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CHAPTER XIX

"SHANTY" GOES HOME



Col. "Shanty" O'Neill bids goodbye...

October came into being in a slow and easy manner - combat operations got off to a slow start - the Group Commander goes home - a new Commander takes over - the Allies campaign in Finschhafen came to a brilliant close on the 2nd - Rapid advances were being made along the New Guinea coast.

It was on the first that Lt. Col. "Shanty" O'Neill, the Group Commander, and five other combat personnel took leave of the 38th. In a farewell speech, Col. O'Neill stated that he was proud to be a member of the Group, and in spite of the fact that he was returning to the states, he did hate to leave the fine group of men and friends he had met during his stay with the Group. The men liked Col. O'Neill and all wished him luck. The other personnel about to leave with the Colonel were happy to be going to the states but they too hoped that somewhere and somehow the friendships inaugurated in the Group could be carried on in the not too distant future.

During the farewell speech Col. O'Neill introduced the men to their new Commanding Officer - Major Lawrence Tanberg - a man the Group knew well and who had gone far in the few months he had

-187-

~~SECRET~~

SECRET



- Major Lawrence Tanberg - Commanding -

been with the Group. Major Tanberg was soon to become known as "Larry" and a hell of a good CO.

Several new crews had come into the 71st and 405th and these men were immediately placed into training on the combat tactics of the Group in the different types of bombings -- particularly the art of Strafing and minimum altitude work. They were taught that teamwork was the basic essential of making a mission a success or failure - that without this teamwork on the part of ever crew member, they would have little chance for survival. They were taught too, that Strafing and Bombing from heights of twenty-five to fifty feet was not at all like any other type of warfare. Long hours each day were devoted to the training of these men and it was not long until the crews shaped up and were ready to perform on regular combat missions.

The first mission of the month took place on the 10th with one B-25 of the 71st dropping propaganda leaflets on the Japanese

-188-

SECRET

SECRET

positions in the Yaula and Kwambelang areas. It was a well timed move for after the recent victories of the past month, even the most fantastical of the Japanese soldiers in the New Guinea campaign could have reasoned that things were not going as their superiors had told them. The Japs were being beaten back in all sectors and several of their garrisons were isolated because of the stubborn tenacity of the Japanese leaders; these isolated troops were dying like plants without water. The Common Jap soldier was told these things in the leaflets, and thus was able to confirm his suspicions that all was not going well.

On the 11th day of the month twelve planes of the 71st and thirteen from the 405th took off from the Durand strip for Dobodura for the mission of the next day. The affair was hushed up for it was to be a tremendous strike on enemy installations at Rabaul. Then on the morning of 12 October, twelve B-25's of the 71st Squadron and twelve from the 405th Squadron took off from Dobodura to participate in a coordinated attack on Vunakanau Airdrome, Rabaul. The formation rendezvoused over Oro Bay picking up other Medium Bombers and fighters. At the mouth of the Warangei River the formation turned inland and followed the river course for a few miles, then taking a course directly to the target.

As the 71st Squadron approached a small ridge just before the target, several red roofed buildings were seen and strafed. As the planes cleared the ridge they sighted ten to fifteen motor trucks but they were unable to bring their nose guns to bear. Just beyond the ridge lay the target. The eleven planes (one having turned back due to engine trouble) formed a squadron front and bombed and strafed the target with two-hundred-fourteen 23 pound parafrags and 18,950 rounds of .50 caliber and 2250 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition. There were ten to fifteen enemy bombers in the Southeast dispersal area and eight to ten enemy fighters in the Southwest dispersal area. Three enemy fighters, inline engine, were strafed and left burning at the Northeast hangar and three bombers in the Southwest area were left in the same condition. Supplies, fuel trucks and numerous other targets were heavily bombed and strafed. One pilot caught an enemy fighter with the engine running on the Northeast edge of the runway attempting to take off - the plane was strafed and seen to catch on fire. Over the area covered by the 71st Squadron, there were ten to fifteen individual black smoke fires burning. The 405th Squadron followed next over the target reported that two of the fires were burning fuel dumps and the remainder burning airplanes.

Without a doubt, the attack caught the Nips with their pants down. The anti-aircraft fire was light and inaccurate and there were only five enemy fighters airborne over the target. They made only three half-hearted passes with only one plane pressing his attack to within 1000 feet.

-189-

SECRET

SECRET



- Dispersal areas were well covered -



-189-A-

SECRET

SECRET



- No part of the drome escaped the strafers -



-190-

SECRET

SECRET



- Vunakanau burned from the 71st attack -



-191-

SECRET

SECRET

As the 405th airplanes approached Vunakanau, some inaccurate machine gun fire was encountered from positions atop a ridge in the vicinity of a large white red-roofed building and two smaller buildings southeast of the airdrome. The positions were strafed with unobserved results. Upon sighting Vunakanau all airplanes began strafing grounded airplanes, fuel trucks and airdrome installations. The abreast formation extended a width of 3000 yards affording complete strafing coverage of the airdrome and dispersal areas. The eleven planes dropped seven hundred-fifty-nine 23 pound frag clusters over the southeastern two thirds of the airdrome and dispersal areas. Combat crews reported that the dispersal area contained at least fifteen enemy fighters and bombers that were setting out in plain view and an unknown number hidden among the trees. Six of the air-



- Rabaul was a burning inferno -

planes on the right end of the 405th formation were intercepted by nine Zekes over the target at minimum altitude. For the next fourteen minutes, the enemy fighters pressed home their attack and in the ensuing fight two of the enemy planes were shot down. Unfortunately however, one Nip scored hits on the plane piloted by Lt. Crews, thus encouraging the other Zekes to close in on the plane for the kill. Lt. Crews ship was hit in the right engine which burst into flame, pieces of metal fell off the right nacelle, and the landing gear dropped down causing one of the tires to fall off the wheel. The turret gunner of the plane kept his guns blazing at the pursuing Zekes until the end. Last words from the stricken

-192-

SECRET



SECRET

plane was by Lt. Crews as he called his flight leader, Captain Woods: "I'm going in" -- then he crashed into the sea.

When the statistics for the entire mission were compiled it was found that the Japs had lost more than their face as a result of the coordinated attack. In addition to the large number of airplanes destroyed and damaged, enemy shipping in Simpson harbor to the tune of three destroyers, three cargo vessels of 5800 to 7000 tons, forty three cargo vessels of 100 to 500 tons, and seventy three harbor craft were sunk. A total of One Hundred Twenty-three airplanes were listed as definitely destroyed - it was indeed a sad situation for the Japs.

After one day of rest the group was ordered to hit installations from Sag Sag to Ulimangi along the West coast of New Britian. Taking off from the Durand strip at 0710/L, the planes flew to the rendezvous point, where a fighter escort was picked up and thence to the target area. Swooping down on the target, twenty four planes, flying in elements of three airplanes each, bombed and strafed the native villages, plantations - the principal target for the bombs - and barges. A total of two hundred forty seven 100 pound bombs were dropped thru out the target but other than six or seven fires, the results were unobserved. Barges were strafed along the coast, but here to, the results were unobserved.

After four months in the New Guinea jungles, becoming acclimated to the New Guinea way of life, and undergoing a "baptism of fire" from the numerous air raids inflicted by the Japs at night, the ground personnel of the 822nd and 823rd squadrons were rapidly becoming veterans of the Pacific War. After having completed their basic necessities for living in the jungles, the men branched out toward different directions devoting their attentions to several squadron parties and engaging in spirited volley-ball contest. But on the more serious side of the picture, the personnel eagerly awaited the arrival of their air echelon and the planes so that the squadrons could take an active part in the destruction of the enemy. In the meanwhile, all were instructed in airdrome defense tactics, the handling of small arms, and chemical warfare. The chemical warfare lectures held the interest of the men to a great extent for the displays that were put on by the Chemical Officer and his two assistants were most realistic, and every man breathed a sigh to himself that he was thankful that he didn't have to put up with the chemical warfare that was capable of being waged by both sides in this already 'no mercy given' no mercy asked' war. On the morning of 9 October, the planes of the 822nd Squadron offered a welcome and beautiful sight as they roared over the camp at Dobodura, flying slightly above the tree tops. It was indeed a beautiful sight for the ground men. Then on the 10th the planes of the 823rd squadron put on a similiar show for their ground men at Durand strip. With the arrival of the deadly Mitchells the morale of all rose to new heights. Eager preparations were made by all

-193-

SECRET

SECRET

for the first mission. Armorers tested the guns, combat crews spent many hours in the intelligence office, and mechanics tuned the powerful engines of the planes to perfection. For the next few days the men were acquainted with the bombing procedures of the Strafers and were flown over different sections of New Guinea to acquaint the new men with the terrain over which they would fly. Then on the night of the 14th word was received that two new squadrons were to participate in the mission of the 15th.

