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CHAPTER XV

NEW UNITS JOIN THE GROUP

Operations of the 38th entered the month of June with the first three days of the month entirely devoid of operations against the enemy. The outstanding event of the month for the Group was the addition of two new Squadrons - the 822nd and 823rd Bombardment Squadrons fresh over from the states. For the Allies, the landings on the Woodlark - Kiriwina Islands was probably the most outstanding event. These landings were carried out with very few casualties to the invading forces, and after meager resistance by the enemy the islands fell to the Allies. Once again, the island-hopping tactics of General Douglas MacArthur paid dividends by catching the enemy off guard.

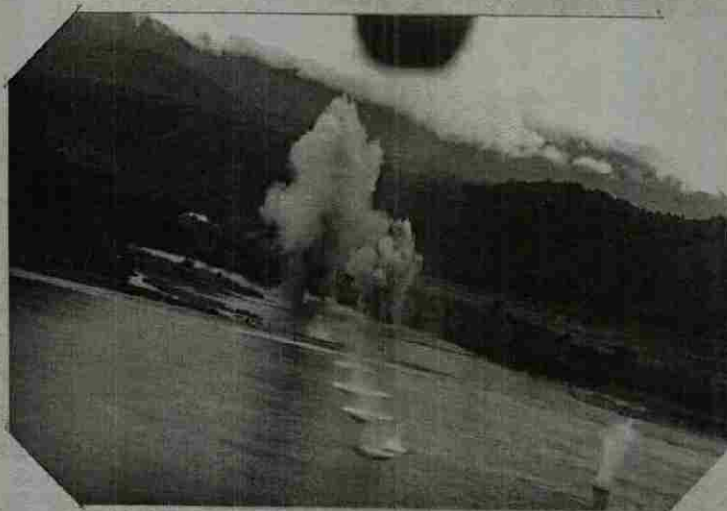
Operations actually got under way on the 4th but this was nothing more than the usual routine patrol. From the 4th to the 10th the ever-present patrol escort missions of friendly shipping to the Moresby Harbor occupied the time of the crews. On 9 June, Lieutenant General Kenney again visited the Group to present the men with Medals. After the ceremony General Kenney then complimented the entire group on its part against the enemy forces and the destruction of enemy installations and shipping. Numerous important events took place during these first ten days, but it was not until the 11th that the combat crews went into action.

The deadly Strafers of the 405th went into action on the 11th in an attack on the Nuk Nuk bridge and supply stores at Salamaua. Eight planes of the squadron started on this mission but one was forced to turn back due to engine trouble. Attacking the target at fifty to one hundred feet, the planes dropped a total of twenty-four 500 pound delayed action bombs in the assigned area - one direct hit and three near misses on the south end of the bridge carried out the purpose of the mission, while the other bombs which fell in the river mouth and along the shore near the Nuk Nuk Village helped to convince the natives and Japs that we meant business. During the entire bombing run, all of the planes strafed the buildings along the south side of the runway and Nuk Nuk Village; two of the planes made a strafing run of Kela Point, along the shore and across the peninsula. The ack ack encountered was fairly intense and accurate as to altitude but it was slightly behind the formation and none of the planes were damaged.

While the 405th was working over the Nuk Nuk vicinity from minimum altitude, the 71st paid a medium altitude visit to Kela Point at Salamaua. Coming over the target at 5000 feet, the formation dropped a total of thirty 500 pound bombs in the target area. Three of the bombs fell in the water but the remaining

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- Frisco River Bridge - Nuk Nuk -
Minimum altitude attack with
500 pound demolition bombs.



- Kela Point - Salamaua -
A pin-pointed target hit with
deadly accuracy from 5000 feet.

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twenty-seven bombs hit with deadly accuracy on the pin-pointed target. MacDonalds Junction continued to put up a moderate amount of medium and heavy ack ack, but in typical fashion, it was either ahead or behind the formation and none of the planes were damaged.

After being given a short taste of an attack mission, the 71st and 405th alternated for the next two days in the usual patrol mission. On the 14th, one plane of the 405th flew a radar check mission and on the 15th, one plane of the 71st was to have dropped supplies over Bena Bena but the mission was not completed because of inclement weather. The 16th saw the planes of the 71st and 405th participate in two missions; one was a reconnaissance by the 405th over the area from Lae to Madang for barges. Both of the missions were completed without interference from enemy aircraft or enemy ground fire. These missions were followed up on the 17th with a ten plane attack against the Madang area carried out by the 405th Squadron. Four of the planes dropped forty-eight 23 pound frag clusters on the town area while five of the planes dropped fifty-eight of the 'daisy-cutter' clusters on the runway and dispersal area - results of the bombing were unobserved. One plane was late in taking off and since he could not catch the formation, made a single strafing run on Kela Village and Weather Station at Salamaua. During the attack two of the planes received minor damage from ack ack fire but both returned to base safely. The next seven days were days of complete inactivity for the combat crews. About the only work performed was done by the ground crews on the line and the usual administrative duties. Mechanics and armament men worked on the ships, cleaning and checking them for any adjustments that might be necessary.

While the Group was carrying on combat activities against the Japanese in New Guinea, the wheels were grinding in the States and two new Units were in the process of being activated. April 1943 saw a group of men being assembled together for the purpose of forming shipment AB-490-C at the Atlantic City ORTC. As is usually the case in the newly assembled group of men, the rumors flew thick and fast. The realization that the days of training the good ole USA had ended, and now the purpose for which all had been straining arrived, the thoughts of all the men were directed to the future -- wondering where they would go, how, and if they would like the set-up. They concluded that they were going to the SWPA or to Panama, but on the other hand a POE on the East coast for a shipment to the tropics was somewhat mystifying.

On 9 May 1943, shipment AB-490-C left the Atlantic City Depot, for Camp Shanks, New York. During the ensuing trip the men of the shipment found that they were a rather heterogeneous group of individuals, comprised mainly of clerks, mechanics, radio men, armorers, and instrument specialists. At Camp Shanks the shipment was joined by additional men from the Overseas Replacement Depot

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at Kearns, Utah, and the Depot at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri; these men were known as shipment AB-490-AB. After all of these men had been gathered in the POE, a semblance of an organization was seen formed under the capable leadership of Lt. W. H. Binkley and Lt. Allen -- they were ably assisted by several of the enlisted men.

During the late afternoon of the 14th of May, the two shipments boarded a ferry to Staten Island. There the shipments remained until dusk at which time the men boarded two army transports: AB 490-C boarded the USAT Barry, and AB 490-AB boarded the USAT Henry Gibbins. At dawn of the fifteenth the two army transports, part of a convoy of four transports and five destroyers, slipped past the lady of freedom. Looking back, many experienced a light feeling in their stomachs and a lump in their throats, and no one was ashamed to admit that he hated to leave the Lady and all she stood for. On the other hand, each and every man realized that if he ever wanted to see the Statue of Liberty again - and have that statue mean the purpose for which it was intended, he must first do his part of the job. Whatever it might be, all felt that the job would be done, no matter how long it took, or how tough the road might be.

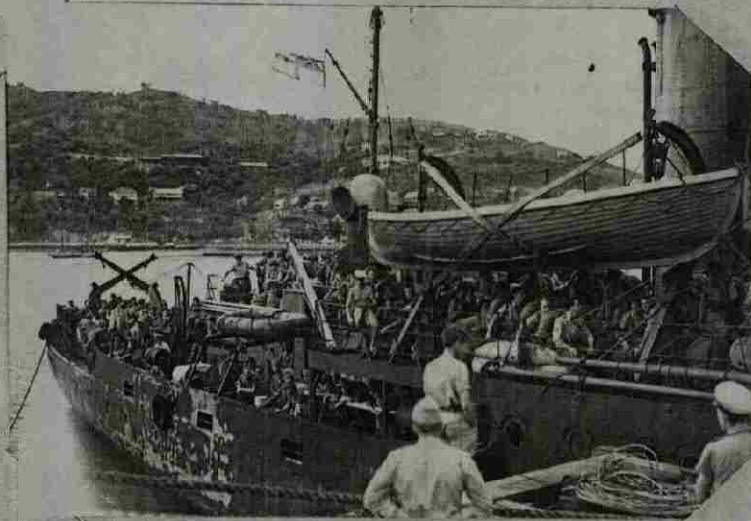
Soon the entire convoy lost sight of America and proceeded on a Southerly course, which was later changed to a southwesterly course, to enter the waters of the Carribean Sea. It was here that the U Boats of the German under-sea fleet pounced upon shipping destined for the European theater. With the escort of destroyers, Catalinas flying overhead and an occasional Blimp, the men had no fear of a submarine attack. Soon the famed Panama coastline was sighted; more planes flew overhead, destroyer escorts prowled thru the waters, and an occasional American submarine could be seen rising to the surface. The men were thrilled to see this sight of America Guarding such an important waterway and other military installations. The two ships stayed at Panama for four days, taking on fuel and provisions. Then on 24 May the two transports passed from sight of land - the last they were to see for three weeks. The trip itself was entirely uneventful - there was an alarm or two, but outside of the increasingly hot weather there was nothing unusual during the entire journey.

The ships sailed into the beautiful and colorful island, Bora Bora on 22 June - from there the convoy proceeded on to Brisbane and thence to Port Moresby, New Guinea. Immediately upon debarkation the men were loaded into trucks and transported to the Durand strip. There the men were introduced to their new first sergeant, Fred Ulmer, formerly of the 71st. After a short orientation talk the men were issued cots and mosquito bars, and then bedded down. The following day the men received the pleasant word that they were to be the nucleus of two new bombardment squadrons of the 38th Bombardment Group. Some of the men were transferred to the 405th and 71st, and the newly formed squadrons, the 822nd and

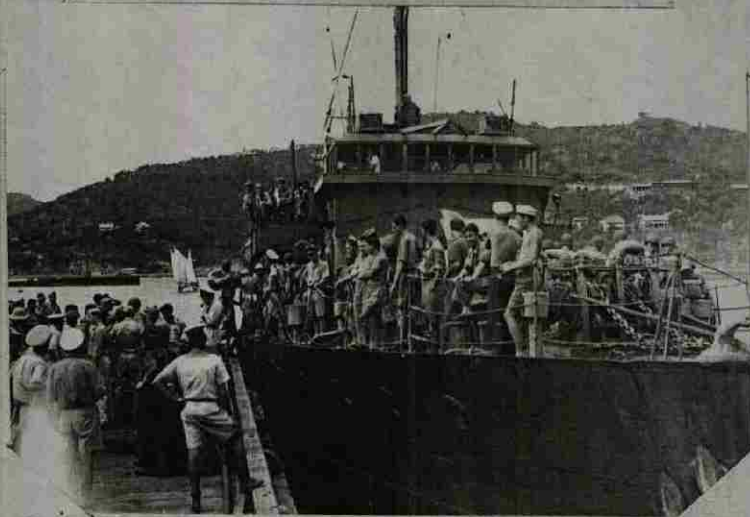
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the 823rd, received the older and experienced men. The commanding officers for the new organizations were Captain Barney Johnson of the 823rd and Major Krell of the 822nd. Thus were formed two new bombardment squadrons for the 38th, making it the first time that the group enjoyed the strength of four squadrons since the days when the 38th was a complete smooth working organization at the Jackson Army Air Base.



- The arrival at Port Moresby -



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- Roll Call -



- The "B" Bag came along -

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- These dam things are heavy -



- What's all the excitement -

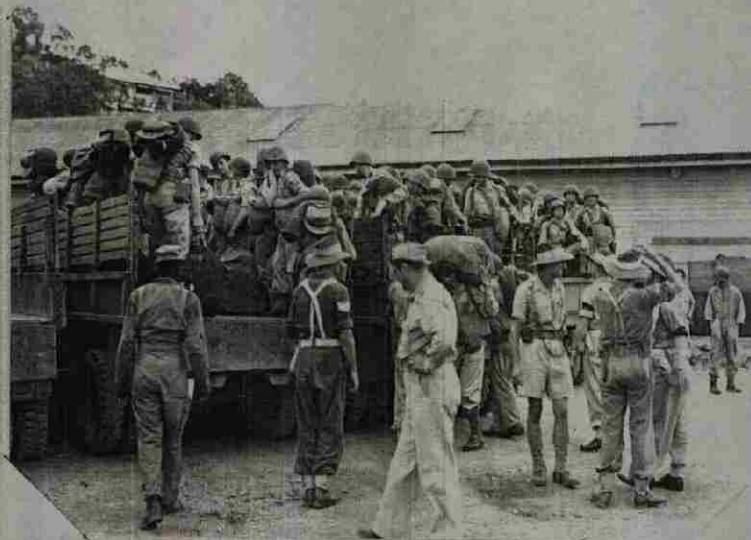
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- Where are they - let me at em -



- Durand Strip via GI truck -

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On Thursday, 24 June, ten planes of the 71st and seven of the 405th went into action again in an attack against the Salamaua and Logui area. This mission was the heaviest concentration of air power the Group had been able to put in the air for quite some time and the ill-fated targets selected were to find just what a concentration of planes could do. Planes of the 71st approached the target at heights from 1400 to 1700 feet, dropping thirty 500 pounders in Nuk Nuk and nine on Logui. Nuk Nuk was completely enveloped in heavy black smoke and debris, while heavy black and grey smoke fires were started in Logui. These facts were verified by the 405th personnel as they came in for the attack at the extremely low altitude of fifty feet; they dropped eleven 500 pound bombs on Nuk Nuk, thus turning the already smoking area below into a raging inferno of death for the enemy personnel. The 405th then proceeded to drop fourteen 500 pounders on the smoking Logui area. Here too, causing an already beat up target to throw sheet of flame high into the air and debris in all directions. During the entire run the "Green Dragons" strafed the area, giving special attention to the hangars and the wireless station -- machine gun positions at the north side of the runway were strafed. There was no interception by enemy aircraft -- enemy aircraft had not put in an appearance against the 38th for quite some time and personnel were beginning to wonder what had happened to the Japanese Air Force.

The mission of the 25th was a combination strike and armed recon -- "Hit Sepu and Glalogool Villages and targets of Opportunity" -- those were the orders. The now efficient low level bombers and strafers of the 405th skimmed over the target and dropped clusters of 23 pound "daisy cutters" in the Sepu Village area. One native hut was seen to disintegrate and at least three others were damaged. The three planes made eleven strafing passes over the village. Four of the planes directed their attention to Glalogool Village in sixteen bombing and strafing passes. Machine gun fire was encountered during the attack but this was quickly silenced by the strafers.

