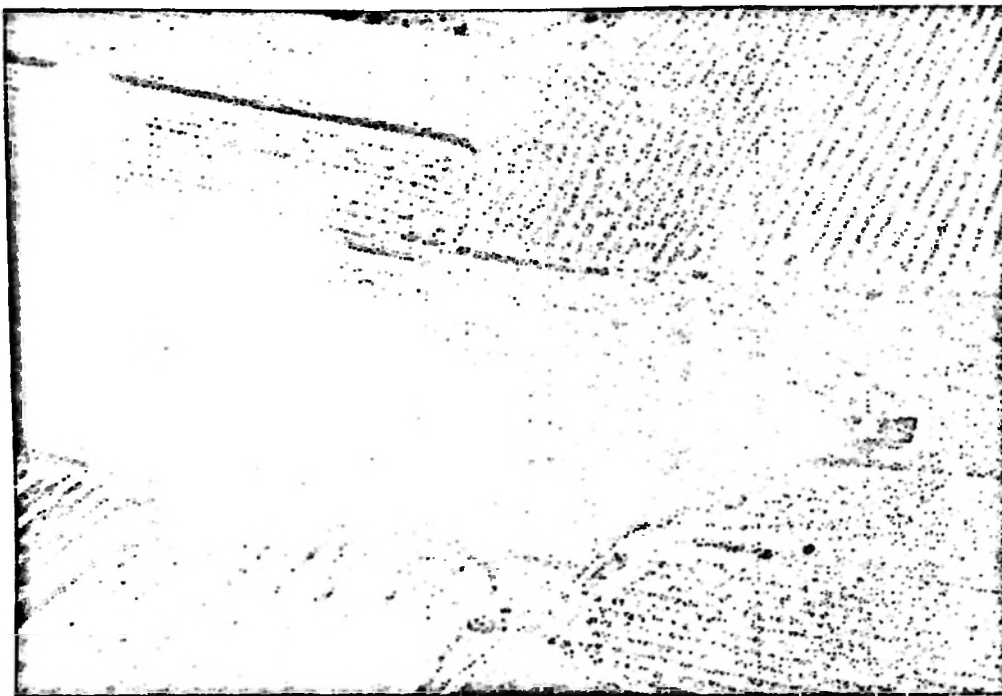
collarbone. The rest of us hung on to the tank, still in the water, the best we could.

"At daylight, Brister and Spangler decided to swim ashore as they believed or imagined it to be not too far away. A flight of B-25s flew overhead and we fired our .38 pistols loaded with tracer bullets but to no avail. Triedness was setting in and I had to keep pulling Reasor's head up out of the water as he kept falling asleep. A PBV rescue airplane flew over and saw us but could not land due to the high seas. He did drop a couple of rubber life rafts but the wind blew them away and we could not get them. Then a B-17 air-sea rescue plane came overhead and parachuted a lifeboat to us. Lentz, West, and I were able to climb aboard. We could not figure out how to release the parachutes from the lifeboat so we could start the engine and collect the rest of the crew. Armstrong left the bomb bay tank and tried to swim over to us but couldn't make it due to his broken collarbone. I jumped into the water and helped him to board the lifeboat. The cans of water in the lifeboat really tasted great and quenched our thirst quickly.

"Suddenly, a destroyer, the USS *Conway*, appeared and it surely looked beautiful to us. They had to literally pull us aboard as none of us had the strength to climb aboard after 23 hours in the water. They had found and picked up Brister and Spangler not very far at all from us. The ship took us to Manila Bay and transferred us to the USS *Currituck*, a big seaplane tender, where we received excellent treatment. This was the last I saw of the rest of the crew as I was transferred back to the squadron.

"After the war I made contact with some of the crew. After 50 years, it is wonderful to enjoy the fellowship and memories that began during training at NAS Jacksonville. Although it was an ill-fated group, the thoughts and friendships are still cherished."

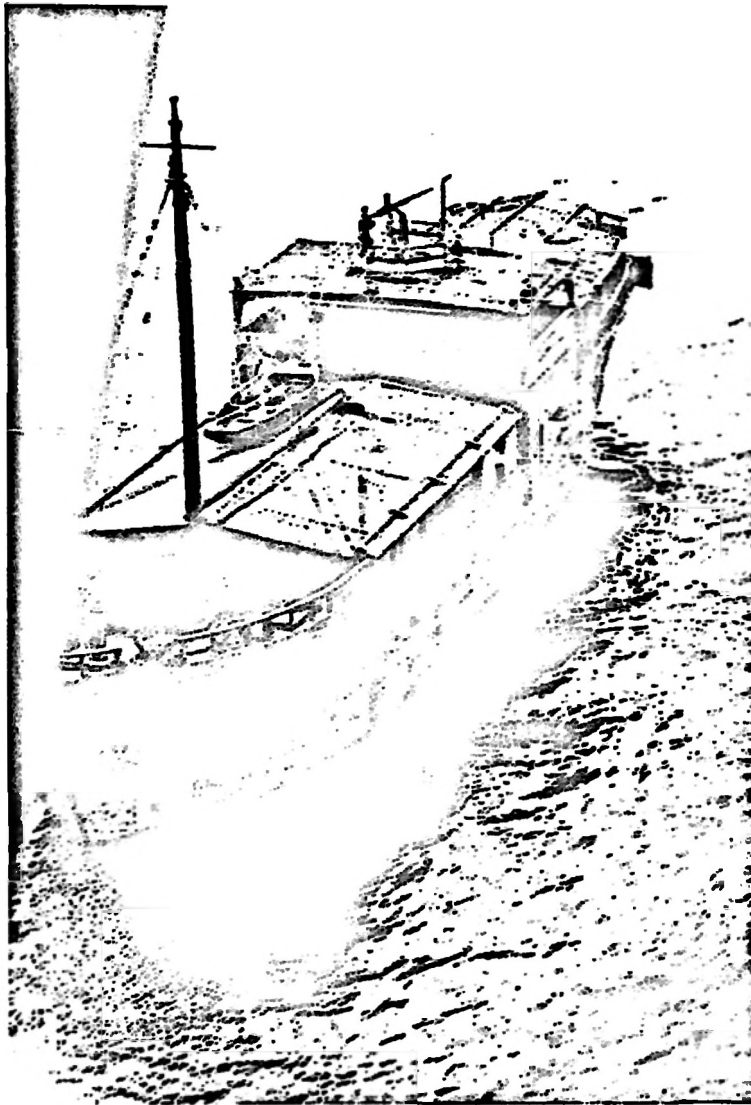
On May 14, 1945, Wright flew a patrol covering the Luichow Peninsula, a neck of land extending from the French Indo-China coastline southward towards Hainan. The 650-mile patrol would take 11.2 hours. The Skipper was carrying a bomb load of three 500# GP bombs and ten 100# incendiary clusters (five were for reloads). His first targets were a bus and a truck. Five incendiary clusters were dropped and 500 rounds fired. One IC was a direct hit, burning the bus to destruction. The truck was set afire by strafing and



most likely was destroyed. Fifteen minutes later they found two automobiles and one truck. Two incendiary clusters and 300 rounds burned one automobile and damaged the two other vehicles. Back over water, Wright sighted a scow (a very small ferry) with a truck on board. One 500# bomb was dropped, making a direct hit, and the high explosive put the scow and truck to the bottom quickly. The final attack was upon a bus, strafing with 400 rounds. Since it did not burn, the damage could not be accurately judged. A total of 1700 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo had been fired during this visit to the island.