The following day saw four squadrons of the Group take to the air for the first time as a full strength combat outfit. The target was to be barges and supplies along the New Guinea coast from Sio to Saidor. The 71st Squadron and 405th Squadrons each put twelve planes into the air while the 822nd and 823rd Squadrons furnished eight each for the attack. The Squadrons arrived at Marilinan at 0900 hours where they circled until 0935 to pick up their fighter cover. At 1015 the formation arrived at the target area. Forming elements of two's and diving to approximately 100 feet the 71st Squadron bombed and strafed the Sio Mission, completely destroying several buildings. Thirteen of the bombs were dropped on Sio Village causing several fires. Malasanga Village was set on fire by strafing while Wasu, Kiari, Singor Villages were bombed and strafed with unobserved results.

The 405th squadron separated into two plane elements over the water off Sio and followed the 71st Squadron into the target at 1028 for their bombing attack against targets of opportunity from Sio to Kiari, a distance of ten miles. Seventy nine 300 pound demo bombs were dropped from Sio to Kiari. Fifty percent of the bombs were dropped at Sio Mission and villages of Lembangando, Manau, and villages two or three miles west of Sio Mission. Other bombs were dropped at Kiari, Wasu and Singor. Sio Mission building was destroyed by direct bomb hits and a small fire was started at Manau. Results of bombs falling in the other villages were not observed.

The 822nd Squadron was the third Squadron to go in, making their runs in pairs and later in single ship formation. A total of forty-three 300 pound bombs were dropped with direct hits being scored in Sio Village and villages in the area southwest of Sio. By the time this squadron had finished its attack, Sio Mission was completely destroyed. Additional fires were started in the mangroves near the suspected barge hide-out southwest of Sio and in the large Kansi area South of Sio. Other fires were started along the coast in the designated area, but damage assesment was hard to determine.

The 823rd Squadron reached Sio at 1000 and circled out to sea until the target was clear. The planes went in elements of two each following the 822nd Squadron. Fifty three 300 pound demo bombs at Native huts at Nambariwa, Sio, Sio Mission, and Kiari

SECRET

SECRET



- Native villages from Sio to Kiari -

with generally unobserved results. As the planes were returning to base, one of the planes of the 823rd while attempting an emergency landing at Lae because of being low on gas, crashed into the sea. Just as the plane was making the final approach to the drome, the engines of the plane quit and the plane hit the water about a hundred yards off shore. The plane stayed afloat for seven minutes and during this time the entire crew was rescued. The only personnel injured was the radio operator and the navigator - their injuries were not very serious. Thus the first full strength mission flown by the Group came to an end. It was not an outstanding mission, but it was considered a success and excellent training for the blows that were to follow.

On the morning of the 16th, thirty six planes of the Group were dispatched for a strike on the Alexishafen drome and supplies in the area. After taking off from the Durand strip the formation followed a course to Marilinan where rendezvous with the P-47 fighter cover was made. It was about this time that the third flight of the 405th lost contact with the rest of the formation, and headed for the secondary target at Sio, followed by the 71st Squadron. The attack on the secondary target by these flights resulted in the destruction of two native huts, and the damaging of one barge. Ninety 100 pounders were dropped on the targets and the entire area was strafed with a number of small fires started. The general results were unobserved however, because of bad weather. The only opposition encountered was a small amount of machine gun fire from a point just east of the

-195-

SECRET

SECRET

Sio Lagoon. The main body of the formation proceeded on to the primary target at Alexishafen where 300 pound bombs were dropped on the strip with excellent results. In addition to the B-25 G's, the B-25 G's of the 822nd and 823rd offered a not to pleasant surprise to the Japs with their nose firing 75mm cannon. In more than one case enemy personnel manning the ack ack positions did not know just what hit them when the 75's hit home. The supply areas along both sides of the runways were bombed and two serviceable planes found in the revetment area were strafed - tracers were seen to enter the planes but the damage was unobserved. The dropping of the 300 pounders resulted in the destruction of at least two buildings - one of the buildings was believed to have been an ammunition storage for after the initial explosion of the bomb, there were secondary explosions with resulting huge sheets of flame and towering columns of black smoke. Both during and after the attack there was interception by enemy fighters, but in most instances it was not a very serious threat to the formation for the P-47 fighter cover was effective. Machine gun fire from the ground was intense but was inaccurate and didn't cause too much concern. One plane of the 405th was the victim of a coordinated attack by five enemy fighters -- tracers from the enemy planes were seen to enter the 405th plane setting both engines afire. The pilot retained control over the plane long enough to make a crash landing and when last seen the plane was still afloat with one man in the water just off the right wing.

There was no mission for the 17th, however, twenty planes from the 405th and 71st Squadrons took off for Dobodura to participate in another attack on enemy installations on Rabaul on the 18th. The morning of the 18th saw twenty planes of the Group take off and head for a point over the Gona wreck where the two squadrons of the group and the 345th Bomb Group made rendezvous with three squadrons of P-38's. Shortly after making the rendezvous, the formation ran into a huge front that extended to heights of 20,000 feet; the B-25's were forced to minimum altitudes in flying under the front, and the fighter cover was forced to return to base. About fifteen minutes north of the mouth of the Warangoi River, the formation turned inland and dropped down to fifty feet to bomb and strafe the target, Tobera Airdrome.

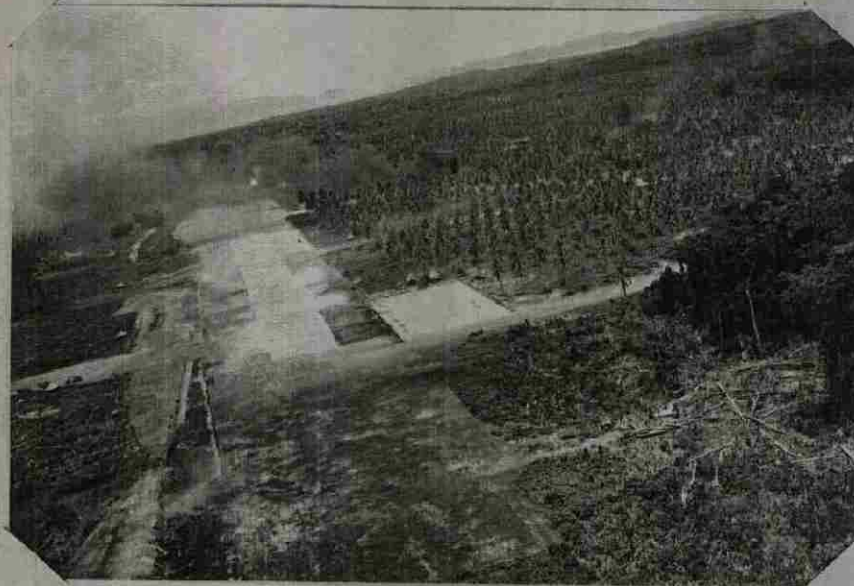
The 71st Squadron carried out their attack from East to West in three plane elements and covered seventy-five percent of the runway and dispersal area. A total of seventy-two 100 pound wire-bound bombs started six to eight fires in the area while one Zeke in the Southeast dispersal area was set on fire by strafing, and one single engine unidentified airplane on the Southeast end of the runway was fired by the strafing. Two more Zekes at the extreme Southeast end of the runway were set afire. One stick of twelve bombs were seen to fall among three or four unidentified airplanes near the southwest end of the runway, but the results were unobserved.

-196-

SECRET

SECRET

ved. Another unidentified airplane larger than a fighter was seen burning on the south side near the center of the runway. During the course of the attack, the squadron encountered heavy but meager ack ack which was inaccurate. Heavy ack ack fire was seen to come from Ulatava Plantation, the flight gap at the Northeast end of the runway and from unknown positions off the southeast end of the strip. Machine gun fire was received from the Ridge southeast of Vunakanau and from Wat Wat Plantation.



- Tobera gets the works -

The 405th initiated their attack by strafing an enemy radio station directly in the line of approach to the Tobera Drome. As the airdrome was sighted, five enemy fighters were observed, two on the runway and three in a standing area at the southeast end of the runway. Propellers on these enemy fighters were seen turning over, indicating that a tactical surprise was achieved in the attack. Coming in for the attack at altitudes from fifty to one hundred feet, the 405th crossed the target in an abreast formation which enabled them to completely cover the drome and dispersal areas in their bombing and strafing sweep. Ninety-three 100 pound wire-wrapped bombs were well placed along the full length of the airdrome and throughout the dispersal and dump areas north and south of the runway. Photographs taken during the run reveal that four enemy fighters at the East end of the airdrome were destroyed. Several bomb bursts and black smoke in the dispersal area south of the strip indicated that several enemy fighters and trucks sighted there were probably destroyed. The photos also revealed damage to installations along both sides of the airdrome and to several

-197-

SECRET

SECRET



- The bomb coverage was excellent -

rail-borne scows used in construction work along the north side of the strip. The airplanes withdrew from the target down the Warang-ei River Valley and for twenty or thirty miles billowing clouds of black smoke to 1500 feet could be seen over Tobera Airdrome. Only six enemy fighters were seen airborne but they chose not to attack the tight formation of the B-25's.