Twenty airplanes of the Group - ten from each squadron - took to the skies on the 26th in the greatest concentration of airpower the Group had been able to muster up to the present time. The strikes of the 38th were increasing in tempo and ferocity, and as the power of the 38th increased many members speculated on the power the group would have when the 822nd and 823rd squadrons went into operations. The Allied successes in North Africa, the invasions of Sicily and Salerno, the tremendous surging power of the Red Army, and the increase of power in the immediate realm of the 38th produced a tremendous air of confidence in the personnel of the Group, for now they realized that the tide of the war was changing from here on in it would be an Allied show, air power, sea power and man power. This twenty plane strike of the group could be regarded as a symbol of the growing powers of all Air Corps Units thru out the entire fighting front. The 71st came over the target

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at 1000 feet dropping one hundred and twenty 100 pound demo bombs on the assigned target, Lae airdrome and installations. The boys did a beautiful job of this medium altitude bombing and the bombs made a perfect pattern down the center of the runway. When the



- Lae Airdrome - perfect bombing -

71st had completed their run, the low flying strafers of the 405th came in for their attack. Ninety clusters of "daisy cutters" were spread out through the revetment area on both sides of the runway. In their usual style, the strafers sprayed the entire area as they made their bombing run. About all that could be seen of the target after the attack was dense clouds of heavy smoke. The ack ack was extremely intense and accurate -- it could be that the Emperor's men did not relish the pastings as of late. One plane of the 71st had an eighteen inch machine gun split in the rear of the fuselage and two small caliber holes in the tail surface, while still another had machine gun holes in the right wing and aileron. Four planes of the 405th were damaged by the anti-aircraft fire encountered; one had a machine gun hole in the fuselage near the tail gun position, another had a 20mm hole in the right vertical stabilizer, another with machine gun holes in the left elevator and stabilizer, and the fourth was forced to land at Kalamazoo because of the damage suffered. There was other minor shrapnel and machine gun damage but none of it was serious.

Striking deep into Japanese occupied territory, the 71st was assigned Dumpu Village while the 405th was given Kiaipit Vil-

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lage for targets on the 27th. The Native Village in the richly scenic Markham - Ramu Valley which was known to house large stores of Japanese supplies, was showered with sixty-one 100 pound wire-wrapped bombs and even though the results were generally unobserved by the crew members, the little village was seen to be going up in smoke as the planes withdrew from the area. The Japs were finding it hard to hang on to anything that was in range of the B-25's.



- Dumpu Village -
... A shortage of supplies coming up ...

The 405th came in at minimum altitude for their attack on Kaiapit. Clusters of parafrag bombs were dropped destroying one corrugated building which gave off huge clouds of black smoke, native huts in the vicinity were set afire, and one tin-roofed building was seen to have a three foot bomb hole in the roof after the attack.

The Nips had evidently not expected an attack on their Markham River installations for there was absolutely no anti-aircraft fire directed at the planes from either of the targets. It was evident too, that the Japs were in the area for just opposite Dumpu Village crew members sighted the personnel area of the Jap garrison - their khaki colored tents were hidden among the trees, twelve of them.

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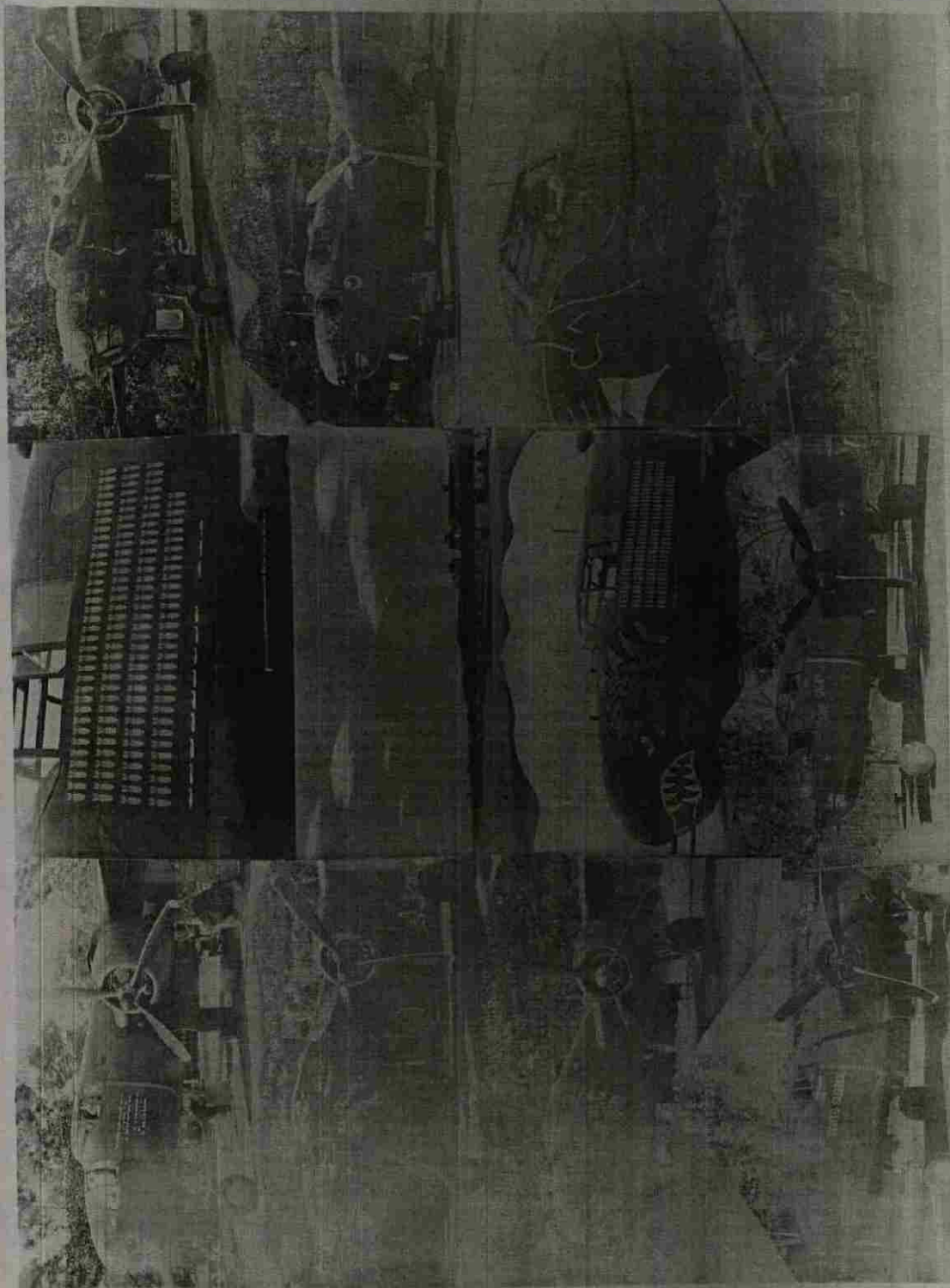
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The last mission of the month was an attack on Bobdubi. Eighteen planes were scheduled for the strike, but extremely bad weather forced the entire 405th squadron to turn back to the base, and three planes of the 71st were forced to turn back for the same reason. Breaking through the weather, four planes of the 71st did manage to hit the target and dropped thirty two 300 pound wire-wrapped bombs on Bobdubi Ridge. The results of these bombs were unobserved. One plane dropped eight of the wire-wrapped jobs on Salamaua Isthmus. Difficult weather prevented observation of the results but it was believed that one large and one small building in the vicinity of the tennis courts were hit. Four or five inaccurate bursts of ack ack was received from the Bobdubi Ridge and one plane received minor damage; however all planes returned to the base.

Thus another month of the war in the Pacific had passed and although none of the enemies planes or ships were destroyed by the Group during the month, his installations and airdromes on New Guinea were rendered ineffective for operations against the Allies. This job itself was just as important as any shipping could ever be, for without airfields to operate from the Japs could never offer any support to their hard pressed ground troops.

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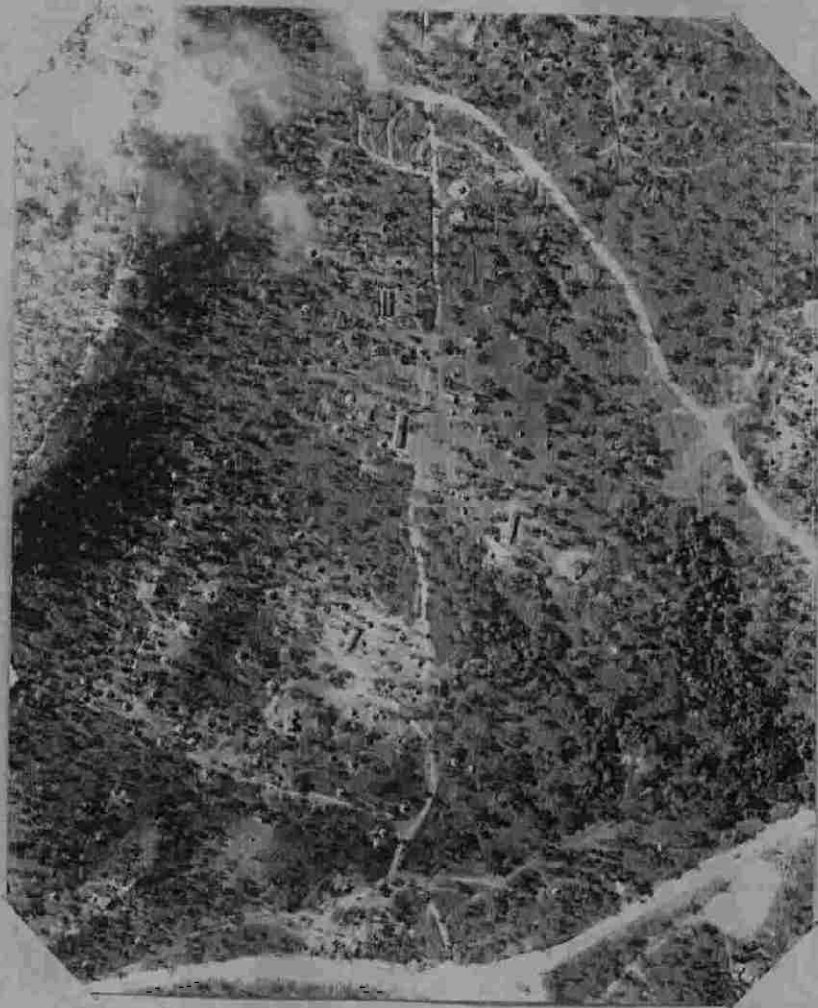
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CHAPTER XVI

THE 38TH GROWS



... 822nd and 823rd Bombardment Squadron Areas ...

The encampment at Durand for the past few months had increased tremendously in size and population. Since arrival in the Durand area, there had been a steady flow of new planes, new combat crews, and personnel to form two new squadrons. Although the flying echelon of the two new squadrons -- 822nd and 823rd -- were not present, all could feel that the 38th was growing rapidly. In the

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near future, the Group would be operating at full strength but this was not to happen during the month of July. The month offered new targets but still the routine patrols came often.

Getting off to a slow start, there was no mission on the first day of the month. However, on the second the usual SJY appeared on the list and one plane of the 405th, piloted by Lt. McCartney, was assigned the job. The mission called for the escorting a small ship and tug going to Milne Bay, but because of low visibility and low hanging clouds, the ships were not located. After several hours of searching, Lt. McCartney returned to base, then after two days of inactivity, another plane of the 405th participated in another of the search missions. On the 5th, a mission in strength was to be taken place against the Salamaua - Komiatum Track area, but shortly after the take off of the eighteen planes, V Bomber Command ordered the return to base of the nine 405th planes and three planes from the 71st. Thus, what was to have been a heavy strike against the designated target, turned out to be only a four plane attack on the enemy installations. One plane of the 405th dropped two 500 pounders - eight to ten second delay - and two 500 pounders - six hour delay in the target area across the track from Kennedy's crossing. The three planes of the 71st attacked from 3800 feet and dropped nine 1000 pounders on the southwest end of the runway. Results of the entire mission were unobserved.

Following the half-hearted attack on Salamaua, weather kept the planes grounded until the 7th when seven planes of the 405th again carried out an attack against Observation Hill. This attack was made in conjunction with eighty other planes from other Groups. The elements of the 405th came in over the target at heights from 250 to 300 feet and managed to drop fifty-six 300 pound wire-wrapped bombs in the target area the results of which were unobserved due to the thick foliage and the dust and smoke caused by previously attacking planes. Six or seven bursts of ack ack was reported, but this could have been the aerial burst bombs being used by the B-24's.

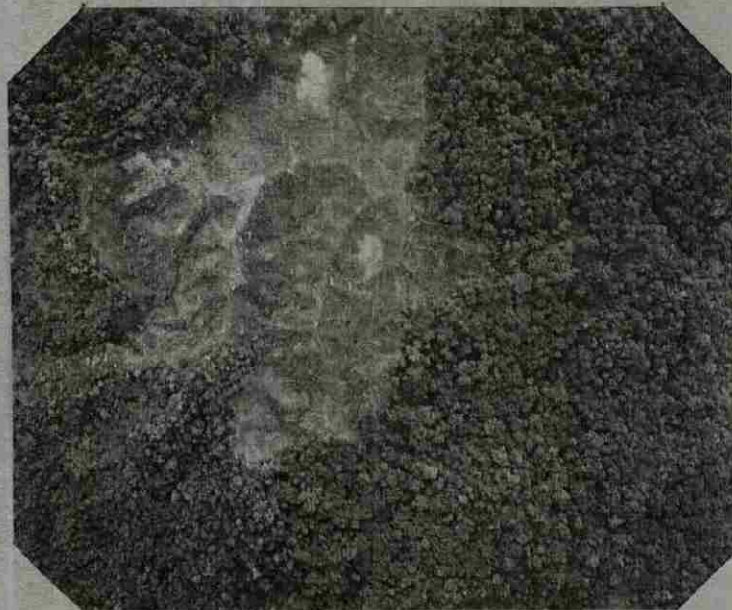
Seven planes of the 71st left the Durand strip during the mid-morning of the 8th for an attack on Malolo Village. Crossing the target in two elements, the first element dropped its bombs in the target area and some were seen to fall near buildings in the Mission and between the Mission and the coast line. The second element dropped twenty-four 300 pounders on the west side of the Mission but the results were unobserved because of the smoke and fire caused by the raid of the first element. Opposition of any type was absolutely nil. Crews of the 405th were not inactive on this date for in the morning hours they too sent eight planes out for a strike on the Buigap Creek area. They were over the target for about ten minutes during which time forty-five 300 pound wire wrapped bombs were dropped in the target area, smoke, dust and low hanging clouds made it impossible to determine the damage done.