CLARK FIELD TO CLARK FIELD THE LONG WAY - On May 14, 1945, Lt. Ira B. West and Crew Twenty-Three was assigned sector 20 and little did they know that it would become a "Day to Remember" for the rest of their lives.

Outbound on their search they encountered extremely heavy weather. Not necessarily an unusual phenomenon. On the return leg and approaching the Pescadores off Formosa, the PPC sighted what appeared to be a Sugar Dog of about 300 tons.



Anticipating an easy and worthwhile kill, West made his attack at 50' altitude and was set up to drop three 250# high explosive bombs in train. Herbert, a copilot stationed in the bombardier's station to make the release, then shouted, "He's shooting at us!" No need to tell Ira at his point, as he and the rest of the crew could hear the projectiles ripping through the airplane.

Now the "easy kill" was recognized as a picket boat and/or an anti-aircraft trap. In addition to the 20 mm gun on the top of the deckhouse, three or four 12.7 mm machine guns were firing from their mounts on the stern. The PB4Y-1 was very seriously damaged.

Adding insult to injury, the bombs overshot. The number three engine was shot out and the windmilling propeller was creating drag. Gasoline was pouring into the bomb bay from hits into several fuel cells. The main and auxiliary hydraulic systems were holed, all systems failing except the brake accumulator which was still holding pressure. But, surprisingly, only one crewman received minor injury.

Sager, the plane captain, on West's command began "stripping ship." Everything except his tool box and the K-20 camera were thrown over the side. No radio report of the attack nor airplane situation was transmitted on the radio. West simply could not take the chance with the strong gas fumes throughout the interior. A spark could have blown the airplane into oblivion.

Once the failed engine was shut down and the propeller feathered the situation improved. The airplane was flying a little better but it was apparent, due to the loss of fuel, that they could not make it back to Clark Field. In addition, the weather encountered outbound would create a real hazard returning with the severely damaged airplane. The PPC's decision was to try for a safe area in China. The coast was only about 50 miles from their current position. Flight crews had been briefed that Chanting airstrip, about 100 miles inland, was available in an emergency. And this sure as hell was an emergency!

Chanting was in a safe area (unoccupied by the Japanese) and was used as a staging field for General Claire Chennault's Flying Tiger fighter squadrons. It had a 2800' macadam-paved runway. It looked very good to West at this point although a little short for a heavy bomber.

Crossing the Chinese coast north of Amoy, the PB4Y-1 was making 150 KIAS and cruising at 4000' altitude. The crew began making preparations for landing on the short strip. This would not be easy to accomplish. The landing gear would have to be lowered and locked into place manually. It would be a "no-flap landing" with the attendant higher speed and greater braking requirement (as it turned out they were able to get the landing flap lowered to ten degrees--some help, but still at a higher landing speed). It appeared that braking with the accumulator would be available. Using this system would permit only one brake application and then holding the brake pedals down. To release the pedals would dump the pressure available to the brakes.

Letting down for the landing, West saw the short strip but there were many people on it! They appeared to be working to lengthen the runway with crushed limestone rock. If this was not a near perfect landing and roll-out, hundreds of Chinese workers would be placed in great jeopardy. Parachutes had been rigged and attached to the waist 0.50 caliber gun mounts to provide aerodynamic braking at touchdown. But this did not work out as planned. At both hatches, the parachutes tore off immediately when tossed out. It was now all up to the PPC's careful brake application.

The laborers were running every which way as the big four-engine bomber rolled down the runway. West applied the brakes and held the pedals down. Unknown to him,

the hydraulic lines to the brakes at the port wheel had been shattered by shrapnel. Therefore, brakes were not available on that side. The airplane swerved violently to the right and off the runway. Ira jammed a burst of power on the number-four engine and skillfully brought the PB4Y-1 back onto the runway. Though his legs were shaking, the airplane was brought to a stop.

A skeleton crew of USAAC personnel greeted the Navy crew and offered every assistance and courtesy. Within an hour a big surprise occurred. A telephone call was received from the SACO Unit located near Amoy. The caller asked, "Was that a Navy airplane that just landed at your airstrip?" The Army Air Corps sergeant answered yes and the SACO USN Intelligence Officer then asked for the pilot's name. "West" was the reply and the former lawyer from West Virginia asked, "Ira B. West?" The SACO officer and West had formed a friendship while at NAS Jacksonville nine months previously. It really is a small world!

The Navy bomber crew remained at Chanting three days as arrangements were made to get them back to their squadron. At the squadron they were listed as missing in action during these three days. But, fortunately, MIA telegrams had not been sent to their next of kin. The status of West and crew was communicated from Chanting via the Fourteenth Air Force rather slowly. A USAAC C-47 flew the crew to Kunming where they spent another seven days before being transported back to Clark Field. On one occasion while at Kunming, Lt. Ira B. West, U.S. Navy, was called before General Claire Chennault, Commanding General, Fourteenth Air Force. Smiling, this veteran aviator asked, "How'd you find that field? My pilots never can." West replied, "Naval aviators are trained in navigation, sir." End of conversation.

A C-54 transported them back to Clark Field and Crew Twenty-Three flew their next patrol on May 31, 1945. They continued their forays against the Japanese, flying their last patrol on July 14, 1945. However, on July 11th, their sector assignment covered the Amoy area. An excursion was made inland a bit to make a beer drop on Chanting. A very nice gesture and no doubt greatly appreciated.

On May 15th, Bittenbender flew my old airplane, BuNo 38889, on a patrol to French Indo-china. Just after liftoff from the runway at Clark, the airplane entered a fog bank. Struggling for altitude with the overloaded PB4Y-1, the airspeed became a bit low and the nose was lowered to regain the usual climb speed. Now Bitt suddenly saw the headlights of a jeep dead ahead! Low airspeed or not, he pulled up and continued on to fly the 13.3 hour patrol. Bittenbender also knocked off a 75-ton tug in Haiphong Harbor.

With the loss of Wood as a PPC on May 13th, Darrel Jay was given a well-deserved promotion to Patrol Plane Commander for Crew Eight. Walker would be pulled from Crew Nine to fly with Jay. This would leave Crew Nine short one pilot, but Ettinger would get along with one copilot, Buzz Gibb. Ettinger would spend a great deal of time in the cockpit alone as Gibb had to take care of the navigation from a table just aft of the cockpit (this, of

course, when he was not the squadron duty officer). But this arrangement functioned satisfactorily and Crew Nine continued to do their job very well.

On May 16th Jay flew his first patrol as PPC. The Commanding Officer would ride as the check pilot. This was also done for each newly arrived replacement crew but not necessarily by the C.O. Jay's search sector would take him to the Luichow Peninsula then to Fort Bayard, French Indo-China, and subsequently eastward along the China coast. Near Fort Bayard, they found four trucks on a highway and made five strafing runs, firing 1200 rounds. One truck caught fire and burned to destruction and the others were well shot up. At Nampang Island an attack was made on a mining installation, dropping ten 100# high explosive bombs and strafing with 400 rounds. It was a good drop, all bombs hitting into the structure, but the extent of the damage could not be determined.