Another mission of the 18th was carried out by four planes of the 823rd in attacking targets of opportunity along the Bogadjim road. The nose firing 75mm cannon of the B-25's scored nine direct hits on nine native huts, destroying all, but causing no fires. Bombs of the 300 pound class were dropped in an unidentified village north of Daumcina; one scored a near miss on a bridge, and several were dropped on four camouflaged trucks, all of these with unobserved results, because of low hanging clouds. In fact, the presence of these clouds forced the cancellation of fifty percent of the mission. Other targets that might have been hit were completely obscured by the cloud covered ridges and valleys.

Missions for the next three days were confined to routine courier flights, and two attack missions carried out by the 822nd and 823rd - each sending up four planes on the 20th and 21st respectively for attacks on targets of opportunity on the Bogadjim

-198-

SECRET

SECRET

Road. On the mission of the 20th, planes of the 822nd Squadron scored hits on the stores in Bogadjim Plantation, on the stores area immediately south of the plantation, and in Bau-ak Village. At least one truss of the Gori River Bridge was knocked out with the cannon firing B-25's. The mission of the 21st was carried out against these same targets of opportunity by four planes of the 823rd Squadron. At least twenty direct hits were scored on individual native huts destroying all of them. Again the 75mm cannon accounted for two bridges - one bridge at Boak was destroyed with a direct hit and another just north of Yaula met the same fate.

Then on the 22nd three squadrons of the Group sent up twenty-six planes for an attack on the But and Dagua Dromes, and shipping at Kairiru and Mushu Islands. After take off, the planes circled Durand Strip until the formation was formed then headed for Marilinan where three squadrons of P-47's were picked up. Enroute to the target, one plane of the 71st was forced to return to base due to malfunction of the turrets. One of the 405th turned back to base due to mechanical trouble.

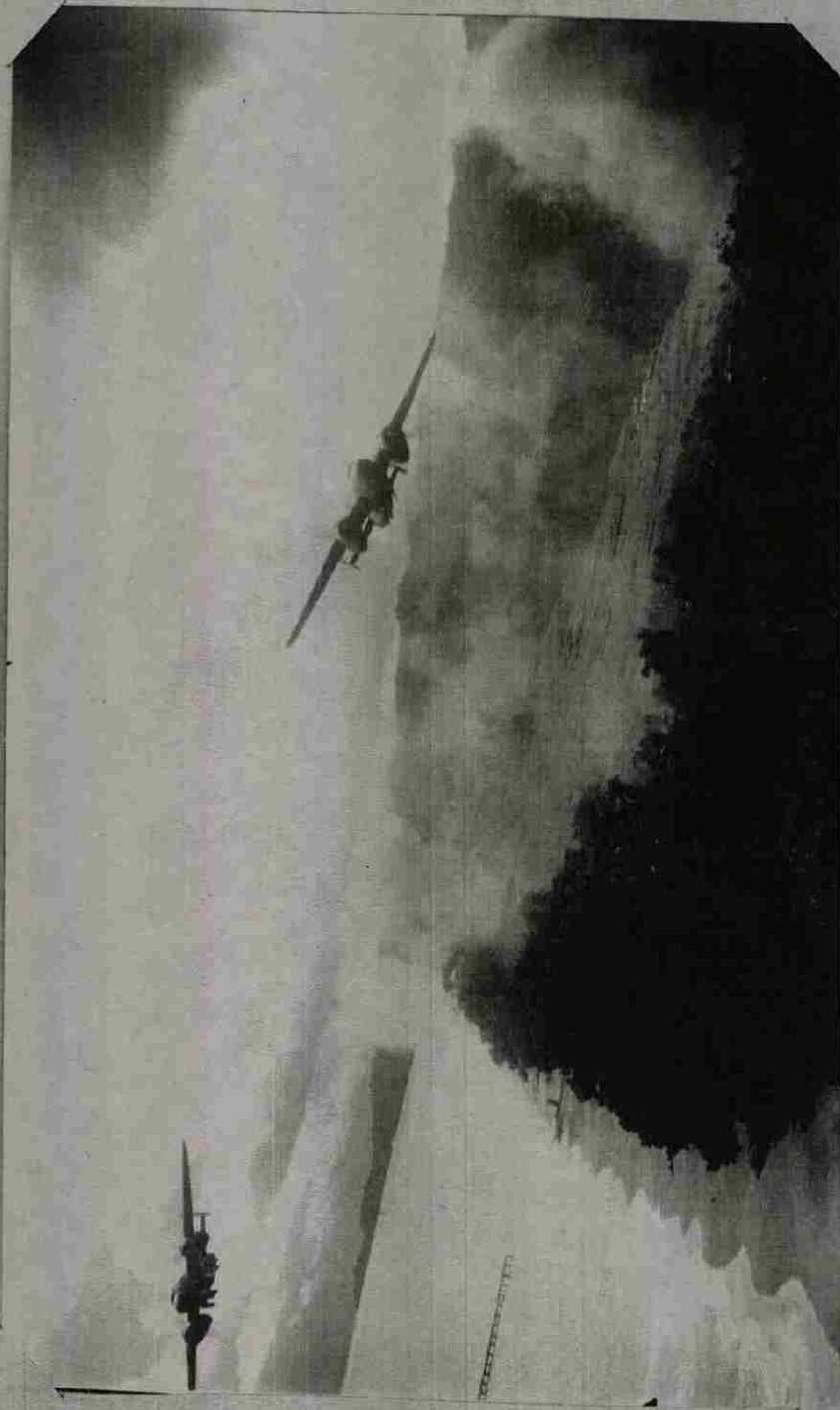
Descending through the clouds the formation broke out near the Butrem Plantation, then turned west and dropped to minimum altitude to bomb and strafe the target. The 71st Squadron made their attack on But Drome from East to West in two elements of four airplanes each. Fifty-six 300 pounders were dropped through But Village and along the entire length of the drome. At least four fires of varying intensity giving off heavy brown and black smoke were started between the Mission and But Village. Heavy grey smoke from But Village to the East end of the strip obscured accurate observation of the damage in this area. One bomb dropped accurately at three twin-engined unidentified planes of questionable serviceability on the South side of the East end of the Drome and all three were believed destroyed. Ten to twelve planes of undetermined serviceability on the drome were strafed and one fire thought to be a burning plane was started on the South side of the West end of the strip. An ack ack position just East of But Village was silenced by the strafing. No enemy fighters rose to offer resistance to the attack, and the ack ack fire was slight, heavy, and inaccurate. Various positions surrounding the drome and in But Village were firing at the formation, but their aim was bad and none of the planes were damaged.

The 405th Squadron assumed their attack formation approximately 10 miles South of Dagua, forming two flights of four in echelon to the right with a one minute interval between flights. At minimum altitude Dagua Airdrome was approached from the Southeast with the first flight attacking at 1003. Runs were made over the entire length of the airdrome from East to West dropping a total of fifty-six 300 pound bombs which were well distributed along

-199-

SECRET

SECRET



- Dagua Airdrome under attack -

-200-

SECRET

SECRET



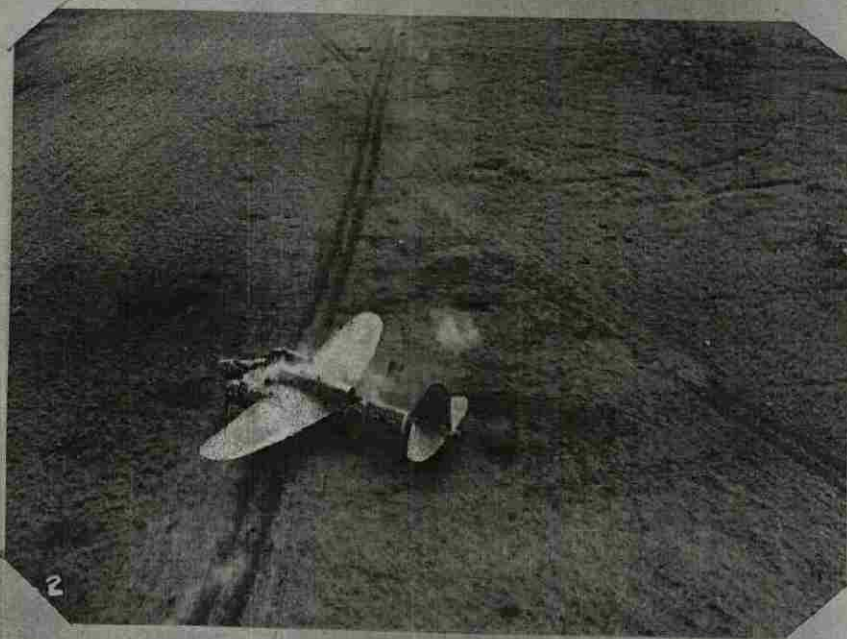
- Spreading the bombs around -



-201-

SECRET

SECRET



- Taking care of the left-overs -



-202-
SECRET

SECRET



- Taking care of the left-overs -



-202-

SECRET

SECRET

the runway, in the fighter dispersal area under the trees along the North side of the drome and in the supply dumps at the East and West ends of the airdrome. Some black smoke near the center of the runway at the West end of the drome and in the North revetment areas indicated that small fuel dumps had been hit. Three unserviceable fighters along the North side of the strip were further damaged by bombing and strafing and four Lily type light bombers, two in the trees near the Southwest end of the drome and two standing in the open along the south taxiway near the west end, may have been damaged by strafing. Only a meager amount of ack ack fire was directed at the 405th planes as they crossed the target. This fire was inaccurate and only one plane in the formation received any damage - this being a shrapnel hole through the turret dome.