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On the following day eight planes of the 405th were selected for an attack -- bombing and strafing of Old Bobdubi. Fifty-six 300 pounders were dropped along the ridge in the assigned area but again, smoke, dust, and dense foliage prevented observation of the results. After the bombing attack, the planes strafed the entire area including the Malolo Mission Building. Since there was no ground fire directed at the planes, one of the planes went down to give Busma Village a good strafing job. While the crews were making the attack, they noticed that the ground around the coconut groves on the ridge appeared well used and that the Japs had begun building a few buildings in the area. V Bomber Command ordered the Group to make another strike against the same area on the 11th.



Old Bobdubi
- This was a target in 1943 -

At 1003/K seven planes of the 71st crossed the target at 3500 feet and dropped a total of twenty-one 1000 pounds bombs. All were seen to hit in the target area but the results were hidden by the heavy smoke from the explosions. Planes of the 405th followed up the attack of the 71st by coming in over the target at fifty to three hundred feet and dropping twenty 1000 pound 8 - 11 second delay bombs in the target area. Smoke from the previous attack together with the explosions of the bombs prevented any damage assessment. As the airplanes approached Salamaua from the east, the formation was intercepted by a formation of seven enemy aircraft identified as Zekes and Oscars. The enemy fighters appeared eager and made a total of five passes pressing the attacks to within 200 feet

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before breaking away, however, none of the planes of our formation were damaged - nor was there any damage inflicted on the enemy attackers.

Up until the 13th of the month, the personnel of the Group had been lucky in avoiding injury on their missions - the planes of the 405th had not been hit for some time. But, on the 13th, they encountered some of the most intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire from the enemy that they had seen for quite some time. The mission was a ten plane attack on Salamaua carried out by the 405th. On this occasion there was no aircraft interception, but the ack ack made up for everything - one crew member actually swore that he saw an old rusty kitchen sink coming up after him. As was their usual method of attack, the planes of the 405th crossed the target at minimum altitude and dropped a total of twenty-one 300 pound bombs. Seven of the bombs fell on the airdrome near a weather station but the results of the damage were unobserved - seven fell along the south east side of the drome knocking out one machine gun position and causing a heavy black smoke fire of short duration - the other bombs hit on and near the runway but the results were unobserved. Thirty six of the 300 pounders fell in the vicinity of MacDonalds Junction but again the results were unobserved. All the while the planes were making the attack, the Nips were throwing up an intense amount of heavy, medium, and light anti-aircraft fire and this time it was classified as accurate.

When the planes returned to base, it was discovered that nine of the ten planes participating in the attack had received some damage and a number of the crew members were injured. The radio gunner in 908 received shrapnel wounds in the forehead while the radio gunner in 118 was wounded in the right foot. One plane was damaged to the extent that four of the crew on an observer on the mission bailed out of the plane over Jackson strip - after they had floated gently down to earth, the pilot, the only person remaining in the plane, brought his ship safely down to earth. Only one airplane in the formation escaped being damaged. The Nips had apparently gathered all the guns they could find and placed them in the Salamaua - MacDonalds Junction area. Guns had been placed along the entire length of the Isthmus, along both sides of the runway, around Kela Point, and any other places where they could place a gun. Crews definitely identified the medium fire as Bofors.

After a few days rest for the combat crews and long hours of work on the part of the ground personnel, the planes again took to the sky on the 18th. The target to be hit by the low-level strafers of the 405th squadron was Lokanu No. 1, Boisi Village, and Dot Island. Coming over the areas at minimum altitude, the seven planes of the 405th dropped eighteen 300 pounders in the Boisi Area, 4 on Tamba Peninsula, 23 in the Lokanu area, 2 on Dot Island, and 2 in the water. Several huts in the Lokanu and Boisi areas were des-

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troyed and the entire target area was covered with smoke. Twenty-eight individual strafing passes were made on the area but the results were unobserved.

On the 20th, the 405th took part in a coordinated attack against the Meiro River mouth and Beliau Island. The 405th followed the 345th Group to the target area after having rendezvoused over Durand Field with the 345th, the 3rd Attack Group, and the three Squadrons of fighters assigned as cover. The 345th Group led the formation to Hansa Bay then turned South along the coast to the Madang area. When the target was sighted, the 405th formed in pairs and spread so as to allow at least one minute intervals between pairs. When the assigned targets, Meiro River Mouth and Beliau Island were sighted, each pair descended to minimum altitude so as to best avoid the medium and machine gun fire from known positions in the area. Twenty-five 300 pound bombs were dropped on Beliau Island but the results were unobserved due to bomb smoke; one fell on what was believed to be Amron Mission causing large column of black smoke to 2000 feet; twenty-six were dropped along the bank and in the water near the mouth of Mero River - the damage was unobserved other than large puffs of black smoke. During the entire bombing run, the entire area was thoroughly strafed. Only one plane received any damage during the attack and this was not serious, and after the attacks all planes rejoined in elements of four and returned to base.



- Bogadjim Construction Camp -

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The following day, the planes of the 405th squadron took to the air again in an attack on the construction camps at Bogadjim-Yaula. The nature of the bombs forced the planes to bomb from altitudes of 1000 feet. Three of the planes were forced to salvo their bombs because of faulty racks, however, one of the clusters exploded setting fire to one hut in the camp north of the target area. Twenty-three of the clusters hit in the north camp area with fire, white smoke and debris resulting. Twelve clusters of the frags dropped in the middle of the camp area and another twelve clusters hit the southern part of the camp area, but results in both cases were unobserved. The remainder of the bombs fell along the river bank north of the target. As the planes finished their bombing runs, down they went to strafe all villages between Bogadjim and Yaula with at least seven fires observed as a result of the strafing. Stores near the buildings at the end of the jetty at the mouth of the Palpa river were set afire during the strafing attack. The target itself was nestled among the rugged terrain of the mountains and the planes were unable to strafe from altitudes they were accustomed to.



- Koniatum Track -

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- Barge Hunting along the Maps River -

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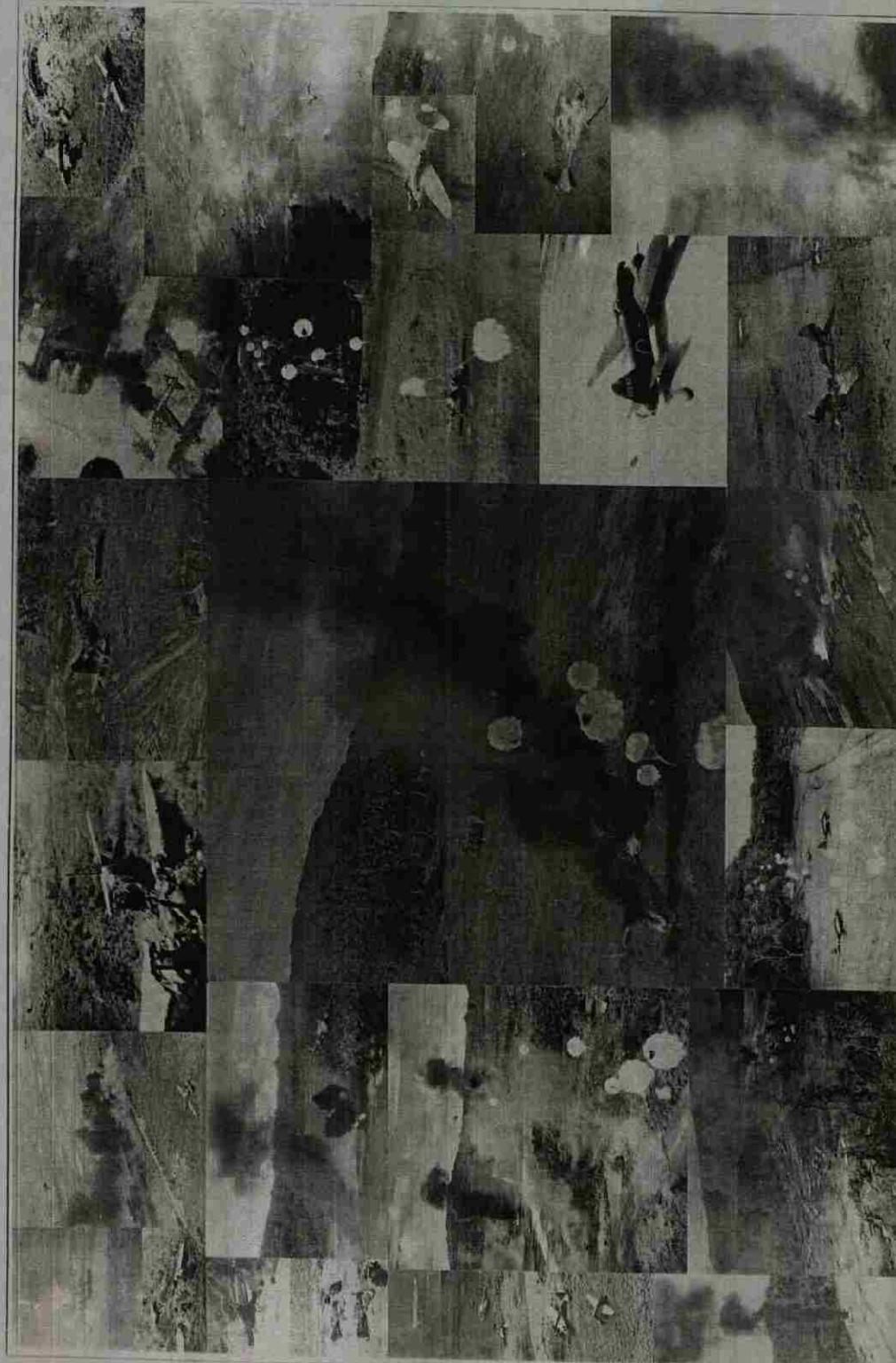
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It seemed as though there was no let-up for the boys of the 405th for on the 22nd, they were called on again to participate in an attack against the Komiatum Track. The Track itself was nothing more than just a mountain trail in the wilds of New Guinea and a rather difficult target to attack. The seven planes of the 405th were over the target at minimum altitude from 1010/K to 1019/K and dropped a total of fifty-six 300 pounders in the assigned area. Results other than bomb explosions and smoke were unobserved. The entire Track plus Malolo Mission huts and buildings, Mission Point, Lettu Village and Burnung Point were strafed with the only observed results being one hut set afire on Mission Point. In keeping with their policy of flying every other day, the 405th was to hit the Komiatum Track on the 24th, but impassable weather forced the formation to return to base. After this, it was not until the 29th that the planes took to the air again for an attack mission. The mission was a search for barges in the Finschafen, Langemark Bay, Hanische Harbor, and Rooke Island areas. The day turned out to be one of good hunting for the low-flying Mitchells and the first target to be attacked was a number of camouflaged barges along the south bank of the Mape River one quarter mile upstream from the mouth. Seventeen 300 pounders were dropped at these targets with one direct hit completely destroying one barge. Nine strafing passes were made at three to five barges in this area causing a column of black smoke to rise from one barge. Two 300 pounders were dropped on 3 barges at the junction of the Mape River Tributary seven miles upstream from Langemark Bay but the results were unobserved due to dense foliage and rugged terrain. Two more strafing passes were made on these barges and as the airplanes left the area, brown smoke of short duration was observed. Two of the airplanes strafed the Finschafen area and Barin and Yangla Villages on Rooke Island. The A-20's were in the area at the same time and were seen to be attacking barges in other streams. Since there were not enough targets to go around, twenty-eight of the bombs were returned to base.

This attack brought to an end the combat operation for the month of July. Nothing outstanding was accomplished during the entire month, but the attacks on the Japanese line of supplies did much to help the advancing ground troops of the Allies.

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CAUGHT WITH THEIR PLANES DOWN

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CHAPTER XVII

JAPANESE AIR FORCE MEETS DISASTER

After several months of routine bombing missions, missions that seemed as though nothing was being done to increase the fame of the 38th as a powerful weapon in defeating the Japanese, the month of August rolled around. Missions of the past few months, with the exception of March when the 38th put on a spectacular show in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, were strikes at enemy installations and there was something that was dull and uninteresting about it, except when the enemy would put up a few fighters to intercept our formations or else try to break up our attacks with an intense anti-aircraft barrage -- and that was rare. The Japanese Air Force did not come out in strength at any one time during the previous month but through the Intelligence Organizations of the Air Force, it was known that they were building up a threatening striking power at their rear base of Wewak. To the Japs, it was probably a wise thing to do - for the Allies, it was just what they had been looking for. The defeat which the Japs suffered at Wewak during the month of August was the deciding as to who would control the Air over the Southwest Pacific Theater of Operations.

The number of missions in which the Group participated during the month of August were not too many, but the damage inflicted directly on the enemy through these attack was enough to make the New Guinea Jap think of Hari-kari. In twenty-two missions, the crews and planes of the "Sun Setters" knocked out ninety-nine (99) Jap bombers on the ground and shot twenty-three (23) more from the Allied controlled skies. Planes were not the only weapons of the Jap to receive a pounding, but the enemy shipping also suffered with the sinking and destruction of fifty-three (53) barges, one trawler, one picket boat, and one power launch. Several months of flying had been completed by the 38th without the loss of a crew or plane but luck changed and during the month, three planes and a total of sixteen men were lost. Although in the matter of statistics the blows against the enemy more than made up for their losses, but the loss of the personnel was keenly felt by all.