The search sectors continued to be compressed. Still, a few 900 and 1000 nmi patrols were flown. On the 17th Hagen had a 650 nmi sector along the China coast northeastward from Hong Kong. He established a "road hazard" 30 miles from Hong Kong by attacking seven trucks on the coastal highway. Four 100# incendiary clusters and 750 rounds were expended in four runs on this rolling stock. Direct hits with the IC bombs were made on two, destroying them, two were left smoking, and the remaining three were hit repeatedly, but did not burn. A bit of an overkill was then executed upon a 25-ton lugger anchored close to the shore (this would have been considered very wasteful several months ago). Six high explosive bombs and 750 rounds were used on this very small vessel. A straddle with two bombs blew the coastal transport up onto the rocks and, together with the many 0.50 caliber hits, it was seriously damaged.

Interestingly, Hagen came upon a railroad bridge that was very well defended. On each end a heavy anti-aircraft battery was set up and ready for business. Bursts from these large shells threw shrapnel into the PB4Y-1, causing minor damage.

On the same day, Didier set up his road hazard operation near Swatow on the China coast. He also carried five 100# incendiary clusters for reload in addition to the bomb rack load. It appears at this time the IC bombs carried for reload had become a standard. On a four-mile stretch of the coastal express highway, Crew Sixteen gunners burned three trucks. One "state trooper" on a motorcycle was knocked off his machine by strafing and probably killed. A total of 1900 rounds were expended during this exercise.

On the Swatow River Didier sighted a 75-ton riverboat proudly flying a Japanese flag. He made five bombing and strafing runs, dropping two 250# and three 100# high explosive bombs and one incendiary cluster. Two direct hits blew the stern off the vessel, destroying it. During this attack, a Japanese infantryman on the shore was firing his rifle at the PB4Y-1 and scored a hit into the fuselage. Didier made one strafing run, silencing this light, very light, anti-aircraft battery.

On May 18, 1945, Wright flew an 800 nmi sector covering the China coast along Amoy and Foochow. The flight would take 13.4 hours. Off Amoy, a 150-ton Sugar Dog

was attacked, making one run and dropping two incendiary clusters from the reload ready issue magazine. Both 100# magnesium pyrotechnics hit quickly, destroying the small freighter. At Foochow another Sugar Dog of 150 tons was sunk after two bombing and strafing runs. Hits were made with one 250# high explosive and one IC. Surprisingly accurate return AA fire from a 12.7 mm machine gun on the SD holed the number three propeller and a wing flap.

On May 19th Jameson and Crew Twenty-Two were all killed during a combat patrol. A message was received from the patrol plane 2.3 hours after takeoff that it was ditching and gave the position. Noon and Crew Four were launched immediately and located the scene of the crash. Only scattered wreckage was seen, evidencing an explosion on impact. Noon stayed on station about three hours but no survivors could be seen. Searches were continued for two days with other PB4Y-1s, PBMs, and a B-17 Air Search and Rescue airplane, but the results were the same. The question of just what had caused the crash made this loss even more difficult to accept.

On the 20th Bittenbender ferried Fisher and a skeleton crew to Lingayen. Wright's copilot then flew BuNo 38859 back to Clark Field. Many of our copilots would soon become Patrol Plane Commanders and various utility flights would contribute to their qualification. Piloting techniques are one thing, but their extensive combat experience was the important factor for qualification as a PPC.

On May 21st Hagen searched the China coast and expended a lot of ordnance on small targets. But the Clark Field Ordnance Department had an inexhaustible supply. Beside, there was really no need to carry bombs back to base. One truck was the target of 1000 rounds and one 100# high explosive. It was set ablaze and then disintegrated. One 50-foot lugger caught 800 rounds and five 100# bombs to sink with its stern blown off. Two trucks traveling together received 1000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo and six 100# high explosives and were destroyed. Twenty-eight hundred rounds and twelve 100# bombs is a lot of fire power to destroy three trucks and a very small vessel. Surely the enemy could not help but be impressed.

The following day Wright found 16 small landing craft 40 miles northeast of Foochow. Two were anchored just offshore and the others were nosed into the beach. Wright made five bombing and strafing runs followed by ten strafing attacks. Bombs dropped amounted to five 100# high explosives, three 250# high explosives, and three 100# incendiary clusters. A total of 4000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition was fired into these targets. The terrain on the beach required these attacks to be made from 700' altitude. A total of nine of these small vessels were destroyed. Rifle fire from the beach put holes into the patrol plane's port wing and flattened the tire on the starboard main landing gear. Were these troops expecting transportation via these landing craft?

On the 24th Wright and the Wing Commander flew to Nichols Field and returned to Clark in a twin-engine Beechcraft (JRB-4). Most likely this was a liaison effort with

Commander Fifth Air Force. Wright, flying a "tail dragger" airplane for the first time in a very long time, was severely tested.

On May 25th and 26th Burton and Bittenbender flew logistic flights. Bitt flew from Clark to Mindoro and on to Samar, staying overnight. The next day it was Samar to Tacloban to Mindoro to Clark.

There was a good deal more to John Burton's logistic effort. He would transport Col. Montgomery, USMC, and his staff from Clark Field to Yontan airstrip, Okinawa. Initially, this appeared to be a simple flight of 5.5 hours and return the next day. Not quite.

In the weather for much of the trip, Big John began a letdown for the landing at Okinawa, expecting a low overcast with rain, heavy at times. "Emerald Control," a surface fleet air controller, was contacted en route and clearance had been obtained to enter the area and make the approach for the landing at Yontan. The letdown was made over the water as there was some high terrain on the island. Using his on-board radar to guide the PB4Y-1, the PPC figured he had a good line-up on the airstrip and soon broke out under the overcast to see dozens of ships at anchor just offshore. These U.S. Navy ships opened fire on the blue-painted B-24 Liberator! Burton and his crew saw quick and repetitive muzzle flashes as the entire fleet opened up. Not a happy sight, well-knowing that friendly fire can be just as deadly as that from the Japanese.

Fortunately, the airstrip lay directly ahead. Dispensing with the usual landing procedure, Burton simply threw the landing gear down and landed straight in. With no landing flaps, the approach was intentionally fast to get clear of the gunfire. This, plus a downwind landing, required very heavy braking to get the big bomber stopped. There was no overrun for the runway. At the end there was only a drop-off into water. There was little doubt that Col. Montgomery held a discussion with the fleet air controllers prior to bringing his air wing to Yontan.

The airfield was a mess. The night before, a Japanese Kamikaze attack had been made against the airstrip. Wrecked airplanes were strewn about. The enemy had used gliders to land their assault troops. Armed with satchel charges, they planted them liberally until cut down by our Marines.

While performing a post-flight inspection, only one hole was found in the number two engine despite all the rounds leveled at the PB4Y-1. A young marine named George Porter arrived with orders home in one hand and a Browning automatic rifle in the other hand. He pleaded with the PPC for a ride back to Clark Field, which John was happy to provide. In turn, the very pleased Marine stated he would sleep under the wing of the airplane to insure its safety until the morning's departure. The BAR would be a considerable asset in this instance.

George Porter, along with eight others heading for home, thought the flight to Luzon was just grand. This, even though the number two engine had to be shut down while in flight. That one round from the fleet that hit home did more damage than first believed.

After one more patrol John Burton and Crew Ten would change the slogan "Golden Gate by Forty-Eight" to "Back Alive in Forty-Five." After 55 combat missions, they had scored well and were still intact. The flight home was the best of all flights ever taken.