- The 822nd after shipping -

While the other two squadrons of the Group were carrying out their attack against But and Dagua airdromes, the 822nd carried out an attack on shipping in the Kairiru Island Straits, in the harbor on the west side of Mushu Island, and a single ship about two miles west of Mushu Island. Twenty-six 500 pound bombs were dropped during the attack. One direct hit was scored on an anchored Sugar Charlie in Kairiru Straits but the results of the hits were unobserved. Runs were made by five airplanes at one Sugar Charlie and one Lugger in the main harbor on the west side of Mushu Island

-203-

SECRET

SECRET

with the Sugar Charlie being destroyed by two direct hits from the 75mm cannon. A near miss with one of the 500 pounders caused the Luger to raise out of the water but the damage was observed. A Fox Tare Charlie moving north approximately two miles west of Mushu Island was attacked by two airplanes and a direct hit with one 500 pounder caused the ship to stop dead in the water. One 500 ton and one 100 ton unidentified vessels loaded with troops were destroyed as the bombs found their mark. To complete the attack, fifteen to twenty new Lighters and Barges near the east end of Mushu Island were attacked with the nose firing 75mm cannon, .50 caliber nose guns, and bombs with at least three hits scored on the barges. After the three squadrons had made their attacks on their separate targets, the Group reassembled and returned to base.

On the 23rd, the 822nd Squadron sent nine airplanes to attack targets of opportunity along the Bogadjim Road from Yaula to Bogadjim Village. Arriving in the target area at 1140/L the airplanes made single plane passes at the 10 mile long target area. Attacks were made at minimum altitude and a total of fifty-six 300 pound bombs were dropped. Eleven hits were made in Bogadjim Village destroying six to eight huts - fourteen were dropped in stores area South of Bogadjim Plantation but the damage could not be observed due to the nature of the terrain - five bombs were dropped on native huts in Bogadjim Plantation destroying at least one hut. Due to the nature of the terrain surrounding the target area, observation of other bombs hits was difficult. Out of eighty-nine 75mm shells fired, ten direct hits destroyed or damaged ten huts in Bogadjim Village, seven hits were scored in the Mindjim River Valley on isolated huts in unidentified villages; three of these were definitely destroyed and others were damaged. The Cori River Bridge was directly hit with two shells causing damage while seven other shells scored hits in the Bogadjim plantation. The results of the mission were just about as good as could be expected because of the type terrain. None of the planes received any damage and all returned to base safely.

At 0630 on the 24th, planes of the 822nd and 823rd Squadrons took off from the Durand Strip to carry out an attack on targets in the Alexishaven area. On the approach to the target the 822nd led the attack in three elements of three airplanes each dropping a total of sixty 300 pound demo bombs in the supply and dispersal areas on both sides of Strip #2. One black smoke fire was started on the south side of the center of the strip and two small grey smoke fires were started on the north side of the center of the strip. Results of the bombing other than these were unobserved but the results of the cannon firing B-25's was well noted. One hit was scored on a medium ack ack position 200 yards southeast of the East end of the strip silencing it; one hit was scored on a medium ack ack position in the center of the Eastern flight gap silencing it; four hits were scored on a heavy ack ack position on the southern branch

-204-

SECRET

SECRET

of the Township Peninsula destroying it; other hits were scored on buildings and native huts in the target area and anything that was missed with the 75mm cannon, the nose guns took care of it. Elements of the 823rd in going over the target dropped fifty four 300 pounders throughout the dispersal and supply areas on each side of Strip #1 and on the Peninsula at the mouth of Bostram Bay. Results over the target were three direct hits on a house southwest of the strip destroying it, an explosion resulted from a direct hit on a supply dump, while two ack ack positions northeast of the strip were silenced. One barge on the west side of Admosin Island received a direct hit from a 75mm shell causing debris to be blown fifty feet in the air. During the course of the attack ack ack was moderate and inaccurate however, one plane received four holes on the under side which caused slight damage.

Word was received on the morning of the 24th that an enemy convoy was sighted along the northern coast of New Britain and the 71st dispatched none planes for the attack. After the planes had picked up their fighter cover at Dobodura and proceeded on course for about ten minutes, the fighters radioed that they would not have enough gas and the entire formation returned to base. The next few days slipped by with nothing exciting more than a courier mission; however, on the 26th thirty-six planes of the Group were to participate in an attack on enemy shipping in Simpson Harbor at Rabual, but inclement weather forced the formation to return to base before the target was reached.

Again on the 29th the 822nd and 823rd teamed up for a seventeen plane strike on Alexishafen and Cogol, the specific targets being supply dumps, beached barges, and grounded airplanes on Strip #1 at Alexishafen. Taking off from Durand strip at 1040/L the formation headed for Gusap where rendezvous was made with fighter escort consisting of P-40's and P-47's, and then proceeded to the target via the Markham Valley and the lower Ramu Valley. The weather over the target was interspersed with rain squalls, and the sky was a complete overcast. However, with all these weather conditions considered, the visibility was fair - one to three miles. The first flight of the 823rd dropped bombs on a plantation and barges beached southeast of the plantation, but the results were unobserved. The second flight scored two direct hits on a building near the strip, completely destroying it. The third flight started its bombing run from the west side of the Wago Plantation to the seashore but again the results of the bombing were unobserved. Weather concealed any damage that might have been done. The attacks of the 823rd were followed by the 822nd who dropped their bombs in three unidentified villages. Other than several columns of smoke rising from the area bombed, the results were unobserved. The enemy offered little resistance to the attack and all of the planes returned to the base unharmed.

Thus another month of combat operations came to an end - each day the Japs were feeling the weight of the Allied Air Arm - what could the future hold?

-205-

SECRET

SECRET

CHAPTER XX

RABAU * OR THE JAP NAVY TAKES A DIP

For the Allies in the Pacific, November was a big month; for the Japanese "Defenders" -- for they were no longer holding the initiative, the month, and all months from here on in, was a sad month indeed. The Allies continued to smash the Japanese installations at Rabaul, and considerable loss was inflicted on Japanese shipping. These losses were not only inflicted by the land based powerful attacks of the Army Air Forces, but by triumphant sea battles of the American Navy -- such as the naval battle off Bouganville Island on the 25th of November. Then, in the Central Pacific, American Infantrymen and U. S. Marines launched the attacks that were to sweep the Japanese from the Gilbert Islands. These attacks were launched on the 21st of November. The 38th Bomb Group, itself, continued to pound the enemy installations in New Guinea and on New Britain, and enemy shipping also suffered. Continuing to operate from the Dobodura strip, the team of the 71st and 405th launched the first heavy blow of the month against the enemy installations at Rabaul.

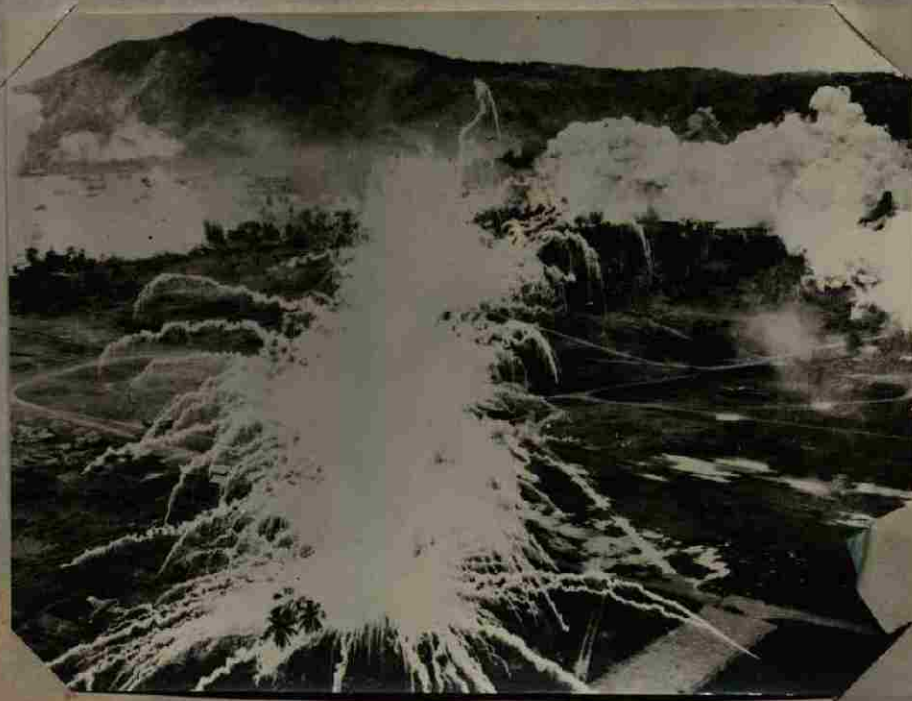
On the morning of November 2, 1943, nine B-25 D-1's of the 71st Squadron and eight B-25 C's and D-1's of the 405th Squadron took off from Strip #15 at Dobodura to take part in a coordinated attack against the enemy shipping reported to be in Simpson Harbor, Rabaul. Rendezvous with the fighter cover and elements of the 345th Bombardment Group (M) and the 3rd Attack Group (L), over the Gona Wreck at 1120/L, was effected and the entire formation set course for the initial point for the strike - Kabagon Island. Scattered cumulus clouds with bases at 3000 feet were encountered enroute forcing the formation to fly at around 1000 feet. Ten minutes on course, one plane developed engine trouble and returned to base. Keeping in mind that the formation was a large one, and that various important things that have a bearing on the mission happened en route to the target, from this point on we will give the story by squadrons.