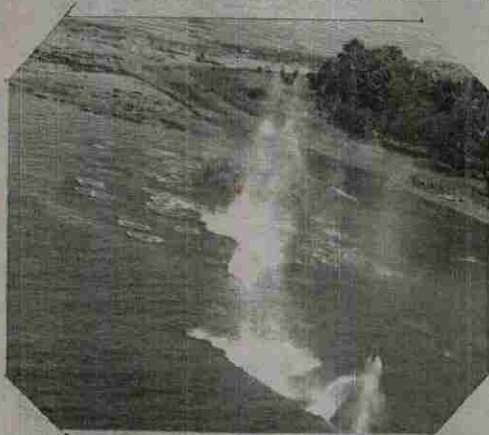
There was no mission scheduled for the first day of the month, but on the second, twenty-four planes set out in a barge search from Lae to Madang. The twenty-four planes of the Group took off from Durand strip at 1000 hours, circled over the area in order to get into flight formation, and then headed for Dobodura to make rendezvous with twenty-one P-38's who were to act as top opposition protector. The entire air armada then proceeded to search the coast in the direction of Lae. About ten miles south of Lae the formation broke up with the planes seeking out targets in pairs. It was not long before two barges and one fast motor launch were strafed and

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left burning five miles south of Lae. Shortly after the attack was made on these barges, a B-25 was seen to crash in the water as a result of a collision with another B-25 - none of the personnel were seen to get out of the plane. A flight of B-24's was sighted over the Lae airdrome and suddenly there was a terrific explosion about the drome, debris was seen to fly into the air and a huge column of smoke reached skyward. The smoke could be seen at a distance of twenty miles, and it was believed that the B-24's had scored a hit on a fuel and ammunition dump. The planes then proceeded along the coast toward Hopoi where direct hits were scored on barges drawn up to an inlet cove. It was about this time that one of the planes



-Hidden in close to shore, the barges were difficult to sight, but the



-Camouflage didn't help-

of the 71st developed engine trouble in the right engine and was forced to turn back to the base. They flew back to Dobodura, made a few minor repairs and then proceeded to the Durand Strip. Other planes of the mission proceeded on along the coast and sighted some camouflaged barges in the vicinity of Yambo. Two of the planes strafed the barges and then they were followed by two more who dropped bombs on the ill-fated craft. The barge was seen to contain a number of Japs. It was in the vicinity of Yambo area that part of the formation was intercepted by enemy fighters. In this occasion, the Japs employed Zekes, Oscars, Hap's, one Nate, and at least two Messerschmidts; a fact that caused some of the crewmen in the "Sun Setters" to rub their eyes in astonishment. At least one of the enemy fighters was shot out of the sky. On the trip back the formation was followed by a few of the enemy planes but they soon dropped back and did not try to make a pass. To the right over the water several P-38's and Zekes were seen to be messing it up; two of the Zekes were seen to dive into the water with smoke

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trailing, and one of the 38's was seen to hit the water. During the attack at least fifteen Japs were sighted along the beach and they tried to run for cover, but two of the strafers of the 405th swooped down and with their sixteen machine guns blazing away, our little Jap enemy was cut to ribbons.

On the 3rd after the previous days good work, the combat crews were given a day off and on the 4th there was an unventful escort patrol in which a cargo ship was escorted to a point off Port Moresby. Then on the 5th came another mission in force - barges were the targets again. The 71st concentrated its search in the Alexishafen area while the 405th hit the Madang area. The planes left the Durand strip at 0800/K, circled over the strip for altitude to give the planes a chance to get into formation. The formation then proceeded to Mt. Yule where rendezvous was made with the fighter cover and thence proceeded to Madang where the 405th branched off for its attack on barges there. Planes of the 71st went over the targets in three flights of four; the first finished peeling off and hit barges in Bostrum Bay and Admosin Island. Bombs were dropped and the target strafed with the result that the barges were left smoking as the planes continued the search. The second flight dropped to low level and hit barges at Sek Island. A total of twenty-eight 300 pounders were dropped but the results were unobserved. The third flight hit the Militat Harbor. Six barges in this area were strafed and were seen to give off columns of smoke after the attack. After the attack the planes circled so that the rest of the formation could rejoin the formation and proceed on toward Finschafen, but there the weather forced the planes to return by the alternate route over the mountains. After gaining altitude up to 16,000 feet, the planes made it over the hump -- doing much of their flying on instruments.

Planes of the 405th made their attack at minimum altitude, scoring a direct hit on barges in the Wald Bay area. A direct hit was made on one docked barge in the Madang Township inlet. Several near misses were scored on other barges in the area from Beliau to Regetta Island. Madang Township and airdrome, Amron Mission, Beliau Island, Regetta Island, and the Fredrick Karl Harbor were thoroughly strafed during the attack. There was an intense barrage of heavy ack ack encountered on the approach to Beliau Island and Madang Township. One of the B-25's of the 405th was hit in the right engine and was forced to make a crash landing in the water about one mile off shore. The crew members were seen to escape the flaming plane and start swimming toward land, but it was believed that the survivors may have been captured by the enemy. Later it was learned that the plane was flown by the Squadron Commander, Major Cox.

The missions for the 6th and 7th were one plane reccos and on the 8th barges in the Finschafen area appeared on the list again. Two squadrons were to participate in the missions but extremely bad weather conditions forced the planes to turn back.

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- Bogadjim Road -

On the 9th both the 405th and 71st squadrons sent up twelve planes each to participate in a barge sweep between Lepsius and Reiss Point - in the event that no barges could be found, the planes were to attack the Bogadjim - Yaula road bridges. The 405th found one camouflaged barge beached between Lepsius and Reiss Points and dropped a total of six 500 pounders the results of which were unobserved. The attack then was turned to the direction of bridges along the Bogadjim - Yaula road. The twelve bombs fell among the construction camp northeast of the bridges and twelve fell between the camp and the bridges. Half of a large rectangular building in the camp area was blown off by the bombing and the remainder was left burning. Timber and debris was flying in the vicinity of the bridges during the bombing, and a truck just north of the bridge was strafed with unobserved results.

The 71st came over the Bogadjim - Yaula road bridges at 1406 hours and dropped eleven 500 pounders at the #1 bridge, of which four were observed to fall one hundred to one hundred fifty feet east of the bridge, four near the road 300 feet south of the bridge, two near the north end of the bridge, and one fell unobserved. Ten of the 500 pounders were dropped at the #2 bridge, of which five were seen to fall in the camp at the east end of the bridge, firing six grass huts, four in Camphon Knoll near the bridge, firing two

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- Hitting in the target -

huts and one fell unobserved. Some of the bombs were returned to base due to a false alert that enemy fighters were in the area. During the entire course of the attack, the enemy failed to fire one shot of ack ack at the formation.

Two days passed without any mission taking place for either of the squadrons but again on the 12th, the 71st sent twelve planes out for a strike on the Bogadjim - Yaula road bridges Nos. 1 and 3. Shortly after the takeoff one of the planes was forced to return to base because of engine trouble. After the planes were in formation, they proceeded to Mt. Yule for a rendezvous with the fighter cover. From this point the formation went to Mariliana, and from there altered the course to Bena Bena, thence to Bogadjim where the altitudes of the planes was reduced from 10,000 to 3,000 feet. Before making any runs over the target, the planes made one complete circle of the area, and then starting individual runs in a follow-the-leader pattern. Each ship made two runs on the target dropping four 500 pounders on #1 bridge - a total of forty being dropped at this bridge. Six of the bombs fell in a wooded area northwest of the bridge, six fell on the road fifty to one hundred yards northwest of the bridge, and several others fell unobserved. On bridge #3, several bombs were dropped but none of which hit the bridge directly. Crew members reported machine gun fire from a position near a tin roofed house near a hill between the Mintjim and Gori rivers - this position was later silenced. Just how successful the mission was, was hard to tell because of the terrain.

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There was no mission for the 13th so members of both squadrons took it easy and rested up. On the 14th, the 405th was assigned the task of destroying the Roosevelt Bridge at Wau. After taking off from the Durand Strip the formation proceeded to Mt. Yule where rendezvous was made with the fighter cover. As the formation headed in the direction of the target, one of the planes developed engine trouble and was forced to return to base. The other planes flew on to the target, and when reaching the vicinity of the target assembled off shore between Dot Island and Tanbu Bay for single plane runs over the area. The runs were made at varying altitudes from thirty to two hundred feet. A total of forty-six 500 pounders were dropped at the three pin-pointed targets with most of the bombs seen to fall directly in the target area causing numerous explosions and one column of smoke that rose to two hundred feet - it was of short duration.

After two more days of no missions, the Group sent up twenty-four planes to participate in an attack against grounded aircraft on But Drome in the Wewak Area on the 17th. Of the twelve planes from the 71st no one reached the target for when arriving at the rendezvous point where they were to meet the fighter cover of P-38's, there was no escort that could be sighted and the entire squadron returned to base. Of the twelve planes sent up by the 405th, eight returned to base from various points between the Sepik River and Wewak due to mechanical failure of auxiliary turret gas tank release, and one returned to base because of being unable to overtake the formation. The three remaining planes proceeded on to the target and attacked But Drome at minimum altitude at 0900 hours. Thirty-five clusters of 23 pound parafrags were dropped along the runway in individual runs. As each plane made his run, he strafed the entire area and tracers were seen to enter eight Zekes and Oscars and one Helen parked in flight gap at the west end of the runway. One of the fighters was definitely set afire. Forty or fifty Helens and Sallys inadequately dispersed in two's and three's in a clearing off the south east corner of the runway were bombed and strafed causing several explosions and a sheet of flame to 100 feet into the air. Heavy, black smoke fire and explosions were caused off the Northeast corner of the runway near the bomb dump. Nine of the clusters fell across the center of the runway causing fires and explosions. The ack ack encountered was intense and fairly accurate but fortunately none of the planes were damaged from it. As the planes were completing their bombing runs, they were intercepted by ten to fifteen Oscars and Zekes in the vicinity of Dagua Drome at minimum altitude. For the next thirty seven (37) minutes a running fight was on with the enemy fighters making individual passes from all directions. The outnumbered B-25's hugged the water and pushed their speed around two hundred sixty miles per hour until the enemy fighters broke off their attack. During the running fight one of the enemy fighters was definitely seen to crash in the water and two more retired from the fight with smoking engines - the damage to our planes was negligible.

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- Disaster for the Japs at Wewak -

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At the time of our attack on But Drome, the 3rd Attack Group was observed working over Wewak and Boram Dromes. Numerous grounded aircraft were seen exploding as a result of their attack and as our planes went out of sight the entire area was covered with a pall of black smoke. Our three planes had definitely destroyed eight medium bombers and damaged twenty more in addition to the one fighter shot down.

On the morning of August 18 at 0637/K sixteen planes of the 71st Squadron took off from Durand Strip, Port Moresby, and headed for Mt. Yule, the first check point. A few minutes later thirteen b-25's from the 405th Squadron followed. At Mt. Yule one of the planes of the 71st was forced to return to base due to mechanical difficulty in the turret. The remaining fifteen airplanes then made a good course to Mt. Yonkie near Bena Bena and circled there until the P-38's arrived. Having completed the rendezvous the airplanes proceeded to a point on the Prince Alexander Mountains just south of the target where the various flights made a turn to the right and started in on their strafing and bombing runs across Dagua airdrome at fifty feet. The 405th Squadron was leading the attack and things began to happen.

As Major Cheli's (Squadron Commander) flight turned to attack from a position between But and Dagua, ten to fifteen Zekes and Oscars dove to intercept from above the broken cloud layer at 1000 feet. One Oscar pressed an attack from eight o'clock below at Lt. Pittman's plane and it was later learned that twenty 25 cal. and 12.7mm bullets had entered the left engine nacelle, left wing, fuselage and struck the right propeller blade - still the plane continued on the run. This Oscar then attacked Major Cheli's airplane and the right engine and right wing were set afire. Despite this damage, Major Cheli led his flight across Dagua airdrome bombing and strafing a concentration of fifteen to twenty enemy airplanes and a gun position. After his strafing and bombing run, Major Cheli called his wingman and ordered him to lead, as Major Cheli was forced to crash land his burning airplane in the sea. Captain Middlebrook, leading the second flight, led his flight across the strip dropping thirty-six parafrag clusters in the revetment areas and across the strip where thirty to forty enemy airplanes were seen and strafed. The third flight, led by Captain Gay, was intercepted three miles southeast of Dagua and in evasive action turned into the attacking fighters toward the sea. This action led the flight over Muschu Island where twelve barges in an inlet on the West side of the island were strafed. Forty-three clusters of parafrags were dropped across the island when the intercepting fighters made such action necessary. During the course of interception, the 405th definitely shot down three of the enemy fighters, four others were believed to have been destroyed, and four others were seen to fall off trailing smoke. Thirty Dinahs or Helens were destroyed by the bombing and strafing and the parafrag explosions caused further explosions and fires in the re-

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vetment area and around planes on the runway. Large columns of black smoke rose to 2000 feet while fires continued to spread through the dispersed planes. The Nips made effort possible to ward off the destruction of their entire Air Force at the time, and ack ack of every caliber was directed at the planes. Hardly any of the planes escaped without first being badly damaged by the anti-aircraft fire.

The "A" flight of the 71st Squadron crossed the target. The attack was made across the east of the drome - strafing the target as they came in for the attack, the flight dropped one hundred and twenty nine frag clusters leaving six possible Betty type bombers and two possible damaged twin engine airplanes at the Southeast corner of the drome severely damaged and burning as a result of the attack. As the planes made their turn about five miles southeast of Mt. Wesegunimi preparatory to their run over the drome, they were intercepted by approximately a half dozen Zekes. The flight was at an altitude of about 3000 feet at this time but the Zekes did not press their attacks until the planes had descended to about 1500 feet. During the ensuing fight, three of the enemy planes were shot from the skies. "B" flight met with the same fate - Zekes coming in from all directions. However, this did not stop the attack and the flight made a bombing and strafing run across the west end of the strip. One hundred and thirty-two clusters of "Daisy Cutters" were dropped and five or six single engine enemy airplanes were left burning on the northwest corner of the drome and fires were started on the southwest side of the strip as a result of the attack. The Zeros were busy with the other flights when "C" flight began its run. Hardly had they started when out of nowhere the enemy fighters began to attack. The planes continued on their run strafing and dropping one hundred and thirty-two clusters of frags across the western end of the drome. Two twin engine airplanes at the southwest corner of the strip were left in flames and a large fire among a number of airplanes and possible supplies resulted from this attack. The fourth and last flight made their run across the east end of the drome dropping ninety-nine clusters of frags resulting in the destruction of five or six twin engine aircraft on the south side of the strip and silencing two ack ack positions at the southeast corner of the drome. Twenty to twenty-five enemy airplanes, both Fighters and Bombers, on But drome were left burning or destroyed after the attack.

Excitement ran high among the crews when they returned to base and each one gave his birds-eye view - other bomb groups were hitting the grounded planes on the other three dromes and the entire area was a mass of solid black smoke - underneath this cloud of smoke lay the ruins of a powerful Japanese Air Force. Two hundred and twenty-five of the enemy planes had been destroyed by the Fifth Air Force, less than half the strength of the enemy force. Surprise, determination, experience, skill, and just plain guts had combined to make up an attacking force - the job was well done - the Japs

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knew by looking around the battered ruins, that they were beaten as no one had ever been beaten before. The lack of Records and Photographs makes this written account inadequate to describe just what did take place - no attempt was made to glamorize the action - death is never glamorous. To the boys who flew the missions, it was just another job that had to be done and was done.