On May 29th a Japanese airline pilot made good his escape from a marauding PB4Y-1. Bittenbender made a 0123(I) takeoff in order to further disrupt the Formosa-Shanghai Shuttle. At 0720, while cruising above a cloud layer extending from 400' to 2000', the patrol plane crew sighted a Betty on their port beam, distance three miles. Bittenbender, at 5000', had a slight altitude advantage and immediately gave chase. The twin-engine bomber, now playing a transport role, dove for the clouds. When 500 yards from the Betty, Gene Montoux in the bow turret and Carl Everhart in the top turret, began firing. Each of the twin 0.50 caliber gunners expended 200 rounds and hits were seen in the port wing and fuselage. Now the enemy aircraft entered the top of the cloud layer and contact was lost. The PPC searched the area for 15 minutes but a visual sighting was not regained. Slight damage was claimed.

On May 30th Hagen had a short sector, 600 nmi, and expanded it by a tour up the Pearl River to Canton. Twenty miles southeast of the city, he sighted two hapless foes, a 40' motor launch and a 75-ton Sugar Puppy. Boldly attacking, two runs were made on the motor launch, dropping one 100# GP bomb and one incendiary cluster. The one IC was a direct hit and this, or the 600 rounds, caused the small vessel to explode. The small freighter was then the subject of four bombing and strafing runs. Again, one direct hit and/or 700 rounds set fire to the vessel and it burned to destruction.

Becker and Crew Twenty-One shot up one truck on the southern end of the Luichow Peninsula to the extent that it was considered destroyed. Then on the northern part of Hainan Island, they caught three trucks and damaged them with 800 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition. So ended the slim pickings for May 1945.

During the month of May, the squadron had flown 142 patrol missions totaling 1482 flight hours. In addition there were 30 test, logistics, and ferry flights totaling 70 hours.

A goodly amount of ordnance had been expended; 140,600 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammo, 315 100# bombs, 60 250# bombs, 4 500# bombs, and 59 100# incendiary clusters.

All of the above for sparse results in the way of hurt to the enemy. Thirty-one vessels had been sunk, the largest being a 300-ton Sugar Charlie (classed as an SC because of the steel construction). The rest of the sinkings had been small craft. It all totaled only 1524 tons. Damage to small craft totaled seven for only 410 tons.

And there was not much in scoring against enemy aircraft; two damaged in the air and one sunk along with its barge.

We did compete with the USAAC for rolling stock and structures ashore. A considerable number of blockhouses, buildings, barracks, radio/radar stations, and factories were destroyed or damaged. A large number of trucks, automobiles, buses, trains, and even one motorcycle were destroyed or damaged.

We had taken personnel losses of one complete crew of eleven men and three from another crew killed in action.

The following PB4Y-1 aircraft were lost this month as follows; BuNos 38869, 38879, 38870, 38875, and 38890. However, the inflow from the Wing Pool was prompt. These aircraft BuNos were; 46725, 38872, 38890, 38806, and 65921. BuNo 38890 survived only four days with the squadron. The first of the far better patrol planes, a Privateer, was received as a replacement, PB4Y-2, BuNo 56574.

A total of six relief flight crews reported on board during May and the "old hands" began the trip home. In addition to Malloy and Crew Twenty-Five, the following relief crews reported on board:

Lt. Thomas G. McAuliff
Ens. Stanley P. Kroczyk
Ens. Lyle H. Sette
Baxter, Thomas D. ARM1c
Brands, Fred A. AOM3c
Harrison, William H. S1c
Kusenda, Milan AMM3c
Long, Donald J. ARM3c
Park, Rex O. AMM2c
Sundberg, Warren J. AMM2c
O'Malley, Joseph R. AOM3c
Van Gorden, Harold W. S1c

Lt.(jg) James H. Thoburn
Ens. Dewey G. McDonald
Ens. William H. Seybold
Wilcox, Glenn E. AMM1c
Chauinard, Gene AMM3c
Driscoll, Frank J. ARM2c
Gaudry, Byron A. ARM3c
Villa, Wilfred AOM1c
Hahn, Joseph W. S1c
Murr, Paul K. AOM3c
McKinney, Robert W. S1c

Woodard, Billy L. ARM3c

Lt.(jg) William G. Bloxham
Ens. Raymond E. Smith
Ens. Thomas M. Donaldson
Walsworth, Marvin A. AMM2c
Welch, Howard G. AMM3c
Fennel, Wilbur M. ARM3c
Hammon, Bill Jean ARM3c
Johnson, James J. AOM2c
Smead, Frederick A. AOM3c
Nelson, John O. S1c
Seaborg, George Allen ARM3c
Forrest, Allan P. S1c

Lt. James H. McGee
Ens. Jack C. Hanna
Ens. Warren K. Pera
Burton, John Clinard AMM3c
Feigel, Harold William AMM3c
Antley, Thomas Raysor ARM2c
Buettgenbach, Robert ARM3c
Allen, Herbert Lewis AOM3c
Gray, Glenn Clifton AFC3c
Prudhomme, Jerome Arthur ARM2c
Hight, William Rogers AMM3c
Allison, Charles Carson S1c

LCdr. William Cole
Lt. William Henry Runge, Jr.
Ens. Ray Wertz Roberts
MacGowan, Frank D. ACMM
Wyeth, Donald Roger AMM3c
Morrissey, William Bernard Jr. ARM2c
Moore, William Patrick ARM3c
Burns, James Philip AOM1c
Koren, Edwin Eugene AOM2c
Pianko, Theodore AMMF3c
Valenzuela, Anaoleto S1c
Crawford, Walter E. S1c

As these relief crews arrived the "drawings" continued to be held. The attention and eagerness to have the last number in the hat did not diminish. And the flow of the homeward-bound Screamers began and would continue into July. But the war would continue and VPB-104 would operate from Clark Field until the surrender in Tokyo Bay.

EPILOGUE

On May 31, 1945, LCdr. Whitney Wright was relieved of the Command of VPB-104 by LCdr. William Cole. However, this was not the end of his activities in the far reaches of the Pacific. On June 2nd he flew a patrol and destroyed four barges. Both he and Copilot Joe Fisher received minor lacerations from return gunfire. Whit asked that the Wing Commander not initiate procedures for the award of a Purple Heart. Doc Jones ignored this, much to the embarrassment of Wright. Two days later Wright flew a flight to Palawan, returning the same day to Clark Field. Most likely this was a liaison trip for ComFAW-17. LCdr. Whitney Wright, USN, flew his last combat patrol on June 7, 1945, in PB4Y-1, BuNo 65291. He was assigned sector 20A logging 12.9 hours and made a final kill of one Sugar Dog. It had been a long war since his first combat action on the night of June 25/26, 1942. On this night he had conducted a bombing attack upon Tulagi, Soloman Islands, flying PBY-5, BuNo 2327. It had been a 15.4 hour mission.

As a final chore Wright and his crew were assigned a goodwill mission. On June 9th they departed Clark Field and arrived Sydney, Australia, on June 13, 1945. For ten days they spread their goodwill and many charms around for the amusement of the citizens of that great city. After this difficult and exhausting duty, they returned to Clark Field, arriving on June 27th. On July 1, 1945, Crew One of Bombing 104 departed for the United States.