Coming in sight of land East of Gasmata, the 71st Squadron followed the coast of New Britain to Wide Bay. A course of 350 degrees at 600 feet altitude was followed through the St. George Channel. Two enemy destroyers were sighted off Warongoi River in the St. George Channel and immediately they opened fire on the formation, both with their ack ack guns and turret guns. In order to avoid combat with these two small fry, the formation changed course toward the coast of New Ireland. As the formation came to the North Daughter Volcano, several buildings on the ridge between the North Daughter and the Mother Craters were strafed, stirring up a hornets nest of heavy ack ack. At this point the formation proceeded North around the North Daughter and made their approach to the harbor from the North. Forming elements of two's, the Squadron made their run in a North to

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South direction taking the left side of the harbor. Prior to the run by the 71st Squadron, the 345th Group had hit Rabaul Township and airdrome areas with phosphorus bombs and smoke from the fires rose to a height of 400 feet. Because this smoke was above the expected altitude it was difficult to pick up the target until well in the harbor.



- The 345th worked the Township over -

Each element of the 71st made individual bombing and strafing runs. Two 1000 pound demos were dropped at a 7,000 to 10,000 ton merchant vessel anchored about 800 yards off the Old Wharf. This vessel was hit causing it to explode and was left in a sinking condition. One element made a run on a destroyer getting a direct hit with a 1000 pound bomb. This ship was left in a sinking condition as verified by another crew. During the run, enemy ack ack scored a hit in the left engine of the leader firing his engine. With his plane on fire and in a final effort to drop his last bomb and make it count, the pilot made a bombing and strafing run on a heavy Cruiser, Flying directly over the cruiser he dropped his bomb, but it fell short. Seconds later the valiant pilot and his crew crashed into the harbor. Still another plane scored a near miss on a Fox Tare Charlie and during the course of his run set the vessel afire with his strafing. Numerous shipping throughout the harbor were strafed as the planes made their runs. The Float Plane base on the Southwestern tip of Matupi Island was strafed starting a fire giving

-207-

SECRET

SECRET



Simpson Harbor - Rabaul -

-208-

SECRET

SECRET

off black smoke. One plane ran over the shipping targets because of the heavy smoke and dropped his two bombs on buildings at Raluana Point, these fell with unobserved results. Not for many years would so much happen in such a small space of time. Perhaps the Squadron has been over the Harbor for Sixty Seconds but during this time the entire area was a mass of devastation and murder. One B-25 was seen to go down in flames - many enemy fighters were seen to leave a trail of flame behind them, then splash with a sickening thud into the water - one parachute with a chard but limp body of a flyer was seen to float past one plane as he was making his run - in leaving the harbor the elements had to parallel two to three heavy cruisers and six to eight destroyers steaming out to Blanche Bay in single file. These ships sent up a terrific ack ack barrage and used their turret guns to throw water spouts in front of the planes. Crossing over Cape Gazelle the formation was intercepted by approximately ten to fifteen Zekes, blue in color. Numerous passes were made, few being pressed home. During the fight one gunner shot down two of the enemy planes and then the P-38's took over - the enemy pilots were just no match for the Young Americans and their "Lightnings". The enemy fighters were lucky enough to score hits on one of the planes which later crashed in the water fifty miles north-east of Kiriwina O only the pilot, navigator and gunner survived. Still another plane crashlanded at base and when the final tally was taken, each plane in the Squadron had been damaged by enemy anti-aircraft fire or machine gun fire.

Getting back to the fight, at Kabagon Island a heavy rain squall was encountered in which the first flight of the 405th Squadron became separated from the second flight. The two flights were further separated in avoiding anti-aircraft fire from the same two destroyers lying between Cape Gazelle and the Duke of York Islands. As the first flight turned West from Kabagon Island, eight to ten Zekes intercepted; attacking from the Northwest. In turning into the attack, the flight entered Blanche Bay South of Fraed Point and three airplanes salvoed their bombs when no suitable targets were sighted. The second flight continued around Crater Peninsula and split into two elements of two airplanes each as they turned to attack around the North Daughter Volcano at 1355/L. Their bombing and strafing runs were made from North to South over the full length of Simpson Harbor. During the run, one of the airplanes was hit by enemy ack ack and was seen to crash in flames in the harbor. Each plane carried two 1000 pound bombs but due to violent evasive action and camera failure, it was hard to say just what did happen. The known damage as a result of the attack by these four planes was heartening. One damaging near miss was scored on a 5000 ton freighter - one direct hit destroying a tug of about 300 tons - another near miss was scored on a 7500 ton freighter, and one freighter of about 2500 tons was left burning amidships from strafing. In addition to the shipping, one Mavis flying boat and one Rufe float plane were fired by the strafers. It had been fully ten minutes since the 71st Squadron

-209-

SECRET

SECRET



- The 405th over Simpson Harbor -



-210-

SECRET

SECRET



- The small ones were taken care of -



-211-

SECRET

SECRET

roared across the harbor and were greeted by the enemy fighters as they left - again the light-blue Zekes pounced upon the 405th as they were leaving. Ten to twelve of the Zekes intercepted the formation. Before the enemy fighters could get within effective range of the B-25's, the "Lightnings" went into action; however, three of the enemy fighters did manage to get close enough to get shot from the skies. The formation continued its withdrawal over the Gazelle Peninsula and thence to Dobodura. Not one plane in the formation has escaped without being damaged.

On the 3rd day of the month the team of the 822nd and 823rd took to the skies for a coordinated attack on Alexishaven. The specific targets for the attack were barges and shore installations in the Alexishaven area and upon arrival in the area, the seventeen planes of the formation peeled off for the attack in elements of three and started the sweep at Odobeg Village, just two and one half miles south of Alexishaven. Five 500 pounders were dropped on five barges in a cove on the south shore of Mililat Harbor, and two of the barges were destroyed. Near misses were registered on two more barges in the west cove of Belieu Island. Two buildings were hit by the bombs on the east end of Schering Peninsula. Shells from the 75mm cannon destroyed a jetty, two heavily camouflaged barges in Mililat Harbor, and one caused a smoke fire on Ruo Island. Anti-aircraft fire from the Alexishaven and Madang areas was of all calibers and on the whole was inaccurate. Ack ack fire from Brimshafen Plantation was intense and accurate, causing two planes to be holed and a third to crash land in the water off Bili Bili Island. All of the five crew members were seen to get out of the plane and into a life raft, then row toward Bili Island.

For the next three days there were no attack missions, only the usual courier and recon flights. Then on the 6th, there was to have been a thirty-six plane attack on Hansa Bay but the mission was not completed due to failure to effect rendezvous with the fighter cover at Marilinan. Radio messages indicated that the fighters had gone to Nadzab to intercept enemy planes in that area. On the 7th the Group attempted to once again send thirty-six planes into the air with the purpose of making an attack on Newak. However, like the previous day, the fighters left to intercept enemy planes in the Nadzab area and the formation returned to base without completing their mission for the second day in a row.

Finally on the 9th, the Group took off in force to smash enemy installations and grounded aircraft in the Alexishaven Area. The target for the 405th and 823rd was Strip #1, while at the same time the 71st and 822nd Squadrons were to attack grounded aircraft, ack ack positions and dispersal areas on Strip #2. After the take off from Durand Strip, the four Squadrons of the Group together with three squadrons of P-38's rendezvoused over the Gona Wreck, and then headed up the Markham - Ramu Valleys to the target area.