On the 19th and 20th, the bomber personnel were given a well deserved rest while their counter-parts on the ground made the damaged planes ready to fight again. During these two days, Radio Tokyo made little mention of the fact that their entire New Guinea air force had been destroyed, but instead boasted that a B-25 had been shot down south of Wewak and that its crew had been captured. Again on the 21st the 71st and the 405th were sent to the Wewak area to finish off the remaining planes on the dromes. This time, it would be the But and Dagua dromes. Planes of the 71st left the Durand strip at 0701 hours and then made for Mt. Yonkie, via Mt. Yule. At Mt. Yonkie the formation made rendezvous with the P-38's and thence proceeded to the target.

At a point approximately five miles southeast of Dagua, the first two flights, flying at a close interval, while diving towards their target at But, were subject to an attack by three Jap single engine fighters. All three planes made simultaneous passes at the B-25's; one of the Japs was fairly lucky for he hit the plexi-glass turret of Captain Lavers plane, causing it to break loose from the plane. One other Jap made a lucky hit on the same plane and knocked out the plexi-glass over the pilots compartment, and put seventeen bullet holes in the fuselage and a 20mm shell in the left engine which knocked out a cylinder. Shortly after the enemy fighters jumped the formation, the eagerly awaiting P-38's took over and this was too much for the Nips. Making an east to west run, the first two flights dropped their bombs netting the score of several bombers destroyed, about thirty-five Japs killed, and a couple of ack ack positions silenced.

Through the excellent cover offered by the escorting P-38's the third and fourth flights made their attack without enemy interception. On several occasions the enemy fighters did their utmost to break up the Mitchell formation, but the hungry Lightnings forced them into more dog-fights. The flights went in for their attack, dropping parafrag bombs and also strafing the target; direct hits were scored on three twin engine bombers, three huts on the east side of the strip were fired, and a machine gun position was knocked out. A Fox Baker anchored off shore was thoroughly strafed, but the results of the attack were unobserved; then on the last portion of the run the planes in a final burst of hell, strafed a truck and four or five tents at the southeast corner of the strip.

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A few scattered planes around the drome were finished off by the low-flying strafers and their packages of "Daisy Cutters"...



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The 405th Squadron was led to the rendezvous point at Mt. Yonkie by the 71st Squadron and thence to the target area at Dagua. About ten miles from the target the formation was intercepted by ten to twelve Zeros. One of them made a pass at Captain Middlebrooks plane, the flight leader of the first flight, but the turret gunner of the plane hit the Zero head on and he was out of the fight. Other Zekes attacked the second flight, but they were intercepted by the P-38's and because the Japs seemed to be inexperienced because rattled and broke away from the attack. One of the Zekes did manage to knock off the turret dome and put a hole through the right vertical stabilizer of another plane. Two other Zekes pressed home their attack on a third ship, but one of them was intercepted by the P-38's and the "Sun Setter" shot the other from the sky. The third flight of the 405th was intercepted by several enemy fighters and many passes were made at the attacking planes, but the Japs were in very poor form on this day and scored only one hit for all their efforts. The flights, in their runs over the target dropped clusters of parafrag bombs and strafed during the entire run. The first flight scored direct hits on none of the enemy bombers dispersed in the taxi ways and revetment areas. Other flights dropped bombs among a concentration of eight or nine apparently serviceable twin engine bombers on the east end of the center dispersal area and all of the airplanes were believed to have been badly damaged or destroyed. Ack ack positions were silenced by the strafers and anything resembling an airplane was given a thorough working over. All of the flights, in a farewell to the Japs, strafed a power launch and a barge ten miles south of Kairiu Island. The launch was set afire and the barge destroyed.

With the flush of victory still in their faces, the combat men of the Group remained on the ground for the next three days. The last tow attack on the Japs had been very costly to the little yellow men; more than two hundred and twenty five of their planes had been destroyed, and several of their barges sunk. These attacks of the 17th and 18th of August were soustanding enough to be listed on the calender of important events in the SWPA and in the history of the "Sun Setters" they were gold star days.

Again on the 25th the two squadrons took to the skies to participate in a coordinated attack with the 3rd Attack Group on targets in the Laing Island Area. The mission had been briefed to the effect that the 3rd Attack would hit Awar Plantation, the 71st, Shipping at Laing Island, and the 405th, Nubia Plantation. Out of the thirteen planes from the 71st Squadron, nine reached the target and just after the 3rd Attack began its attack on Awar Plantation, the 71st, in three flights of three airplanes each, began making their low level attack on shipping in the Laing Island. Twenty-eight 500 pounders were dropped at three large luggers (approximately 300 tons) and six Type "A" barges

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in a cove on the west side of Laing Island. Of these, direct hits were reported on two of the Luggers and near misses on all six barges. Brownish smoke and flying debris to the height of the formation obscured further results. The planes noticed an intense barrage of heavy ack ack in the Awar plantation area, but only a small amount of machine gun fire was directed at their formation.

The 405th followed immediately with their attack on the Bivouac area in Nubia Plantation. Ninety-four clusters of parafrag bombs were dropped in the assigned target area, but the results could not be observed due to the Palm trees. However, twelve individual fires and black smoke were seen over the area after the attack. One cluster of bombs was dropped at a 75 foot sailboat about a hundred feet off shore and the bombs were seen to hit the boat, but the damage was unobserved. As they withdrew from the target area, the smoking barges around Laing Island were strafed. The 405th then joined the planes of the 71st and the formation returned directly to base.

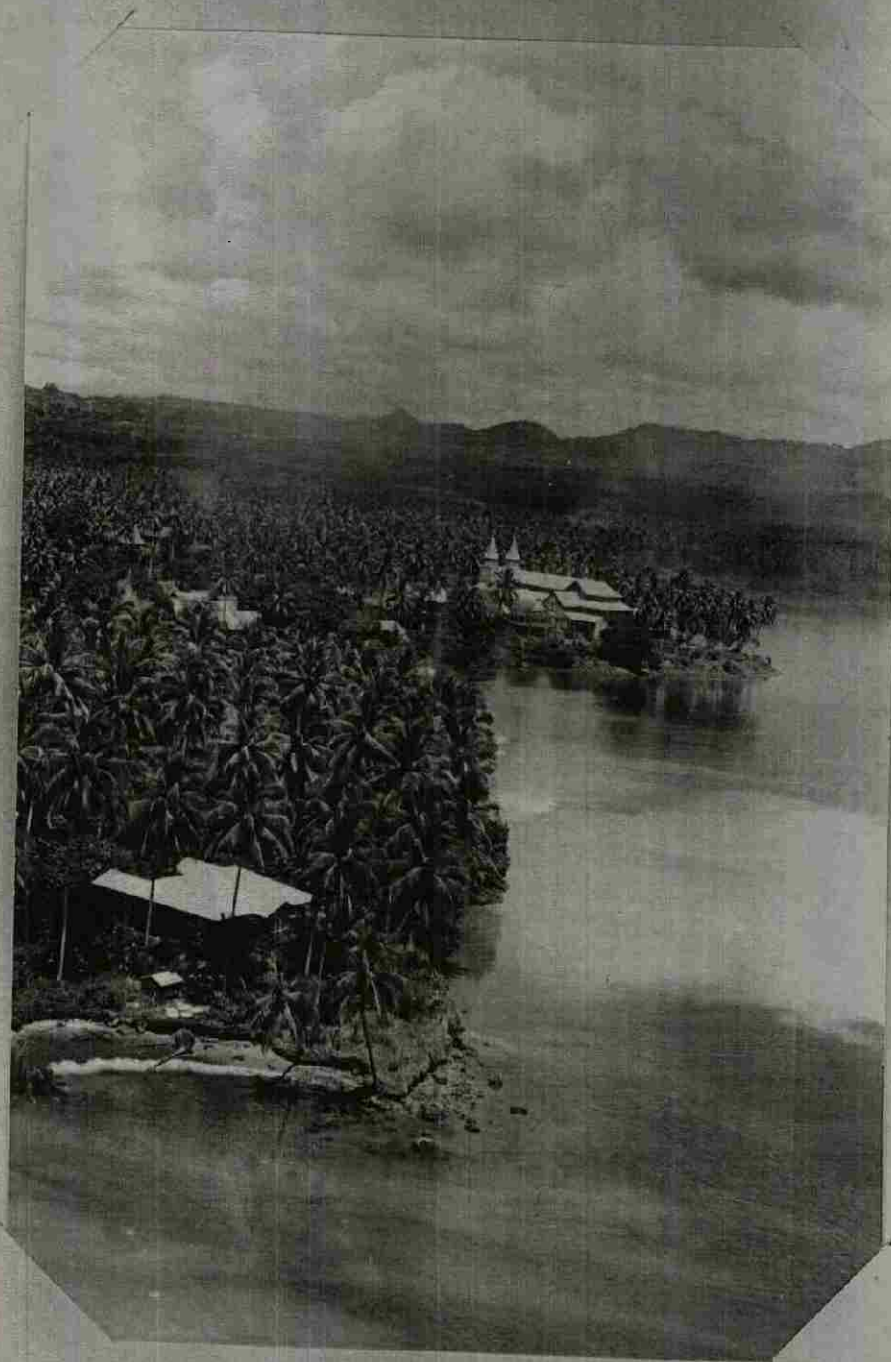
After this followed three days of rest until the 29th when the last mission of the month was carried out against Alexishaven. Twenty-one planes took off to carry out the mission but before they reached the target, one plane from each squadron was forced to return to base. The planes came over the target in elements of three airplanes each from the west to the east and dropped a total of seventy-four 300 pound and thirty-six 500 pound bombs throughout the target area. It was planned that the Japs would be caught in their morning worship periods, but at the same time it was believed that the Church was being used for their headquarters. Bombs were seen to score near misses on the Cathedral and hit among the mission buildings as well as the supply dumps along both sides of the strip. The actual damage inflicted on the Japs was or rather could not be determined, but as the planes withdrew from the area, large columns of smoke were coming up from various points. The dumps they had been sent out to destroy were destroyed but it is believed that the boys had a soft spot in their hearts for the old Cathedral and didn't try too hard to hit it - just close enough to let the Japs know that if they were using it as a headquarters, it would be taken care of on the next trip.

During the course of the attack, the Nips threw up several bursts of heavy ack ack which exploded above and in front of the low flying planes. An intense amount of machine gun fire came from the coconut grove bordering the strip but only one of the planes received any damage and this was from an unknown cause. It could have been from enemy fire, but more than likely it was caused by flying a little too close to the ground and the exploding bombs.

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- The Cathedral at Alexishaven -

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- The Cathedral under Attack -



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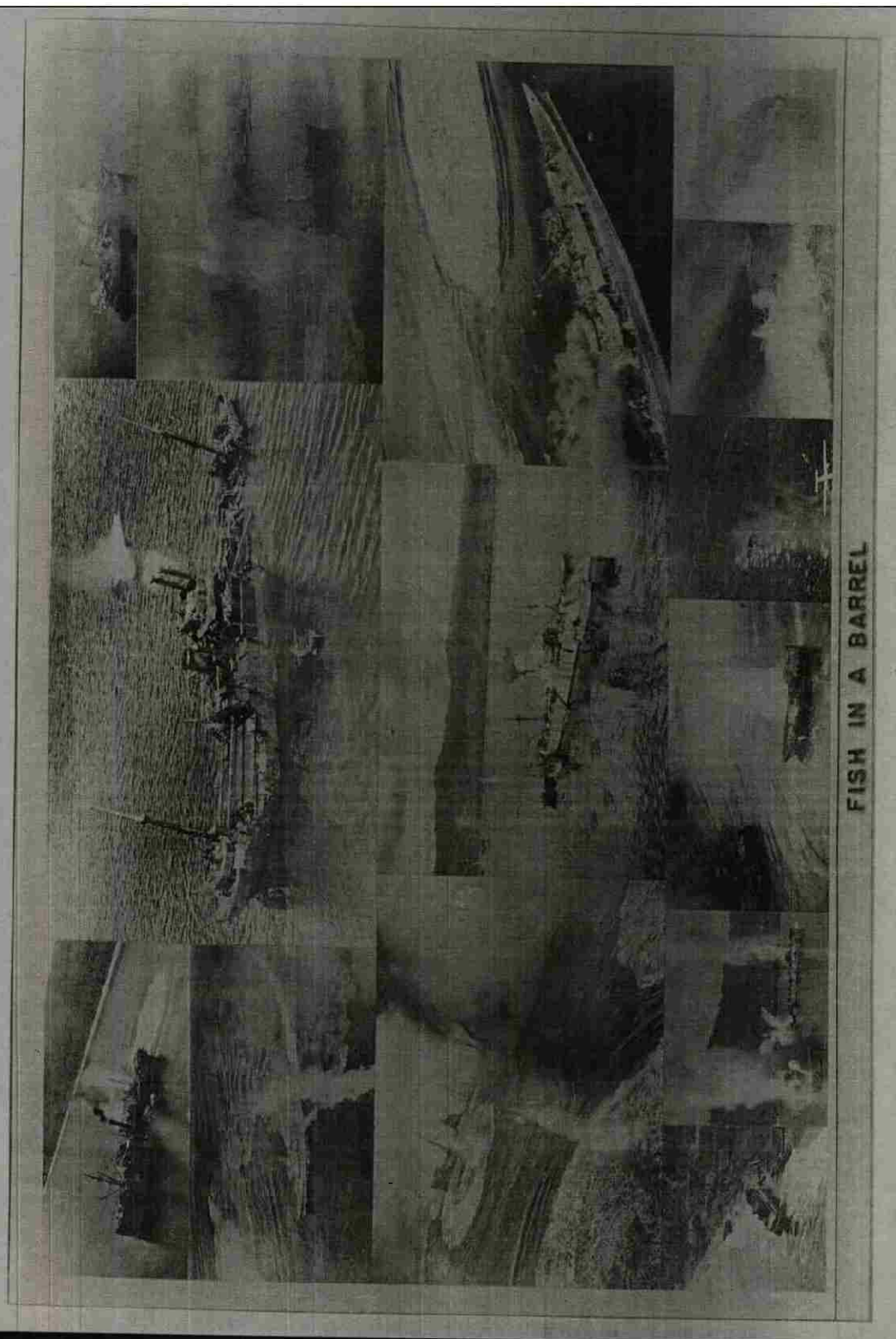
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And thus with this mission, a most successful month came to an end for the "Sun Setters". Great numbers of enemy planes were smashed in the Wewak area, plus the destruction of a few enemy barges.