I cannot complete this story without offering a comment regarding the use of the atomic bomb which brought the Japanese to the surrender table aboard the USS *Missouri*. There have been a considerable number of observations that deplore the use of this weapon. But make no mistake, the Japanese military leaders were determined to extract the maximum numbers of casualties should the invasion have taken place. Their purpose was to gain the most favorable terms from the surrender document. Be very sure about this. They were prepared to sacrifice thousands upon thousands of Japanese lives to obtain their purpose. The losses of American lives also would have been horrendous.

We were mistaken in the method and process of awarding decorations to the Squadron personnel. Most certainly the selection of individual flight crew actions and personal acts of bravery should have been the criterion. Unfortunately, we simply did not have sufficient administrative and clerical staff to do this properly. Ultimately, we followed the long-criticized system employed by the USAAC. There were some individual awards made, but there should have been far more. Well after the end of hostilities, Distinguished Flying Crosses and Air Medals were awarded to the flight crews based upon the number of missions flown. Of some considerable satisfaction, the Squadron was awarded a second Presidential Unit Citation, the only U.S. Naval Aviation Unit to be so recognized during WW II.

Returning to the United States was in itself just grand. The flight crew's release for the next assignment and 30-days leave was sweetened by the receipt of a full-sized wad of

money. Just prior to our departure from Kaneohe for the combat zone, Wright called a meeting of all crewmen. Among other things, he stated that despite the hardships and many discomforts of the South Pacific, be of good cheer and disposition, for in the end and many years later, "You will look back on this as the happiest days of your life." How true. He also asked all the men to agree to draw no more than \$15.00 each month from their pay accounts, leaving the balance remaining "on the books" to be cashed-in upon return to the States. To a man, they all agreed. Whit's purpose was to eliminate gambling while in the forward combat area. A very good stroke!

Our travel back to the West Coast began via the Naval Air Transport Service in PB2Y-3 Coronado flying boats to Pearl Harbor or Kaneohe. Then, by and large, we traveled by surface transportation. There were some minor irritations en route. However, while these may have been minor for most, they were critical for John Freeman who was escorting the lovely Putt Putt home. John placed the little dog in a carry-on zip-up bag, leaving a small opening for her nose. Generally, he was successful in eluding the bureaucrats of the Customs, Immigration, and NATS boarding officers. At one stop en route, it was necessary for several of the One-Oh-Four crew to intimidate, with the threat of bodily harm, a NATS minor flunky. However, when boarding a USS transport ship, it was a different story. Officers of the Deck are not easily tricked nor threatened. John's recourse was to go right to the Commanding Officer. After being presented with Putt Putt's combat record with Crew Ten, he granted permission for this veteran of many battles to come aboard. Putt Putt was to live a long and happy life with John's family. She was quite a lady. After all, she was from Hollywood.

The men of the Squadron have lived the good life. All have been successful in their chosen careers, both in the Navy and in civilian pursuits. We have held many reunions and the war stories improve with every telling. The first was held in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1963 and it was a men-only affair. It was a riot! Soon the ladies joined in and even some of the men's mothers who had been so gracious and helpful during the San Diego training periods. The reunions are now even more of a family affair. Prized grandchildren are displayed with great pride. We consider all of our spouses as "trophy wives."

At our reunion in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1993 we celebrated the Fiftieth Year of the Commissioning of Bombing Squadron 104. Vice Admiral Harry E. Sears, the first Commanding Officer, gave the address and it struck deep into our hearts. His words were so fitting for the occasion. We are forever blessed with the leadership and devotion to duty of Harry Sears and Whitney Wright.

On April 13, 1995, at NAS Jacksonville, Florida, Patrol Squadron Twenty Four was decommissioned. For 52 years Bombing 104 had operating a variety of airplanes under several squadron designations in the defense of our country. The Squadron had excelled in its performance of duty over this entire period. It had been awarded two Presidential Unit Citations, two Navy Unit Commendations, five Meritorious Unit commendations, and two Battle "E" awards. About 40 members of the WW II years, with their wives and other

family members, attended the decommissioning ceremony as honored guests. It was a very proud day for all attendees but somewhat sad. A fine Squadron was laid to rest.

On May 15, 1997, a ceremony was held at Arlington National Cemetery by the World War Two veterans of Bombing 104. Norman Baxter and Earl Henning initiated the action and took the steps necessary to make up a plaque in memory of those lost in combat during WW II. A red oak tree was planted to provide a base for the plaque and lend to the beauty of the memorial. Vice Admiral Sears and his family attended the dedication.



Whitney Wright died on December 21, 1994. He was laid to rest at Boothbay Harbor, Maine, his home of choice and a state he loved.

The world and our nation have changed a great deal during the past fifty years. The men of Bombing 104 have not.

APPENDIX I

**TOP SECRET
ULTRA**

15 March 1945

**TO: General Whitehead
FROM: General Hutchinson**

Deliver following message to Gen Whitehead only and acknowledge delivery to him:

Message states important Vice-Admiral to depart Sourabaya for Singapore at 1200I, 14 March in 4-engines Emily destination Keeling. Depart Singapore for Saigon 1200I, 15 March. Depart Saigon for Sama(Hainan Island) 1200I, 16 March. Depart Sama for Keelung 1100I, 17 Mar. Most necessary security reasons source of information not relayed to anyone. Past experience under similar circumstances when message intercepted of scheduled flight Jap Admiral Yamamoto proved disastrous. Allied pilots in radio breach while waiting for Admiral's plane, gave Jap tip-off on compromise their codes. Jap Naval code changed immediately resulting in 4-months silence Jap Naval messages. Suggest matter be handled by unsuspecting fighter sweep based on estimated ETA or takeoff time and that no attack unless all security precautions to insure no tip-off to Jap regarding source this information. Vice-Admiral not worth loss of code.

Note: The making of an exact copy of this document is forbidden.

APPENDIX II

COMMAND FILE
WORLD WAR II

COMMAND FILE - WW II

IN REPLY
REFER TO:
AS-3(5)/JIN

U.S. NAVAL UNIT
HEADQUARTERS, FOURTEENTH AIR FORCE
APO SET, POSTOFFICE, NEW YORK

Serial: 01240

19 May 1945

DECLASSIFIED

From: The Commander, U.S. Naval Unit, 14th Air Force.
To: The Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet.

Subject: Four-Engine Japanese Seaplane which crashed near
HAIMEN, CHINA, 17 March 1945 - forwarding of
report on.

Enclosure: (A) This Unit's Secret Memorandum on subject
incident, dated 16 May 1945.

1. The Commander, Fleet Air Wing 17, has expressed
an interest in receiving all possible information concerning
subject plane. Accordingly, Enclosure (A) is forwarded for
information and retention. These reports were prepared by
Lieutenant Frank Balsley, USNR, of this Unit, who was in the
HAIMEN area at the time of subject incident.

2. All subsequent data on this matter will be
forwarded immediately upon receipt.

S.S. Savage
S.S. Savage.

cc: ComAir7thFleet
ComFairWing 17
ComNavGrChina

DECLASSIFIED - OPNAV INST 650.10
DATE 3-21-60

Folder: "U.S.A.A.F. FOURTEENTH AIR FORCE memo "Japanese Seaplane Crash 19 May 1945"

Box: "177" "WW II CF
NON NAVY

USAAF XXI BOMBER COMMAND

USAAF SQUADRONS"

WORLD WAR II COMMAND FILE

OPERATIONAL ARCHIVES

Com 7th Fleet 5-16-45 4533 JIN H-3 JIN 1-1-45

IN REPLY
REFER TO:
AS-3(5)/JEM

U.S. NAVAL UNIT
HEADQUARTERS, FOURTEENTH AIR FORCE
A.P.O. 627, POSTOFFICE, NEW YORK

DECLASSIFIED

18 May 1945

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Four-Engine Japanese Seaplane which crashed near
HAINEN, CHINA, 17 March 1945.