-212-

SECRET

SECRET



- Parafrags on Alexishaven -

-213-

SECRET

SECRET

The target was approached on a course paralleling the coastline and at minimum altitude over the hill three to five miles inland from Alexishaven. At this point the two squadrons split up into elements of three airplanes each and made their attack. From the attack by the 405th, One-Hundred-Thirty-Six 23 pound parafrags were dropped on the drome, in the dispersal areas, and among approximately One Hundred Japs between the edge of the Northwest dispersal area and Bostrem Bay. Results of the damage were unobserved by the crew members, but as the airplanes withdrew from the target, one black smoke fire was seen near the East end of the Strip. Enemy fighters were up over the area, but interception by the P-38's prevented them from making an attack on the 405th. The first flight of the 823rd Squadron hit Strip #1, while the second flight made a mistake and hit Strip #2. The only observed results of the attack on Strip #1 was the destruction of a heavy 4 gun ack ack position - eight 100 pound demo bombs were seen to fall through the position and then there was no more fire from that area. The flight hitting Strip #2 had better luck - one Sally, two engine bomber, was set afire and destroyed by a direct hit from a 75mm shell; three Zekes, one taxing towards the west end of the runway, one parked at the northeast end of the runway, and one at the edge of the South dispersal area were bombed and strafed - photographs revealed these planes to be set afire from the attack; a fuel truck on the south side near the west end of the strip was set afire by strafing; the control tower on the south side of the strip near the center of the runway was apparently destroyed by a direct 75mm hit.



- The planes burned very nicely -

-214-
SECRET

SECRET



- The 71st and 82nd get their target -



-215-

SECRET

SECRET

Coming over the Prince Alexander Range, the 71st Squadron formed three flights of three's letting down to approximately Seventy-five feet and made their bombing and strafing run from West to East. As the first flight approached the runway a Zeke was taking off into the direction they were making their run and although the plane was fired on, it succeeded in getting off the ground and was seen to pass to the left and below the flight. Three heavy camouflaged unidentified planes parked northwest of the strip were heavily strafed and three Medium bombers at the North edge of the strip were bombed and strafed, and left burning. The second flight followed closely with their bombing and strafing and three fighters of a possible ten or twelve in a revetment area were set afire by strafing. In all, a total of One Hundred-Forty clusters of parafrags were dropped by the three flights of the 71st and as the planes cleared the target, numerous fires could be seen over the drome area.

The three elements of the 822nd Squadron followed next, dropping a total of Ninety-five 100 pound demo bombs at grounded airplanes on the strip, dumps on either side of the strip, and ack ack positions south of the strip. Three near misses and a possible hit was scored on the known ack ack position half a mile south of the west end of the strip - one direct hit on a twin-engined airplane at the northeast corner of the strip destroyed it - four hits were scored among the buildings in the township area, but the results were unobserved. Other results of the attack were unobserved due to the speed of the attack and the presence of enemy fighters in the area. Just as the squadron passed over the target, six Zekes or Oscars attacked the formation, but the attacks were not pressed too closely. One of the enemy fighters scored hits on one plane killing the radio gunner but a few seconds previously, this same gunner had shot one of the pursuing fighters down. The plane which scored the fatal hit on our formation was pounced upon by the eager P-38's and it to, hit the water.

The fighter cover was excellent; the P-38's prevented on several occasions attacks by the Nip fighters and it was later learned that the three squadrons of Lightnings had definitely destroyed Seventeen Zekes and Oscars during the foray. The ack ack encountered was of every variety and although was accurate as to altitude, burst around the formation. Three airplanes of the 71st Squadron were holed as a result of the machine gun fire and one plane of the 405th Squadron was damaged in the bomb-bay due to our own bomb burst.

Alexishaven was revisited on the following day by the 822nd and the 823rd Squadrons. Twenty-four of the strafers came in at minimum altitude dropping 100 pounders, 23 pound parafrag clusters, firing 75mm cannon, and strafing with their nose guns. Two ack ack positions were knocked out and one plane on the ground was destroyed. Three houses in the township were completely destroyed by a barrage from the 75's of the B-25 Gs, and one warehouse suffered a direct

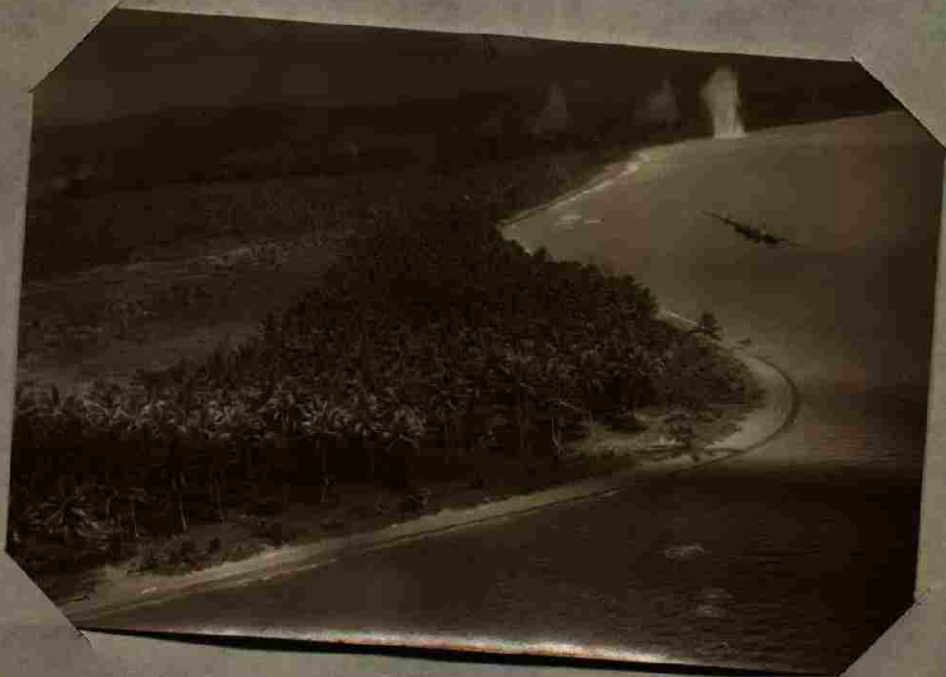
-216-

SECRET

SECRET



- Coordinated squadron attacks and



- Individual runs were made necessary -

-220-

SECRET



- Results were not observed -



-221-

SECRET

SECRET

during the attack, the heavies were bombing from high altitude at the time our planes were making their runs. A total of Six-Hundred-Ninety-Seven 100 pound bombs were dropped in the assigned target, but weather plus smoke from the bomb bursts plus the heavies bombing through our formations made damage assessment unobservable. The ack ack encountered was very inaccurate, bursting far below the attacking planes; however, one plane with its crew of five were lost in leaving the target area. When last seen, the plane was completely enveloped in flames and crashed in the center of Arwin Island. It was not known just what caused the crash - it could have been ack ack or a bomb from one of the heavies.

On the return trip home the course had to be altered on several occasions because of inclement weather. In flying the range, one of the planes of the 71st squadron had trouble with its right engine - it burst into flame, but by the use of the Lux System the fire was extinguished and the propeller was feathered. Due to defective release mechanism the bombs of this plane were not dropped over the target, and when the engine cut out another attempt was made to get rid of the bombs, but this too failed. Thus the plane was forced to make a landing at the base with a full bomb load, and with only one engine in operation. It was a brilliant exhibition of nerve and excellent flying under trying conditions - an example of the high calibre of flying so characteristic of the men of the 38th.

Things slowed down again for the next four days with only the courier flights and recon missions taking place. A strike in force was planned for the 27th on the one enemy installation that has received considerable attention from the Groups of the Fifth Air Force, and always did manage to present some sort of a worth while target for the attacking planes - this was the target of Wewak.

Thus, on the morning of 27 November, Thirty-six planes of the Group took to the skies, headed for Wuruf where fighter escort of four squadrons of P-38's was picked up, and elements of the 345th Bomb Group, then headed for the target area. On the approach to the target, elements of the 71st Squadron spotted a large white building and several adjoining buildings. The buildings were strafed, but with unobserved results for the entire formation was in the process of losing altitude for the attack. Planes of the 71st flew over the target in elements of three planes each; the first and third flights destroying three serviceable bombers at the end of the strip. Ten to fifteen airplanes of questionable serviceability were bombed and strafed with unobserved results. The second flight of the squadron hit three more bombers, destroying at least two of them. In strafing the entire area, supplies and numerous tents were hit with unobserved results, and in sweeping over the end of the strip, a lugger was spotted and was strafed. Planes of the 405th Squadron formed a squadron front of eight planes, and made a clean sweep of

-222-

SECRET

SECRET



- Boram and Wewak during the strike -



-223-

SECRET

SECRET



- not much damage but a lot of fun -

hit, but the results were unobserved. Tracers were seen to enter two single seater fighters on the strip, but there was no resulting fire from the attack - tracers were also seen to enter three trucks parked near-by but again the damage was unobserved. The entire area was thoroughly strafed. One airplane of the 822nd suffered several hits by bursting ack ack - the plane lost its right engine and several control cables; the right elevator and vertical stabilizer were severely damaged. The stricken plane barely maintained flight very low over the water - in another few minutes, the plane crashed into the sea and the pilot, co-pilot and navigator were the only survivors. Still another plane received shrapnel holes through the windshield, the fragments of which slightly injured the pilot and co-pilot.