Just as the curtain was falling to end the month, a rumor popped up that seemed to be the daddy of all rumors. Just where the bright message originated is not known, but it was passed along to the interested personnel with great confidence and many words claiming that it came from a good source. The words that flowed from the confidential mouth to the eagerly awaiting hand-cupped ear were:..."I understand that all of the original combat personnel of the group are to be in Brisbane by the 15th of November for return to the States - and some of the Ground men too".. As far as the ground men are concerned, that rumor still hasn't come true.

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CHAPTER XVIII

ANNIVERSARY - ONE YEAR OF COMBAT

Activities for the month of September blended right in with the powerful blows of the "Sun Setters" for the month of August. Action all over the Pacific was being speeded up and each day saw a greater number of planes over Japanese Held sections of New Guinea. There was one all-over purpose - destroy Jap Airfields, installations, supplies, and personnel at what the Japs called their rear bases. Wewak, the last big base, was slowly being pounded into submission. For the Japs there was little hope that they could keep their planes close enough to hit the Allied bases or give any help to their hard pushed ground troops who were fighting a delaying battle. Their only hope was to hang on to what they had and even this stood a poor chance.

At 0735/K on the morning of September 1, twenty-four airplanes took off from Durand to hit Japanese personnel and supplies around the two air strips at Alexishaven. The 71st Squadron led the formation to Marilinen, their rendezvous point, to participate in a coordinated attack with three squadrons of B-24's. Immediately after takeoff, while climbing through some bad weather, one of the planes of the 71st, breaking through a layer of clouds, found himself facing a formation of three B-24's approximately 100 feet away, and to avoid a collision dived his plane approximately 1000 feet. During this maneuver four 300 pound bombs and the shackles tore loose breaking through the bomb-bay doors and damaging the hydraulic system. This forced the plane to return to base, and after much difficulty the wheels were lowered and the plane landed at Durand. Immediately a stand-by airplane took its place and overtook the formation. The formation arrived at Marilinen at 0840 where they circled until they picked up their fighter escort of P-38's. Leaving the rendezvous point, they headed for the target which consisted of stores and personnel on Strip #2 at Alexishaven. Diving to an altitude of 75 feet, the planes of the 71st thoroughly strafed and bombed their assigned area. Seventy-four 300 pound bombs landed in the target starting five or six fires. Two of them were apparently oil fires giving off black smoke rising to a height of approximately 1500 feet.

A thorough strafing silenced a machine gun position in the coconut grove at the southeastern corner of strip #2, and a heavy ack ack position at the northeast corner of the strip. Two of the bombs landed on Ulimal Island with unobserved results and eight bombs were seen to fall in the water beyond the peninsula. During the run a ball of fire about the size of a hot was shot at the formation. It appeared to have been lobbed up from the west end of the strip, falling below and to the left of the formation. It was not seen to explode.

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- Two oil dumps going up -



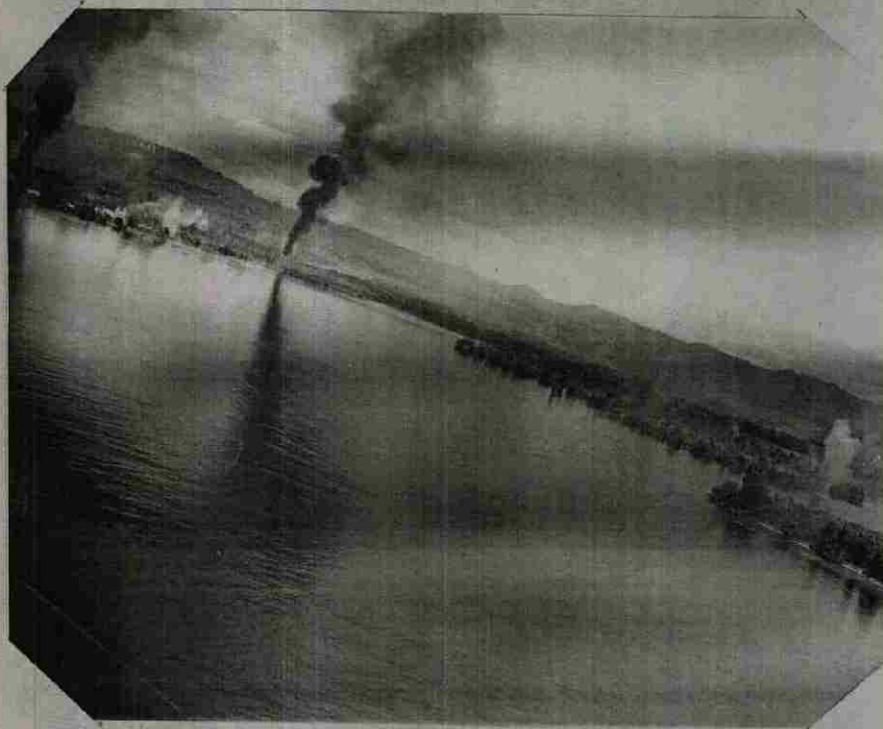
- Strafing across the tree tops -

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The 405th followed the 71st and came in for their attack in four elements of three airplanes each. Coming in at minimum altitude, the planes bombed and strafed personnel and supplies on strip #1. Seventy-three 300 pound bombs were dropped at their designated target causing seven large fires and numerous small fires, with three heavy columns of black smoke rising to 300 feet. The 405th pilots reported seeing the B-24's bombing Alexishafen Township approximately three minutes before the 405th airplanes reached the target and that this heavy bombardment continued during and after the 405th attack. During the course of the attack, moderate, heavy inaccurate ack ack fire was directed at the formation but was above the planes. The medium fire was quite accurate as to altitude, but was bursting well to the sides of our planes.



- Alexishafen Strip #1 -

Operations against the enemy remained in high gear for on the following day sixteen planes of the Group paid a return visit to the Wewak area - this time the target was shipping reported to be in the harbor. Inflight reports from recon planes reported that a number of transports had moved into the harbor - the exact type and number were unknown, but orders called for a minimum altitude attack on whatever might be there.

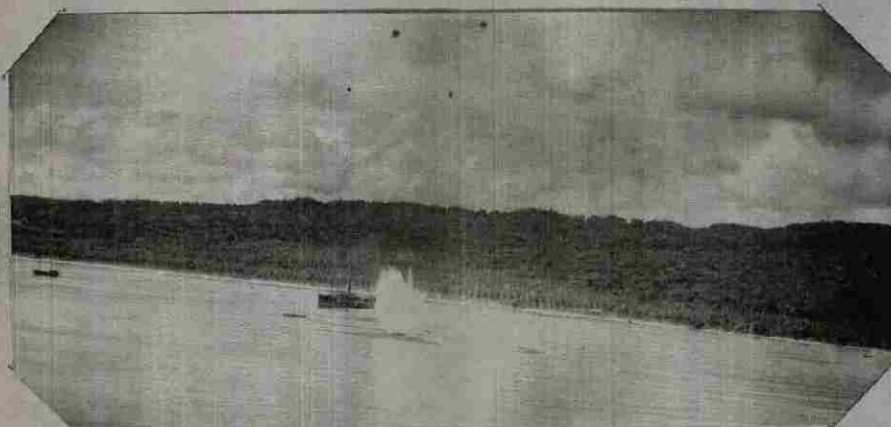
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After taking off from Durand Strip at 0700 hours, our planes, with the 405th leading, set their course for Mariluan, there to pick up their P-38 fighter cover. After circling for thirty minutes the formation flew a course up the Ramu Valley to Wewak. Just South of the Prince Alexander Mountains, the formation broke up into two airplane elements for their bombing and strafing run over the concentration of enemy shipping in Wewak Harbor. The 405th flights approached Wewak Harbor from inland dropping to minimum altitude over Boram Strip. Eight Zekes and Tonys intercepted the formation over Wewak and continued their attacks in a running fight that lasted for twenty five minutes after leaving the target. To cause further concern, the Nips were prepared and waiting for the low-level strafers and the minute the planes appeared over the mountains, they were met with a terrific amount of ack ack fire of every caliber. To complete the picture the Japs had prepared in full - it was noticed that barrage balloons were floating above the ships in the harbor; they were about ten feet in diameter, extended to heights of 400 feet, and there was a ballon attached to each vessel.

Coming in two airplane elements, the first flight of the 405th made their bombing and strafing run on one Fox Able anchored just East of Cape Boram. One 1000 pound bomb in Captain Middlebrooks airplane broke the shackles and fell through the bomb-bay doors just prior to reaching the target - the second bomb was seen to score a near miss. The two bombs dropped by the second plane in this flight were both over the target. S Sgt. Emminger, turret gunner for Captain Middlebrook shot down one Zeke attacking from 5 o'clock level over the Karau Lagoon. The Zeke was seen to turn away smoking and crash into trees. This same gunner also hit one Tony attacking from the rear over the water just East of Wewak.



- Overshooting the target -

The second flight made their bombing and strafing run on the same Fox Able. This time, two of the 1000 pounders hit the Fox

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Able leaving it burning furiously and in a sinking condition. All the while the planes were making their runs, the enemy fighters continued to press home their attack. S Sgt. Cruz, gunner for Lt. Grover, leader of the second flight, shot the tail section off one Tony which crashed into Wewak harbor. In a running fight that continued after the planes left the area, Sgt. Cruz shot down a second Tony 45 miles inland from Hansa Bay. Lt. Barber, flying wing for Lt. Grover, was shot down by two unidentified enemy fighters approximately 15 miles southeast of Wewak and about ten miles off shore. At the time, Lt. Barber was pulling into formation and was flying low over the water. His plane was seen to hit the water with its right wing cutting the water first causing the plane to cartwheel and sink.

As the third flight came over Wewak, they were intercepted by five Zekes and Oscars. After one of the enemy fighters was shot from the skies, the others were not so eager and broke off the attack. Captain Adkins and Lt. Cusworth made their bombing and strafing run over one Fox Tare Uncle midway between Boram and Wewak Points. Three of the 1000 pounders were close enough to be listed as near misses and were believed to have done considerable damage to the vessel for photographs taken of the ship three minutes later showed it listing. Lt. Cusworth strafed and dropped one 1000 pounder at an ODD off Wewak Point. The bomb was observed to hit the vessel then skip far enough away before exploding so as to not damage the ODD.

As the last flight came in for their run, the plane piloted by F/O Blain was shot down off Wewak Point by ack ack. The flight, led by Lt. Deptula, was making a bombing and strafing attack at a Fox Tare Charlie between Mission Point and Cape Boram when the Nip gunners scored a lucky hit on F/O Blain's plane. Lt. Deptula reported that his two bombs were short of the target, but that F/O Blain scored two direct hits amidship and leaving the vessel emitting heavy black smoke and burning furiously. It was after this attack that other planes noticed F/O Blain's plane - the right engine was burning, Bomb-bay doors open and the landing gear was suspended from the nacelles - the plane crashed into the water off Wewak Point and there was very little chance for survivors.

The 405th had little to say about the ack ack received during the attack or the barrage balloons, but enemy interception was extremely annoying - the Japs were quite insistent in carrying their attacks home; in fact, this is what Captain Middlebrook had to say about it: "I don't think there's any question but that the enemy pilots attempted to ram us on two occasions. Only by a very steep pull-up could I avoid being rammed by one Tony shortly after leaving the target," and here is what Lt. Grover had to say: "One tony definitely attempted to ram my airplane, and when I pulled up to avoid him, he rolled over on his back under my tail which was not over one

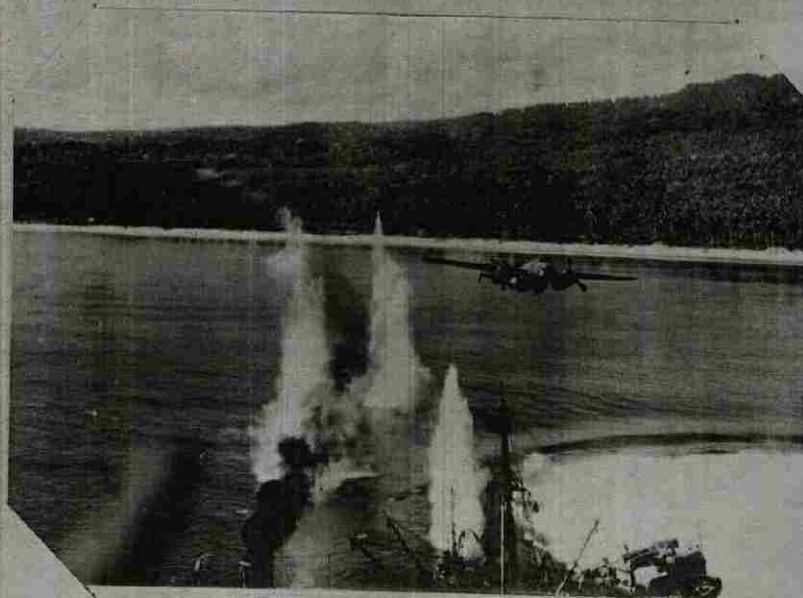
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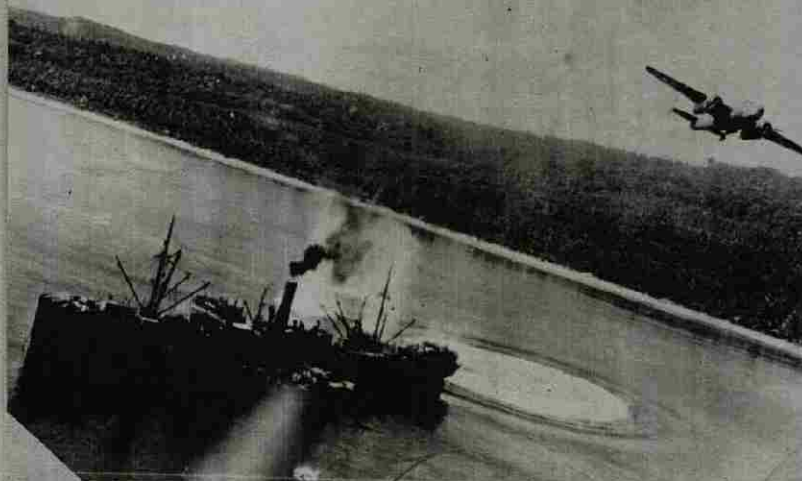
A "Green Dragon" comes in low over the water for its bombing and strafing attack on a Fox Able.