1. The information presented below was forwarded to this Unit by Lieutenant Frank Balsley, USNR, who was in the HAINEN area at the time of subject incident. It is felt the report can be evaluated as Baker-Two.

2. From a report dated 22 March 1945:

"The Jap Admiral episode has occupied much of my time lately. The picture is still confused but roughly reconstructed this is what happened:

"At about 1500 on 17 March a large four-engine Jap seaplane, No. 92 of the Fourth Fleet, dropped down over Hainen, circled and landed on the river. From subsequent information it was learned that this plane had come from Seerabaja to Singapore to Saigon to Hainan and was enroute to Shanghai. When about sixty miles from Shanghai, it was attacked by American aircraft with the result that one engine was shot out and the pilot turned back and travelled South with the intention of landing in Ningpo or Wanchow to make repairs. Mistaking the Hainen river for the river at Wanchow, he landed and taxied to a point on the river bank about three miles above Hainen. Some of the Japs got out to inquire as to their whereabouts and some Chinese soldiers were rushed to the scene. A melee ensued which resulted in the burning of the plane, the escape of about twenty Japs, the massacre of about eight and burning of three.

"From best reports now there were 33 persons in the plane including 11 crew members and twenty-two passengers. The passengers were six officers, eleven non-commissioned officers and five civilians. The senior officer, of course, was Vice-Admiral Yamagata Seike, recently relieved of his command of the Fourth Fleet and enroute Japan for new job. Another name we found was that of Captain Nagaru Keku of the Jap Navy, apparently on the staff of the Admiral. There was, in addition, a Colonel Hala, who had just left an outfit in Amboina NEI. All these men are believed to have been killed during the melee.

- 1 -

Enc. (A)

DECLASSIFIED

16 May 1945

Subject: Four-Engine Japanese Seaplane which crashed near
HAIMEN, CHINA, 17 March 1945, (cont'd).

"Five prisoners were taken the first day and were rushed via Linhai to Yunko to get them out of the area as soon as possible. They were:

Fukuda Hiro	20 yrs.	Corporal, Naval Aviation
Norihito	48 "	Navy Lt., Doctor
Tanikuochi	23 "	Navy seaman
Fukuchima	23 "	Civilian clerk
Isiraki Sahi		Seaman, crew member

"In the four or five days since the plane's landing, sixteen Japs have been caught in the surrounding hills and shot to death. No other prisoners have been taken.

"The day following the landing, March 18th at 1000, two Japanese gunboats and a 4000-ton transport came from the South and made an attempt to recover the plane and passengers. Barges were lowered from the transport and sailed up the river. The Chinese mustered about two thousand troops and gave them considerable small arms opposition from shore. Four Japanese planes joined in the search but neither the ships nor the planes were able to find the seaplane as it had been sunk and covered with dirt and straw by the Chinese. In the evening an American plane came on the scene and the Japs withdrew. A later report said that the transport was sunk by an American plane near Do Chen Island at about 1700 that evening. There has been no further reprisal but Chinese authorities are ready to evacuate from Haimen and Linhai at a moment's notice.

"Incidentally, we don't know what kind of an American plane it was which attacked this Jap plane as we haven't seen it yet. From all descriptions it sounds like a gigantic Flying Wombat!"

3. From a report dated 23 March 1945:

"One of our employees, who was on the scene when the Jap plane first came down reports that the Jap crew members said they had met an American B-24 which fired on them getting several hits on one or two engines. This damage definitely caused them to make the forced landing. As to where the action took place it is not entirely clear but it appears from several interrogations that it was shortly before they arrived Shanghai and that the Jap turned back to land here (near HAIMEN).

AS-3/(5)/JIR

DECLASSIFIED

18 May 1945

Subject: Four-Engine Japanese Seaplane which crashed near
HAIKOW, CHINA, 17 March 1945, (cont'd).

"The number, names and ranks of the people on the plane are very confused and probably never will be straightened out. One version says 16 officers, mostly Navy including the Admiral, seven captains, two Commodores, two Lieutenant Commanders, two Lieutenants, and two Lieutenants (jg). Many of them removed clothes to swim the river and were later shot by the local constables so we'll probably never know their rank except by their gold teeth."


S.S. Savage.

APPENDIX III

Bryan Moon Expedition, Lin Hai, April 1994 Report of Side Trip to Haiman, China

An interesting morning. Chris is not feeling very chipper this AM but still going. We had breakfast at 7:30 and then proceeded to look for airplane tickets to Shanghai. Still no tickets and I believe we will end up driving to Ningbo. That is second however to the things at hand.

Went back to the old city to see what the effects of the sign had been. At the present time we are the center of attraction and the biggest thing to happen in this part of China in a long time. Every one is aware of the two Americans and what they are trying to do. Help is coming from a lot of directions, much of it of questionable value, but sincere, nevertheless.

Met with older Gentleman, who is 69 years old and lived here all of his life. His story is fascinating and aligns with the article I read, with some minor deviations, and some interesting additions. According to his story, the Japanese airplane circled several times and the allied airplanes were overhead and watching it, knowing it could not go any further. He further supported the idea the Japanese airplane was hit by ground fire from the Chinese locals, and that it was in bad condition. After the airplane landed, it floated ashore in the same place as was earlier identified. A Japanese man by the name of Tong then got out of the airplane and asked for an anchor to hold the plane. He told the local people that after liberation the anchor would be returned and that they were duty bound to help him. The story indicates he was passing himself and the airplane off as Chinese or as allies. Meanwhile the Japanese in airplane had moved a machine gun into a door and it was trained on the crowd indicated that these people were not allies but were enemy because of the rising sun symbol on the side of the airplane. However, the locals agreed to procure an anchor, and at that time the Japanese then removed the machine gun from the door. Shortly after, the Chinese militia came on the scene and told the locals to depart rapidly and head for cover. As they left for cover a battle began between the Chinese Militia and the Japanese on the plane. The initial effects of the battle was not covered, but evidently there was a lull in the fighting and during this lull someone, Chinese, decided to storm the airplane. An unarmed Chinese man evidently then ran through the mud to the airplane and climbed a rope that was hanging from a window (possibly the one used by Mr. Tong) up to a window. When he reached the window, a Japanese attempted to cut his throat with a sword, but he did not kill the Chinese man and he slipped back down the rope. Meanwhile the Japanese soldier also came down the rope and proceeded to chase the Chinese man through the muck. Due to the muck and the fact that the Chinese man was in shorts and bare feet and the Japanese man was in high boots and long pants, the Chinese outran him in the muck. As soon as the Chinese man got back to the bank he yelled at the locals and said why don't you kill that Japanese. He is trying to kill me. At that point the locals shot the Japanese at point blank range. The man who had been injured then grabbed the sword from the hand of the Japanese who was shot and plunged the sword into the Japanese body. At that point three more Japanese had come out of the plane and they were massacred on the

spot by the locals. Then evidently things slowed down for a while, after which a group of Japanese attempted to leave the plane and they were all killed. At that point the airplane caught fire from the inside and started burning. Meanwhile three Japanese had escaped from the plane and were hiding in a building very close to the home #57 where our man lives. These Japanese were captured the next day and were either killed or killed themselves by beating their own heads on rocks.