The following two days, only the usual reccos and couriers occupied time, but again on the 13th another strike in force took place. The mission was to be a coordinated attack with the 345th Group against the airdrome areas at Alexishafen. The planes took off from the Durand strip at 0830/L, headed for Mt. Yule where rendezvous was made with the 345th Group and the P-47 fighter cover, and then proceeded to the target area by the Markham and Ramu Valleys. During the entire route, there was a low overcast at about 8000 feet, as well as over the target. Spotting a break in the clouds, the lead ship broke thru, followed by the rest of the flights, and saw a strip below which was believed to be Alexishafen, But which proved to be Madang when the photographs were developed. However, other flights did attack the assigned target. These were two flights of the 405th Squadron.

-217-

SECRET

SECRET

Making a run from West to East the flights of the 71st Squadron formed a Squadron front of nine planes. Letting down to minimum altitude, the lead plane made his run down the center of the runway with the others covering about One-fourth-Mile on either side of the runway. A total of One-Hundred-Three 100 pound demolition bombs were dropped in the target area with a direct hit being scored on two enemy fighters and one bomber that was parked near the center of the runway, completely destroying them. A direct hit was made on a house Southwest of the runway on the waters edge demolishing it and other results of the bombing were unobserved. Strafing used 19,500 rounds of ammunition but here to the results were unobserved.

The lead flight of the 405th crossed the hills between Madang and Alexishafen and proceeded to the assigned target, Alexishafen, while the two following flights hit the Madang area. The three planes attacking Alexishafen dropped a total of thirty-six 100 pounders along Strip #1 and in revetment areas and supply dumps along the Northeastern side of the airdrome - seven fires were started, two of which threw off large columns of black smoke. The entire area was strafed during the attack, and on the approach to the target buildings at Nobanob Mission were strafed and left burning. The second flight of the 405th dropped a total of Thirty-five 100 pounders in the dispersal areas and along the strip at Madang. Other than two small fires, the results were unobserved. The third flight dropped an additional Thirty-six bombs through Matupi Plantation and across Siar Island but the results were unobserved.

The 822nd Squadron's nine planes made an abreast attack on the Madang airdrome dropping Sixty-three 100 pounders on the runway, dispersal areas, Township, and on Beliau Island and Gracat Island with generally unobserved results. Fifty-seven rounds of 75mm ammo were expended during the attack - one Zeke parked at the West end of the strip was definitely destroyed - four hits were scored among buildings in the township - a barge in the South cove of Beliau Island was hit and damaged, but not sunk - hits were scored on two unidentified twin-engine planes on the South side of the East end of the strip and on two camouflaged fighters on South side of center of strip.

The two flights of the 823rd Squadron attacked the two strips at Alexishafen. Flight #1 dropped Twenty-eight 300 pounders with twenty-one falling in the dispersal area on the North side of the runway; seven fell on the South side of the runway from the taxiway triangle to the flight gap at the east end of the strip. Three large explosions followed the bomb bursts on the south side of the runway just east of the Taxiway triangle - no other bombs were observed. Bad weather over the target area prevented the observataion of any damage that might have been done. Ack ack encountered was moderate, but highly inaccurate.

-218-

SECRET

SECRET

With courier flights and recon missions taking place on the 14th, the Group passed a relatively quiet day. On the 15th however, big things were planned for the Group to make a powerful strike on enemy installations at Wewak. This mission was forced to return to base for when enroute to the target area, an enemy formation of bombers and fighters was sighted. The P-47 fighter escort for the mission turned off and intercepted the enemy force. Thus, without an escort, the planes of the Group were forced to turn back to the base. One plane of the 822nd, after the turn was made to head for home, was seen to falter and lag behind the formation. It was hit in the right wing and the navigator's compartment by one of the enemy planes. The plane was also hit by several large caliber machine gun bullets. The hydraulic system and prop controls were destroyed and the throttle damaged to the extent that the left throttle was frozen and the right throttle could not be cut. The right wing tanks started to leak. In this condition the plane was forced to leave the formation and head south for Gusap which at the time was being bombed by the Japs. The pilot swung the plane to the right of Gusap and finally made a crash landing at Nadzab. At the plane came in for a landing, the landing gear was partially extended causing the plane to roll about fifty feet. When it collapsed, both engines were torn out. Only the navigator was injured and this was caused by shrapnel from the enemy shell.

For the next six days, activities settled down to the routine courier and recon flights, which were carried out mostly by the 822nd and 823rd Squadrons. Then on the 22nd of the month, attacks against the enemy were resumed in force when Forty-eight planes of the Group were assigned the task of smashing enemy installations in the Gasmata-Lindenhafen area. The mighty mediums of the Group roared down the runway of the Durand Strip at 0935/L, gathered in formation and circled the entire Moresby area in order to gain altitude for the necessary crossing of the Owen Stanley Range. About forty miles from the Moresby area, one plane of the 71st had its blast tube break loose from one of the side guns. This tube was caught up by the propeller and thrown through the cockpit with considerable force, tearing a hole approximately ten inches in diameter just behind the co-pilots seat, severing the control wires and narrowly missing the navigator. It continued through the fuselage tearing a similar hole in the upper left side of the fuselage. The plane was forced to return to the base at Durand, and its place was taken by a stand-in-plane. Approximately thirty minutes from the target, another planes instruments and turret went out, and this plane too, was forced to return to base. As the formation came within forty miles of the target, they circled out over the sea in order to give the B-24's time to clear the target. The four squadrons of the 38th, with the 71st Squadron leading went in for the attack. Each Squadron made their run across the plantation crossing Baronga Island and then returned to make individual runs over various sections of the assigned target. At times

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the strip and adjoining areas. Parafrags accounted for one Zeke and one Sally while several other smaller fires were started. One Grey sedan automobile was set afire by strafing and bombs were seen to fall among airplanes parked among the trees. Eight planes of the 822nd dropped the majority of their bombs in Wewak township, reporting that the town was thoroughly covered with bomb bursts and that one thick white smoke fire was started off the west end of the strip. Following last over the target, the nine B-25's of the 823rd Squadron dropped their bombs in the revetment areas south of Boram Drome, on the strip, in the stores area at the base of Cape Boram and on Cape Boram, but the results were generally unobserved. After leaving the target, heavy black smoke was seen to come from the west end of the strip. After leaving the target, two of the planes attacked a Fox Tare Dog in the harbor scoring a direct hit on the super structure of the vessel and causing debris to fly into the air. The initial explosion on the ship was followed by secondary explosions and flame but the eventual fate of the vessel was not known.

During the course of the attack on the Wewak area, the Group dropped Two-Hundred-Forty-Six (246) clusters of 23 pound parafrag bombs; One Hundred-Ninety-Nine (199) 100 pound demolition bombs; expended Thirty Two Thousand Nine Hundred Forty (32,940) rounds of .50 calibre ammo; Three Thousand one Hundred Fifty (3,150) rounds of .30 calibre ammo and One Hundred Four (104) rounds of 75mm ammo. There was no interception by enemy aircraft during the attack and the ack ack and machine gun fire encountered was inaccurate. One plane of the 823rd however, was seen to crash into the sea - again it was a case of not knowing whether ack ack caused the crash or whether the plane was struck by a bomb from some of the high altitude bombers.

After this mission, the last attack of the month, the combat crews settled down to rest for the last remaining days of November. Only courier and reconnaissance flights constituted the activities of the Group. The enemy suffered and the Group was able to claim five enemy aircraft shot from the skies, with three more probables in the air and fifteen probables on the ground. Enemy shipping suffered to the extent of having one destroyer, eight merchant vessels, and two luggers damaged or destroyed. The Group itself lost five planes and their crews.

-224-

SECRET



SECRET

CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS -DECEMBER 1943

December, the month during which all Americans turn their thoughts to good cheer, peace, and good will toward all men. December in America! War in the Pacific! What thought was more outstanding to the fighting men in the Pacific than December in America. Here sweating, flying, and dying were the men of America -- in the jungles of New Guinea -- sacrificing so that their loved ones at home could enjoy that "December in America" that they knew. Christmas packages to the men in the Pacific brought vividly to mind the snow, cool brisk weather so characteristic of the month, and the holidays culminating in the end of one year, and the corresponding resolutions by which one intends to better himself. These were the thoughts that were running through the hundreds of thousands of GI's in the Pacific; perhaps these thoughts caused many a lump in the throat of the fighting man, but in passing these thoughts reaffirmed in their minds that America was indeed the "promised land", and certainly no sadistic Nazi or any treacherous Jap would set foot on American soil.