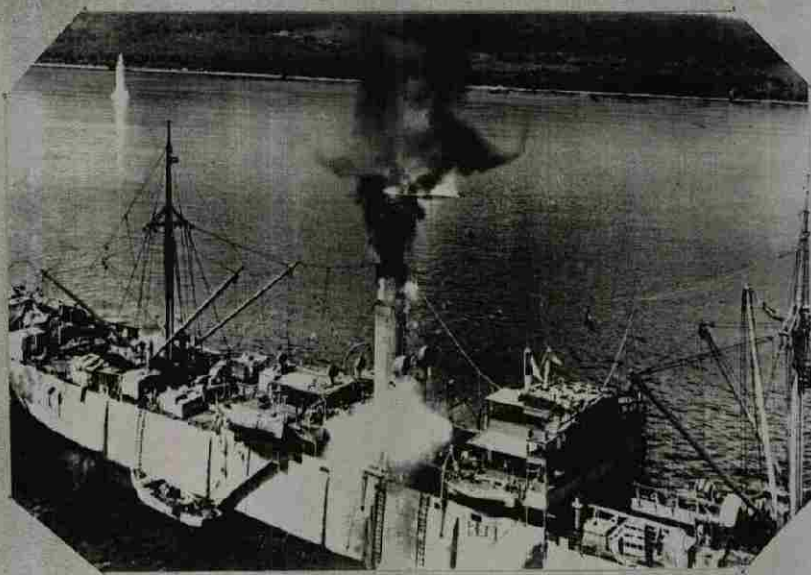
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- Bombs away and the Strafer pulls up over the mast of the ship as a 1000 pounder scores a direct hit amidship.



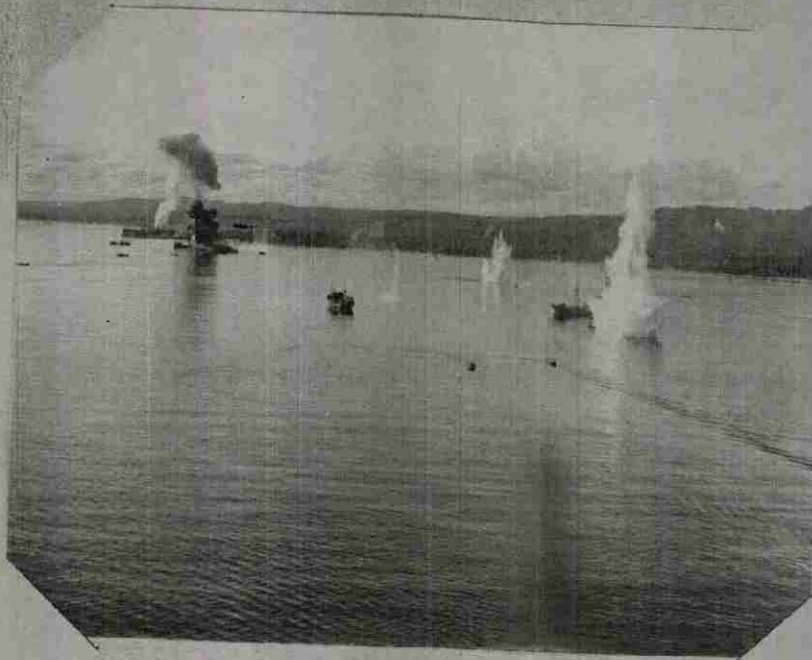
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- The "Dragons" were everywhere -



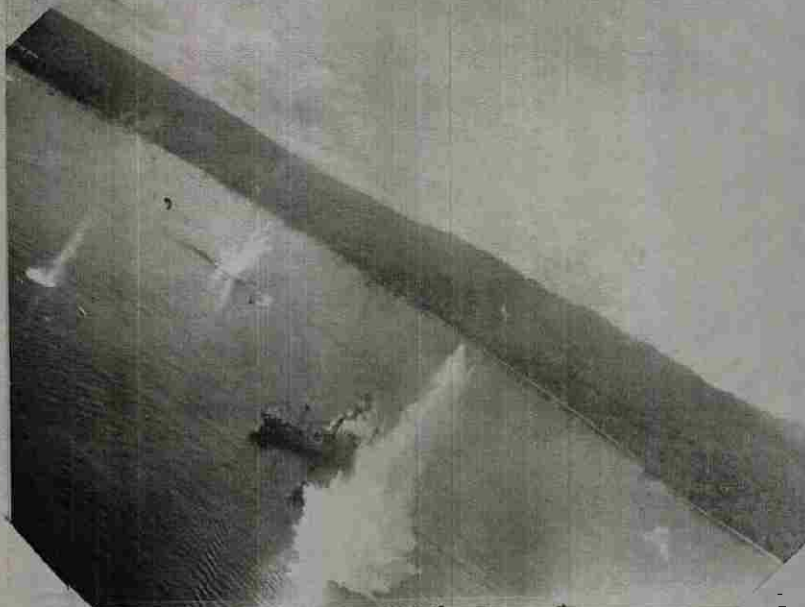
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- Near misses and direct hits were scored -



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hundred feet above the water." The Nips were experienced and appeared to be eager. Our boys were just as eager and six enemy airplanes were shot from the skies by the experienced gunners of the 405th.

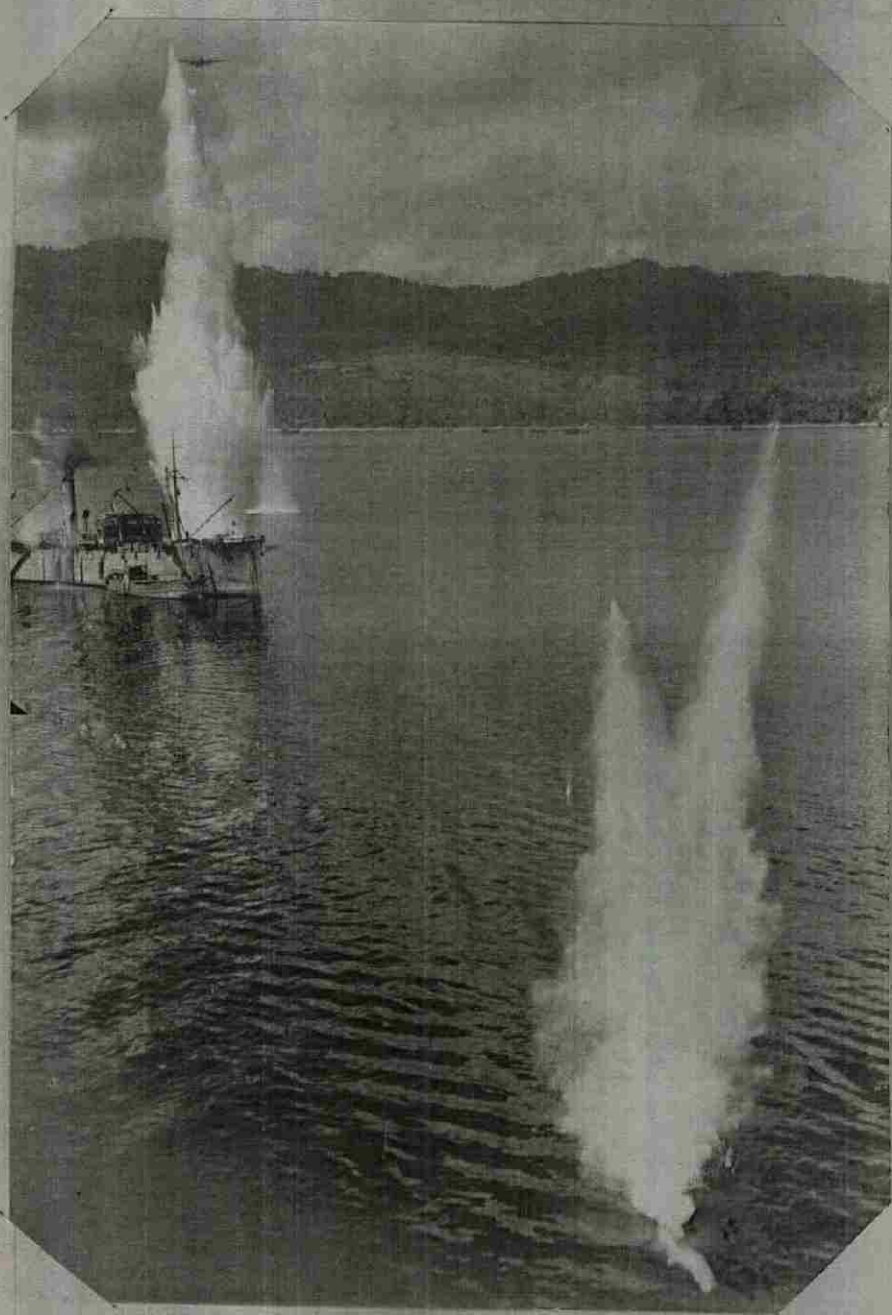
When the 71st broke over the mountains, the Japs continued to throw up a heavy barrage of ack ack and machine gun fire. The first flight, led by Major Best, with Lt. Gornfle flying his wing, made their approach over Wiriwi plantation and the Southeast end of the Wewak drome. They then turned out to sea and headed for a large Fox Baker anchored just off shore from Wewak Township. Tied to the stern of the ship was a Sugar Charlie and two luggers which were acting as lighters for the larger ship. Another lugger was tied to the bow of the Fox Baker on the Starboard side. Noticing a barrage balloon over the center of the Fox Baker, Major Best found it necessary to make a turn to the left in order to give Lt. Gornfle enough room to make his run over the ship, thus when his bombs were released both struck the water some 200 feet off the bow. The other two bombs dropped by the flight possibly sunk the ship. One was seen to score a direct hit but bounce clear before exploding - the other hit within 20 feet of the bow. The other two ships in the first flight flown by Lt. Friend and Lt. Schumacher, strafed a Sugar Charlie anchored a short distance from the jetty where supplies were being unloaded. After strafing this boat they made their strafing and bombing run on a Fox Able which was anchored just a few hundred yards north of the Sugar Charlie. Neither of the four bombs dropped scored direct hits, but the near misses were close enough to damage the vessel. All during the bombing and strafing run, the enemy fighters were pressing home their attacks and the plane piloted by Lt. Schumacher was seen to turn upside down and then plunge into the water.

Just before they reached the Prince Alexander Mountains the second flight likewise divided into elements of two ships for the bombing and strafing attacks on the enemy shipping. Captain Paquin and Lt. Stanford formed one element while Lt. Storm and Lt. Beers formed the other. Captain Paquin and Lt. Stanford made their approach over the Wiriwi plantation and the Southeast end of Wewak drome. Lt. Stanford then chose the Sugar Charlie anchored near the jetty as his target and strafed it thoroughly. His bombs fell about half way between the Sugar Charlie and the Fox Baker anchored nearby, apparently doing no damage. Captain Paquin chose the second Fox Baker near Wewak Township and strafed it thoroughly. Both bombs fell seventy five to one hundred feet off the bow of the ship with unobserved results. Having sighted a gunboat maneuvering about near the target, Captain Paquin then continued his strafing until it was well raked from stem to stern. As the fighters continued to press home their attack, the gunners shot straight and true. Captain Paquin pulled his plane up to meet an oncoming Zeke and as the tracers from the nose guns poured into it, the enemy fighter peeled off smoking and was seen to crash a few minutes later.

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- Enemy fighters spoiled the aim -

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- A heavy barrage of ack ack fire, machine gun fire, barrage balloons, and enemy fighters, made the mission an exciting one.

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The last two planes to strafe and bomb were flown by Lt. Storm and Lt. Beers. Lt. Storm made his strafing and bombing attack first, choosing as his target a Fox Baker which was anchored near the jetty. The ship was thoroughly strafed as he flew over its entire length raking it from stem to stern. The bombs were ready to be released at the proper time during the run but due to bomb rack failure neither could be dropped at the boat. One finally came out about 1000 yards after the target had been passed. The attack was not completed however until the gunboat which Captain Paquin made a run on was again strafed with good bursts. Lt. Beers decided to take the next Fox Baker to the West, anchored next to the jetty for his target, so made his strafing and bombing run across the ship. One bomb was dropped at the stern and but only a few feet from the port side. According to another pilot who saw the hit, the damage was thought to be severe enough to cause the ship to sink. Debris of all sort was seen to be thrown in the air and a fire was started as a result of the hit.

The Japs were just a little eager for their own good - after the smoke of battle had cleared, nine of the enemy fighters had been shot from the skies, six more were probably destroyed, and six others were damaged. Two of the Mitchells were downed over the target and almost all of them had received some damage.