Ten or eleven other Japanese escaped from the aircraft on the river side wearing life jackets, crossed the river and escaped into the hills. They were without food and water and several of them were wounded. The following day, tired, hungry, etc and probably a bit depressed, they talked to an older Chinese Gentleman and asked him if he would please get some food for them. They gave him a watch or several watches, all on chains in a good faith gesture hoping he would bring food and not turn them in. Bad decision on their part. He returned to the village and immediately notified the authorities who in turn, went into the hill on the far side and captured the Japanese. They were returned to the local area and the locals wanted to kill them, but someone in authority finally convinced them to turn the Japanese over to the proper people and they (the prisoners) were then transported to Lin Hai and that is all that is known about them.

The following day, fearing reprisals, it was decided that the burned out remnants of the aircraft should be camouflaged to preclude them being identified from the air by Japanese flying forces. Two barges were floated down by the burned out plane and matting was stretched between the barges to cover the hulk. Meanwhile, the Japanese thinking this whole saga had occurred up country, several hundred miles at another river, took revenge and bombed the area unmercifully, not realizing they were in the wrong location (local discussions do not cover details of a Japanese vessel weighing 4000 tons coming into the mouth of the river and attempting to recover the aircraft).

From here we go to distribution of the materials from the bird. Locals all agree that a lot of the aircraft was cut up and used locally for a multitude of things. At the time money and materials were scarce and this was sort of a gift from the gods in the air. I have heard a lot of tales about the destruction of the bird but few of them have actually made a lot of sense and none of them have come from first hand knowledge.

Today the story goes that the KMT (Nationalist Chinese Government) was responsible for removing the engines from the bird (it had four 1850 HP Mitsubishi radials). At this time these were like gold, due to the condition of parts, airplanes, motors, etc in China (bear in mind this was when Chang Chi Chek was still in power). The upper part of the fuselage, which was burnt out, was salvaged, in pieces by the local Chinese. As time went on, they also salvaged the wings, as pieces, the nose, and vertical stab, along with the horizontal stab, as pieces and as much of the fuselage as possible, a piece at a time. While I have heard the story that an attempt was made to remove the whole thing (fuselage and pontoons, along with the bottom part of the fuselage, and that it was almost out when it slipped and went back to the bottom of the channel). I believe the story today is more logical than any of the others, and it does come from first hand knowledge: not a hand me down for 2 or 3

generations. The words today were the only thing remaining is the bottom part of the fuselage and maybe the pontoons and that they are probably in at least 7 meters of mud. After our probing seance, I can go along with this.

Points to remember.

The time of the landing was about 2 or 3 in the afternoon. The time of looking for an anchor was shortly after they ended up in the mud. The first battle took place about 4 or so. The major battle took place about six PM. The Japanese who escaped on the back side obviously did it after about 7:30 or 8, however it may have been earlier if their escape was covered by the fire. The fire must have occurred about six or six-thirty. The locals did not intend to show any mercy.

May 9, 1994, afternoon

Yesterday ended with out finally getting the piece from the Japanese plane. After a number of trips and a few other things it was finally purchased for 13,000 yuan, which was probably more than it was worth, but at least we got it. Additional symbols were found on it that may be a manufacturer mark. We will have to get some help on this one. The day ended about midnight and none too soon for we had a 4:30 wake up. The evening was spent shopping for some more souvenirs, computing ills and prepared for departure. Today we left at 5:00 AM from the airport and drove into town where Mr. Yu and the driver had breakfast. We began our journey to Ningbo at about 5:30 and it was an interesting drive.

APPENDIX IV

GLOSSARY

Abbreviations

AAR	Aircraft Action Reports
AA	Anti-Aircraft
ACIO	Air Combat Intelligence Officer
API	Armor Piercing Incendiary Bullets
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
AvGas	Aviation Gasoline
BOQ	Bachelor Officer Quarters
BuNo	Bureau of Aeronautics Number
CW	Continous Wave (keyed transmissions)
ECM	Electronics Counter Measure
FAW	Fleet Air Wing
G.P.	General Purpose
HF	High Frequency (radio band)
HedRon	Headquarters Squadron
(I)	"India" Time Zone +9
KIA	Killed In Action
KIAS	Knots Indicated Air Speed
Link Trainer	Simulator Instrument Trainer
MAP	Manifold Pressure
MIA	Missing In Action
NAAS	Naval Auxiliary Air Station
NAS	Naval Air Station
nmi	nautical miles
PBY	Catalina Flying Boat
PB4Y-2	Second Model PB4Y-1 (single tail)
Plane Captain	Senior Flight Crew Mechanic
PATSU	Patrol Aircraft Servicing Unit
Quonset Hut	Permanent Structure
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
R&R	Rest and Recreation
RPM	Revolutions Per Minute
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
Sector/Patrol	Area to be searched
USAAC	U.S. Army Air Corps
VB	Bombing Squadron
VHF	Very High Frequency (voice radio)
VP	Patrol Squadron
VPB	Patrol Bombing Squadron
War-weary (Aircraft)	Over-aged (too long in the combat zone)

Combat Ships

CV	Aircraft Carrier
CVL	Aircraft Carrier Light
CVE	Aircraft Carrier Escort
BB	Battleship
CA	Heavy Cruiser (eight-inch guns)
CL	Light Cruiser (six-inch guns)
DD	Destroyer
DE	Destroyer Escort
PC	Patrol Craft
PG	Gun Boat
MTB	Motor Torpedo Boat (PT boat)
Armed Trawler	Converted Trawler (steel hull)
Picket Boat	Early Warning Boat (outpost vessel)

Japanese Auxiliary Ships

TA	Transport 9,000 to 12,000 tons
TB	Transport 7,000 to 8,000 tons
FTA	Freighter-Transport 7,000 to 8,500 tons
FTB	Freighter-Transport 5,500 to 7,000 tons
FTC	Freighter-Transport 2,000 to 4,500 tons
FTD	Freighter-Transport 1,000 to 1,500 tons
SA (Two Stack)	Tanker 40,000 tons
SA	Tanker 7,000 to 10,000 tons
SB	Tanker 1,500 to 7,500 tons
SC (L)	Tanker or Freighter 1,500 tons
SC	Tanker or Freighter 500 to 1000 tons
SD (wooden hull)	Coastal Freighter 100 to 400 tons
Sugar Puppies (wooden hull):	Coastal Freighter under 100 tons
Luggers, landing craft and barges	Usually open hull and engines aft
Riverboats (wooden hull)	Inland Waters Transport 50 to 500 tons

Japanese Aircraft

Betty	Navy Type I Attack Bomber (twin engine)
Claude	Navy Type 96 Carrier Fighter
Dave	Navy Type 95 Recco Plane
Dinah	Army Type 100 Recco Plane (twin engine)
Emily	Navy Type 2 Flying Boat (four engine)
Frances	Navy Night Fighter (twin engine)
Frank	Army Type 4 Fighter (high performance)
George	Navy Interceptor Fighter (high performance)

Hamp
Irving
Jack
Jake
Jill
Judy
Kate
Mavis
Myrt
Nate
Nell
Nick
Oscar
Paul
Pete
Rufe
Sally
Tabby
Tess
Thelma
Tojo
Tony
Topsy
Val
Zeke

Navy Type 0 Carrier Fighter
Navy Night Fighter (twin engine)
Navy Interceptor Fighter (high performance)
Navy Type 0 Recco Seaplane
Navy Type 2 Carrier Recco Plane
Navy Type 2 Carrier Recco Bomber Plane
Navy Type 97 Carrier Attack Bomber
Navy Type 97 Flying Boat (four engine)
Navy Carrier Recco Plane
Army Type 97 Fighter
Navy Type 96 Attack Bomber (twin engine)
Army Type 2 two-seat Fighter (twin engine)
Army Type 1 Fighter
Navy Recco Seaplane
Navy Type 0 Observation Seaplane
Navy Type 2 Fighter Seaplane
Army Type 97 Bomber (twin engine)
Navy Type 0 Transport (Douglas L2D)
Douglas DC-2
Lockheed Fourteen
Army Type 2 Fighter
Army type 3 Fighter
Army type 100 Transport
Navy type 99 Carrier Dive Bomber
Navy Type 0 Carrier Fighter

Anti-Aircraft Classifications

Size

Heavy	3 to 5 inch bore
Medium	20 to 40 mm
Light	7.7 to 12.7 mm

Volume

Intense	Continuous Firing
Moderate	Breaks in Firing
Light	Sporadic Firing

**APPENDIX V
SCORE**

SCREAMING ONE "O" FOUR RECORD

(6 November 1944 — 30 April 1945)

Combat Patrol Missions 1,026
Hours on Patrol Missions 11,890
Total Hours in War Zone 12,899

PERSONNEL LOSSES

Killed or Missing 54
Seriously wounded 18
Sustained Minor Injuries 18

PLANES IN AIR

Destroyed 38
Probably Destroyed 12
Damaged 21

DESTROYED	PROBABLY DESTROYED	DAMAGED
2 Sallys		2 Bettys
4 Toppys	5 Oscars	4 Oscars
2 Bettys	1 Tony	2 Franks
7 Jules	1 Mick	2 Jules
1 Paul	1 Betty	1 Sally
1 Frank	2 Zelas	1 Topsy
5 Vals	1 Pete	2 Tonys
1 Jill		5 Vals
1 Emily		1 Zela
2 Nells		1 Pete
3 Zelas		
1 Kate		
1 Dove		
1 Mavis		
1 Tabby		
1 Tess		
1 Tony		
1 Pete		

PLANES ON GROUND

Destroyed 11
Probably Destroyed 2
Damaged 13

DESTROYED	PROBABLY DESTROYED	DAMAGED
1 Dinah		5 Oscars
1 Zela	1 Jake	2 Bettys
1 Kate	1 Pete	1 Dinah
1 Betty		2 Jules
3 Pates		2 Pates
3 Jules		1 Kate
1 Sally		

SHIPPING

Ships Sunk 362
Ships Damaged 249
Tonnage Sunk 82,000 tons
Tonnage Damaged 115,800 tons
Ship Sightings 758 Warships
Ship Sightings 4,357 Merchant Ships

SHIPS SUNK

2 Fox Tara Bakers	2 Pictol Boats
3 Fox Tara Charlies	3 Assault Boats
1 Fox Tara Uncle	18 Sea Trucks
1 Tara Uncle	2 Trawlers
1 Sugar Able	62 Luggers
2 Sugar Bakers	11 River Boats
30 Sugar Charlies	10 Berges
85 Sugar Dogs	5 Tugs
1 Gunboat	1 Motor Launch
3 Patrol Craft	1 Ferry
1 Escort Ship	1 Yacht
16 Landing Craft	

SHIPS DAMAGED

1 Battleship	1 Pictol Boat
1 Fox Baker	2 Patrol Craft
1 Tara Baker	25 Sea Trucks
1 Fox Tara Baker	65 Luggers
6 Fox Tara Charlies	4 Trawlers
2 Fox Tara Dogs	2 River Boats
2 Sugar Ables	7 Tugs
7 Sugar Bakers	6 Berges
25 Sugar Charlies	1 Powered Jant
94 Sugar Dogs	1 Salvage Vessel
10 Landing Craft	2 Power Launches
2 Assault Boats	

LAND TARGETS

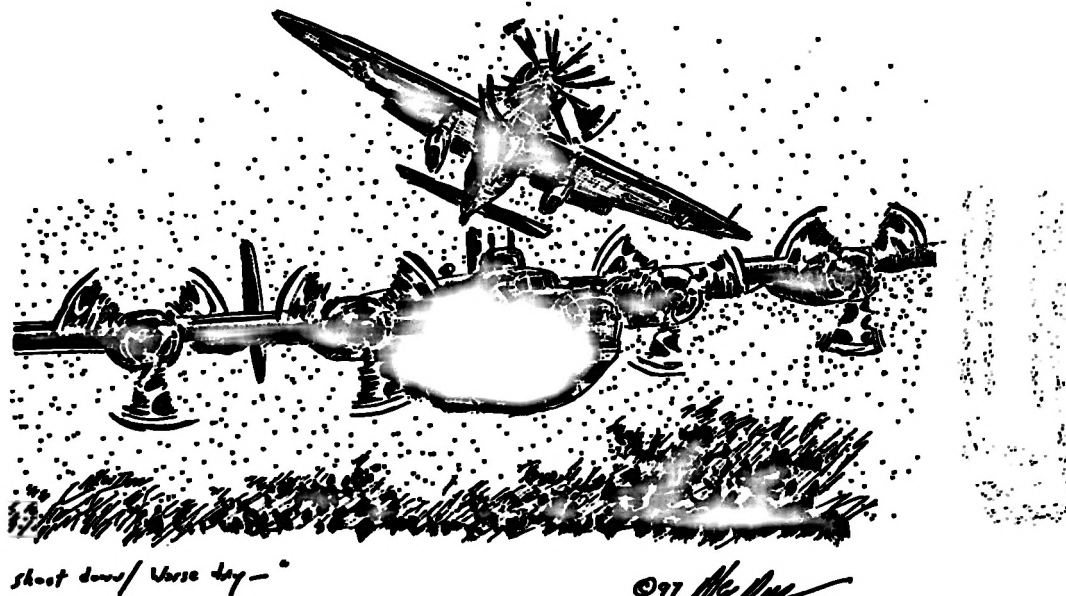
DESTROYED

2 Locomotives	1 Steam Roller
40 Trucks	2 Radar Stations
1 Automobile	8 Buildings
6 Block Houses	2 Oil Storage Tanks
1 [Small Forts]	1 Highway Bridge
7 Warehouses	10 Freight Cars
2 Airfield Buildings (Storage)	

DAMAGE—POSSIBLY DESTROYED

9 Warehouses	1 Oil Refinery
19 Block Houses	2 Airfields
8 Barracks	1 Factory
1 Railroad Station	1 Bridge
1 Power Plant	3 Buses
2 Military Camp Areas	3 Locomotives
6 Radar Stations	15 Freight Cars
4 Radio Stations	31 Trucks
1 Troop Train (6 car)	1 Mining Plant
8 Troop Trucks	

The Squadron shot down Thirty-Seven enemy aircraft and
GOT ONE BY RAMMING!



"The PB4Y normally flying unescorted single-plane long range searches, was one of the Navy's best fighter planes."

Naval Aviation Combat Statistics World War II
The official U.S Navy publication

LOW LEVEL LIBERATORS

Awarded the Presidential Unit Citation