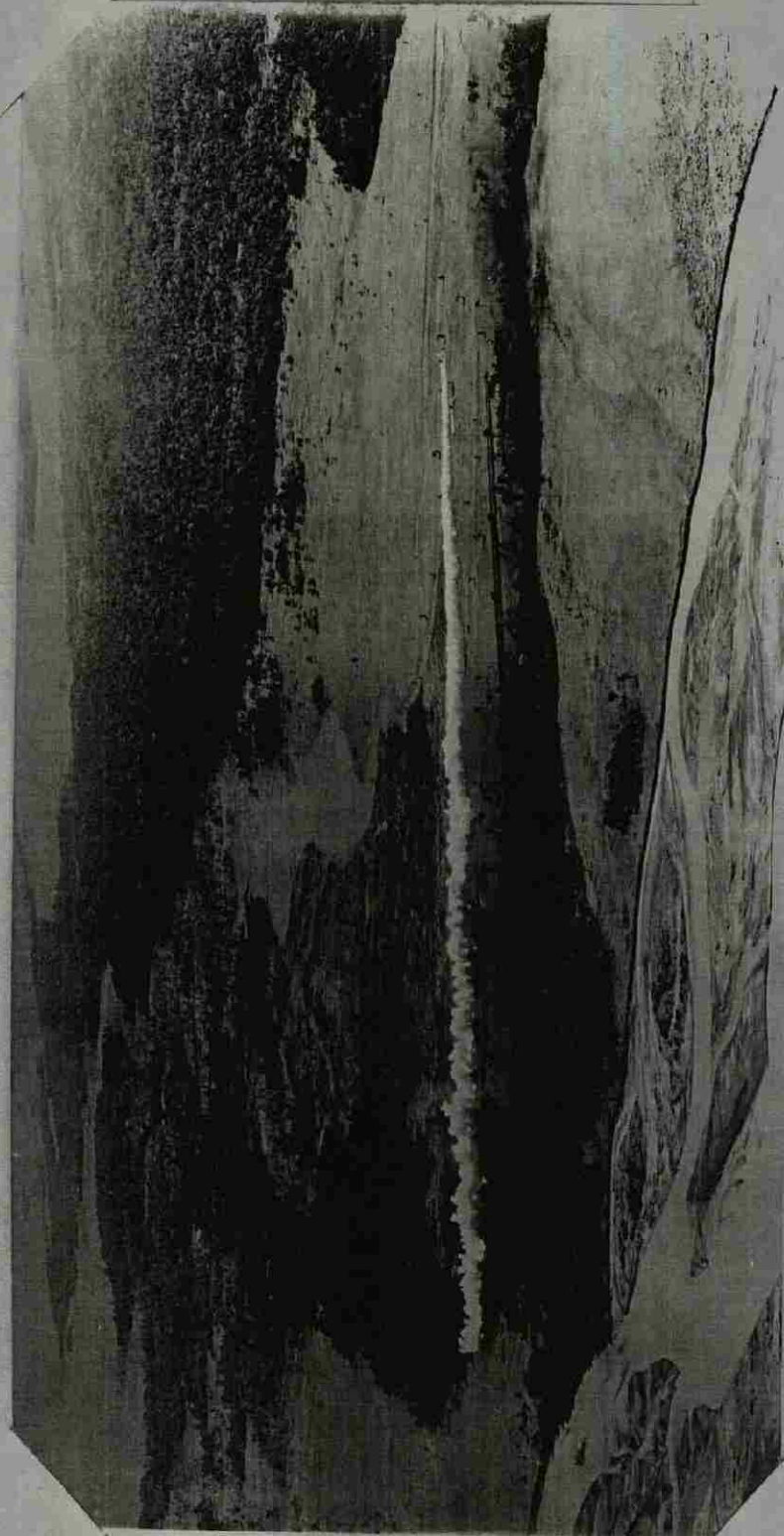
After a two day rest, sixteen airplanes of the Group were assigned the task of blasting targets in the Yalu, Narakapor and Labu Island areas. The planes left the Durand strip at 0915 and after circling the field, headed for Marilinan where rendezvous was made with the fighter cover. This operation on the part of the "Sun Setters" was part of a large operational mission that led to the American Paratrooper attack at Nadsab. As our planes approached the target area, the large formations of C-47's were returning after having dropped their men. Large numbers of parachutes would be seen on the ground East of Nadzab and a dense smoke screen could be seen from Narakapor to Nadzab. This was to be the biggest air borne operation of the SWPA to date. The Japs were cut off from their valley of retreat by the Americans who had jumped from the C-47's and by the Australians who were waiting across the Markham River. As a matter of historical importance, a few scenes of that day are given herein.

The attack by the 405th and the Group as a whole was not too intense, for even though Gabsonkek was one of the targets specified in the briefing, it was decided not to hit it for several of the chutes of the American paratroopers could be seen in the vicinity. Planes of the 405th did, however, drop clusters of parafrags on New Labu Island, and strafed a few isolated areas in the Gabsonkek target. The 71st hit targets in the Narakapor sector, and after dropping several clusters in the vicinity, with unobserved results, proceeded to the secondary target, Yalu. Here several more clusters of parafrags were dropped on huts in the villages, causing several fires, but the results were

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- The A-20's smoked the area prior to the jump -

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- American Paratroopers in their first big operation -

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- The Rivers had to be crossed -

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generally unobserved. Over in the direction of Heath's plantation huge explosions could be seen as a result of the heavy bombardment by the B-24's. After making the attack on Yalu, the planes then strafed the Markham road leading to Lae and then returned home.

On the 7th after a one day intermission, eight planes of the 405th participated in a bombing and strafing attack on the Markham Valley Road. Rendezvous was made with the fighter cover over the Durand strip and the entire formation then headed for the target via Marilinan. As the target was approached the planes peeled off for individual runs over the target, each strafing and dropping clusters of parafrags on the road. The attack was made at heights from fifty to four hundred feet. There was no enemy activity noted on the road, and at the same time it was noted that Heath's plantation was virtually demolished as a result of the heavy pounding it received on the 5th. Friendly troops were observed to be working on the Nadzab strip. After each plane had made two runs over the target, the formation was reassembled and the planes headed for home.



- The Scenic Markham Valley Road -

On the following day the 71st was called upon to send twelve planes to work over the Markham Valley Road in a strafing and parafrag attack. As the planes approached the target, it was decided that the best plan of attack would be single plane runs over the road, for the Markham road was no wider than a Jeep - so it seemed. Parafrags were dropped and strafing attacks were made during the entire run. A few ack ack positions and machine gun positions were strafed although they did not offer any too much resistance - the greatest resistance encountered was experienced from a pom-pom position on the Lae wreck; the position was thoroughly strafed and silenced, and then all the planes of the formation returned to base safely.

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From the 9th to the 13th there was no activity - everyone enjoyed a well deserved rest from the strong and powerful attack of the past few weeks. On the 9th of the month word was received that Italy had surrendered unconditionally to the Allies - it was a shot in the arm for all of the boys. Finally when the resting began to get a bit tiresome, the group received orders to send up two squadrons for a barge sweep from the Sepik River to Angoram to Cape Gordon. Twenty planes, twelve from the 71st and eight from the 405th were to participate in the attack.

The 71st opened up the attack by dropping four 500 pounders at three barges off shore north of Awar Point with unobserved results. Six of the 500 pounders were dropped on Awar Point silencing two heavy ack ack positions that were making a nuisance of themselves - four 500 pounders were dropped at seven barges in a cove immediately west of Awar Point with unobserved results, while six more were dropped at ten barges in a cove north of the main jetty area, two of which were believe to have scored direct hits. The hunting was good and three or four barges tied to the first jetty north of Awar Point received the attention of another 500 pounder. Still another was dropped at Eku Village, scoring a direct hit on a building. Scattered barges along the coast received the attention of the strafers, but the results were generally unobserved.



- Barge Hunting -

Airmen of the 405th sent their planes over the target at heights ranging from fifty to one hundred feet, bombing and strafing during the entire run. Fifteen 500 pound bombs were dropped, of

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these, two were dropped at a large, red-roofed building in Angoram scoring a direct hit and causing it to explode. Six were dropped at two tin-roofed, two-storied warehouse like buildings and a large grass shack in Marienberg, scoring direct hits on the shack and one of the buildings, and a hit close by the other blowing off the side of the building. Two others were dropped at a Type "G" barge near the shore south of Nubia plantation jetty with both bombs overshooting the target. Three were dropped at a Type "G" barge tied to a wrecked Fox Uncle south of Awar Point but both missed. The remaining two were dropped in Dumb Area west of Jetties in Awar plantation, causing black smoke. During the run over the target and shortly before the run, heavy barrages of ack ack were sent up from ground positions, and although the ack ack bursts on the same levels as the planes, it was too far off to the left and no damage was done.

On the following day, the men of the 38th awoke to the realization that it was the anniversary of the Group's entry into combat. For it was on this day, just one year ago that the Mitchells of the Group soared into the skies for the Group's first strike at the enemy. Twelve planes of the group struck supply dumps, the strip, and quarters at Buna. The first mission was considered a success and the beginning of the end for the Nips. Since that first day of combat against the enemy, the 38th realized that much had been accomplished during the period of one year. True it was still operating out of the Port Moresby sector from the Durand Strip, but operations of the 38th and the entire Allied Forces, inflicted nothing but pain and bad news on the enemy. And in the month of September 1943, the culmination of many months steady pounding against the enemy installations, planes, and shipping, was realized as gigantic strides were made in the capture of Nadzab, Lae, Salamaua, Kaiapit, and the initial landings at Finschhafen. Among the outstanding battles that the Group participated in were the attacks on enemy shipping in the Bismarck sea, and the heavy pounding given enemy installations in the Wewak section during the month of August 1943.

Some of the men of the organization had made the supreme sacrifice in fulfilling their duties, others had been wounded, and others still were fortunate enough to be dealing blows of death and destruction against the enemy without mishap to themselves. Of those who performed against the enemy, there were many heroes, men who in spite of the fact that they had been injured or there planes had been hit, stuck to their positions so that tasks and missions could be fulfilled. It is they who made the history of the Group bright and outstanding. It is they who made the days of the Japanese dark with terror and destruction. Of those who performed their duties well, some may never receive recognition for their actions of bravery and self sacrifice were swallowed up in the heat of the battle, but recognition was afforded at every possible opportunity and one airman of the Group, Major Cheli, received the highest award of the nation - The Congress-

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ional Medal of Honor. Major Ralph Cheli was the flight leader of a flight of B-25's in an attack on enemy installations at the Wewak drome. As his plane swooped down for a dive on the target, enemy fighters singled out his plane and poured round after round of ammunition into his ship. The right engine of the plane burst into flames, but Major Cheli, being an experienced airman, choose to keep his plane in the formation, thus insuring the safety of the other planes in his flight, and proceeded to attack the target. After completing his run, he radioed his wingman to take over then crashed his burning plane into the sea. Until today it is not known whether Major Cheli and his crew are dead or prisoners of war -- it is fervently hoped that some day that the Major and his men will by the grace of God and the prayers of the men of the 38th, return to the United States of America and enjoy the way of life for which he and his men fought so bravely to defend.

It was not until on the morning of the 21st that eight Mitchells of the 71st and eight of the 405th, took off from Durand drome to participate in a coordinated attack against enemy targets on the new Bogadjim road. Rendezvous was made with the P-38's over Marilinan and from there the entire formation proceeded to the target via the coastline. Arriving over the target, the area was circled once before any strafing or bombing runs were made. The 71st squadron planes then started in singly to make their passes at the target, commencing their runs from the sea over the road to a point just beyond Daumoina Village which is the nearest terminus of the Bogadjim road. In all, thirty bombing and strafing passes were made at the targets. During the strike fifty-four 300 pound bombs were dropped. As a result of these bombings, bridge No. 2 was damaged by one bomb hit very near the north end of the bridge, a direct hit on a two-story white house approximately five miles west of Yaula Village destroyed the house. The remaining bombs were dropped at bridges and camps along the road between bridge No. 1 and bridge No. 34. Resistance from the ground was limited to sporadic machine gun fire from points north of the Bogadjim plantation near the road and the mouth of the river.

The 405th arrived over the target at 1030 hours and made sixteen individual passes from Bogadjim to Mintjim road. Fifty 300 pounders were dropped with two direct hits on Palpa River jetty, destroying it - one direct hit was scored on bridge No. 3, destroying it - bridge No. 22 was partially destroyed at the north end by a direct hit while bridge No. 23 was reported damaged by two bombs. The remainder of the bombs were dropped in villages and camps along the road, but the results were generally unobserved due to heavy foliage and the low altitudes of the planes. At 1100 hours the attack was over and only one plane in the formation had received any damage. Bridges along the Bogadjim road would have to be repaired before the Japs could use them again. To repair the bridges meant inviting another visit by the low-flying strafers of the 38th.

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300 pounders dropped from
fifty feet played havoc with
the bridges all along the road.



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After two days of absolutely no activity, one plane of the 71st was assigned to the task of flying a weather recco from the Durand base, to Marilinan, Kaiapit, Lae, Finschhafen, and return. The mission was incomplete because of extremely bad weather conditions - the pilot experiencing icing conditions at 15,000 feet. Although this mission broke up the monotony as far as the activity records of the Group were concerned, it did nothing to help the combat personnel escape their boredom. The next two days were spent in 'Sack' time, and some of the personnel devoted the time to their own personal washing, letter writing, and card playing.

On the morning of the 27th, the monotony was broken when the Group was ordered to carry out another attack against the enemy airdromes in the Wewak area. Eleven planes of the 71st, together with twelve from the 405th, took off from Durand strip to participate in the attack. Arriving at Bena Bena, the pre-determined rendezvous point, the formation circled for thirty minutes waiting for the additional pursuit cover of P-40's to take off and get into formation. Out of the eleven planes of the 71st, only eight of the planes reached the target. Two flights were formed and the planes went in at minimum altitude over the Prince Alexander mountains. Crossing But Drome the first flight dropped one hundred and eight 23 pound frag clusters in the north and south dispersal areas. Very little strafing was done on this run since the depression angle was too great due to the necessarily steep dive from the mountain tops. It was decided then to make a second run over the target.



- Parafrag - ing the drome -

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While the first flight was making the turn for the second approach, the second flight made its attack, with the four planes flying abreast. Sixty-six of the frag clusters were dropped in the dispersal area north of the runway, and thirty-three in the dispersal area south of the runway. This flight, in making its run, strafed the target thoroughly, causing considerable damage to the twenty to twenty-five Lily type, twin engined bombers dispersed on the drome. The first flight then came in for its second run, flying over the target in a similar direction. This time they dropped eighteen clusters on the stores at the southeast end of the drome. The wing of one Lily was seen to fall off as a result of the strafing and another Lily at the east end of the drome was set afire. Many bombs were seen to explode near the various parked airplanes on the north and south side of the strip, undoubtedly resulting in severe damage. Not until the planes had completed their attack did they encounter any opposition. From a position near the jetty east of the drome, both flight met intense, heavy and accurate ack ack fire as they turned out to sea to start the flight back to Durand drome. As a result of this fire, two of the planes received minor damage. About two miles off shore the formation was intercepted by six to eight enemy fighters but since the P-38's were flying low over the formation, the enemy fighters didn't play around too much.

In the case of the 405th, three planes were forced to return to base and the remaining nine planes crossed the target at 1045 in three elements of three airplanes each. One hundred and two frag clusters were dropped along the runway and in the north and south dispersal areas. Three or four small fires were seen at the east end of the drome but the results of the bombing and strafing were generally unobserved. During the attack the first two flights didn't encounter any anti-aircraft fire but the third flight received six to eight bursts of heavy ack ack fire and a moderate amount of machine gun fire from positions on the south side of the strip. Four enemy planes made half-hearted attacks on the formation of the 405th, but when the turret gunners of the B-25's opened up the Japs dropped from the fight, not before one of them was shot down.

Apparently the Japs were surprised that an attack was being carried out - the low lying clouds over the tops of the mountains had prevented the detection of our planes. Although the results of the mission were not all observed, as in the case of the 405th, the photographs revealed that the bombs had covered the entire drome and dispersal areas. Bombs were seen falling among apparently serviceable airplanes as well as those that had been wrecked in previous attacks.

With this attack on the Jap installations on Newak, another successful month of operations against the enemy came to a close. The Japanese of New Guinea were just beginning to feel the real strength of the Group.

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- Parafrags covered the drome and dispersal areas -



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WE DOOD IT!