Poundings of the months of November and December culminated in the Allied landings on the coast of New Britain. Army Infantry troops landed on the Arawe Peninsula of New Britain on the 15th of the month and U. S. Marines landed on Cape Gloucester, New Britain on the 26th. The Marine drive resulted in the capture of the Cape Gloucester air strips on the 30th of December. The 38th participated in the attacks on the installations of the enemy in the sectors of the Allied landings, and performed with such outstanding merit that the Group was awarded the Presidential Citation. This was the second Presidential citation to be awarded the Group.

December was a rather active month for the Group - seventy-six attack missions were carried out, sixteen reconnaissance missions, and thirty-seven couriers. It was a month of good steady pounding on enemy installations. A month that was to give the hated enemy no rest.

The first day of December saw only two reconnaissance flights take place. It was not until the second that the four squadrons of the Group were to send their mighty Mitchells against the enemy. The intended strike was against enemy installations in the Borgen Bay area. The morning of December 2nd saw twenty-four planes of the "Sun Setters" roar down the strips of the Durand drome to participate with elements of the 345th Bombardment Group in this coordinated strike. After making rendezvous with the 345th over the 'Thirty Mile' strip, the 38th and 345th then followed a course to the Cape Ward Hunt area where rendezvous was made with two squadrons of F-38's. The entire formation then headed for the target area. The attack was made from minimum altitude on the designated area where enemy supplies and equipment were to have been stored, but

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- The supplies and equipment were not there -

to all appearances the equipment and supplies were not there. A total of One Hundred Sixty Four 300 pound bombs were dropped in the target area, but the bombs were not seen to inflict any visible damage on anything that looked like enemy supplies and equipment or installations. During the course of the entire mission, there was no anti-aircraft fire encountered and all of the planes returned safely to base.

On the 3rd of December only the usual reconnaissance and courier flights were carried out. These flights took place on the 4th also, but a strike on the supplies in the Borgen Bay area was also scheduled. The planes did manage to leave the Durand Drome but further flying brought the formation into impassable weather. Shortly after the rendezvous was made with fighters, this inclement weather was encountered in which three squadrons of the Group were forced to return to the base. The 405th, however, managed to proceed on to the designated target. Landfall on New Britain was made at Arawe and from there the squadron flying behind the 345th Group crossed the island directly to Rein Bay. At 1115/L two elements of three airplanes each made their attack dropping thirty-five 300 pounders throughout Iboki Plantation. The results of the attack were unobserved and photos failed to reveal any damage as a result of the bombing or strafing.

-226-

SECRET

SECRET

After a lapse of one day without a mission, the Group was scheduled for another strike at the enemy positions at Borgen Bay on the 6th. Twenty six planes were to participate in the attack, but while enroute to the target two were forced to return to base due to mechanical trouble. Attacking at minimum altitude, the planes covered the target area with 300 pounders - bombs were seen to fall on the track in several places just south of Cape Gloucester, some pyramidal tents, and approximately ten boats hidden among the trees. The results were just not observed due to the dense foliage in the vicinity. Approximately ten Japs were strafed when caught in the open in the midst of the strafing run. It was certainly not a very exciting mission and light machine gun fire was all that was encountered during the entire course of the attack.



- Kokopo Village, Borgen Bay, New Britain -

Again on the 7th twenty-six planes of the Group took off from Durand Drome to participate in another coordinated strike against the Borgen Bay area of New Britain. This time the specific target for the mediums was to be Kokopo Village and Mission. The Group was joined by the 345th Group over Rogers Drome and then proceeded over the Owen Stanley Mountains to the Gona Wreck where rendezvous was effected with two squadrons of P-38's who were to act as top cover. From there the entire formation proceeded to the vicinity of the target where landfall was made near the mouth of the ADI River, continuing across the Wariai Sub-District to the target.

-227-

SECRET

SECRET

The 823rd Squadron, in flights of three and four plane elements led the formation over the target. A total of thirty 300 lb. 8-11 second delay, and twelve 300 pound six hour delay bombs were dropped on Kokopo Mission and Village and Mareka Village. Two hits were scored on Kokopo Mission causing explosions and sever damage, small fires emitting white smoke were seen following the explosions in the Mission. A European type building adjacent to the Kokopo Mission was partially destroyed by a near miss, while the other results of the bombing were unobserved. A total of One Hundred Thirty-Six 75mm shells were fired in the village and surrounding areas but here again the results were unobserved.

Two three plane elements of the 822nd followed next over the target dropping a total of Forty-two 300 pounders at Kokopo and between Kokopo and Bambak, but the results were unobserved due to dense jungle growth in the area. The 71st followed closely behind the 822nd and dropped another thirty-six bombs in the vicinity of Kokopo but like the previous squadron, the results were hidden under the dense jungle growth. The last squadron over the target was the 405th and they too dropped their bombs in the target area from Cape Mensing to Kokopo Mission but again the jungle growth came into the picture and the results went out. Although the bombing was considered excellent, the results of the attack remained hidden under the jungles and not even the pictures made on the strike could capture the actual damage done.

One lone courier took to the skies on the 8th, but again on the 9th Borgen Bay Area appeared on the list. Twenty-eight planes took off for the strike, but only twenty-seven reached the target. The pattern followed closely that of the previous day with 300 pounders being dropped on the track in the Silimati Point area. Bomb bursts were seen to explode dangerously close to enemy pillboxes, perhaps destroying and damaging a few; however, the dense jungle foliage prevented the accurate assessment of the damage inflicted during the course of the attack.

After another day had passed, it was back to the Borgen Bay area again. The mission originally consisted of twenty-seven planes, but only twenty-six were able to reach the target. The attacks were made at minimum altitude and again 300 pounders were dropped on the track, the hillside, and near the pillbox emplacements; several columns of smoke were seen because of the bombs dropped in the vicinity of the hill. Propaganda leaflets, informing the Japanese of the course of the war and showing them the growing hopelessness of their situation were dropped. A direct hit was scored on a barge which was already damaged, and the hit by this bomb completely destroyed the barge. As in the past missions against this already well hit target, the results were generally unobserved. There was absolutely no interception by enemy aircraft, nor was any anti-aircraft fire encountered.

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The 12th was another comparatively inactive day with the combat crews taking it easy, and only the usual courier and reconnaissance missions taking place. However, on the 13th it was back to Borgen Bay. The trip was fast becoming another milk run. Of the original striking force of twenty-seven planes, four were forced to return to the base because of mechanical failures. It was the same thing over again with the squadrons making their attack at minimum altitude and dropping 300 pounders. Lindenhafen Plantation was the specific target and several of the bombs were seen to drop in the midst of the wrecked buildings -- the results were generally unobserved.

On the next day, 14 December, the Group participated in another attack which was a strike against enemy installations at Arawe. The Eastern Coast of Arawe Island, Amalut Plantation, and Filselo Island were thoroughly bombed, strafed and shelled but the returning crews had little to say about the results of the bombing. Again the Japs received bundles of propaganda leaflets which informed them of how the war was going - apparently they could see that themselves for no attempt was made by their air force to ward off the attack - even the ack ack boys stayed out of the fight.



- cleaning out the coconuts -

For two days only the usual reconnaissance flights and couriers took place, then on the 17th a strike was called for Cape Gloucester. This mission was to have consisted of thirty-six planes, but hazardous weather forced all of the squadrons, with the exception of the 405th, to return to base. The "Green Dragon" leader found an opening in

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SECRET

the weather and decided to at least hit the secondary target before going home. The squadron let down from 10,000 feet over the water East of Sio and formed in three elements of three airplanes each. After crossing Sio the squadron made a wide turn to the left so as to bomb and strafe over the Nambariwa River. Each airplane dropped seven 300 pounders - five were dropped at Sio Island where two wrecked Type "A" barges were beached - two of these hit the island, the other three the water. The remaining fifty-eight bombs were dropped along the Nambariwa River from a point one mile inland to the mouth. Other than flying debris resembling broken boxes, there was no damage observed. After the attack, the squadrons started their B-25's for the high altitude, 17,000 feet, in order to cross the Owen Stanley's and return to base.

On the 18th there was only one courier mission, then on the 19th there was to have been a strike in force against enemy installations at Alexishaven, but weather forced all of the planes to return to base shortly after take-off. This mission was carried out on the next day when thirty-five planes took off on the mission.

Approaching the target, the 71st Squadron formed three flights of three planes each and at minimum altitude bombed and strafed the target area from Southwest to Northeast. The flight leader of the first flight chose the right hand side of the runway and with his wing men spread out made his bombing and strafing run. Four to six camouflaged planes were seen on the strip. Three or four unserviceable single engine planes were scattered along the north side of the runway. The second flight leader chose the left side of the runway and thoroughly bombed and strafed the target. Just after passing over the end of the strip the bomb-bay of the second flight leader's plane caught on fire from anti-aircraft bursts - his wheels dropped down and the plane lost altitude. The pilot of the damaged plane was apparently trying to gain control of the plane and try to make a belly landing on the water, but approximately fifty feet off the water near Sek Island a sudden gush of flames engulfed the cockpit and the plane nosed down and hit the water with terrific force. The plane sank immediately and no one was seen to escape.

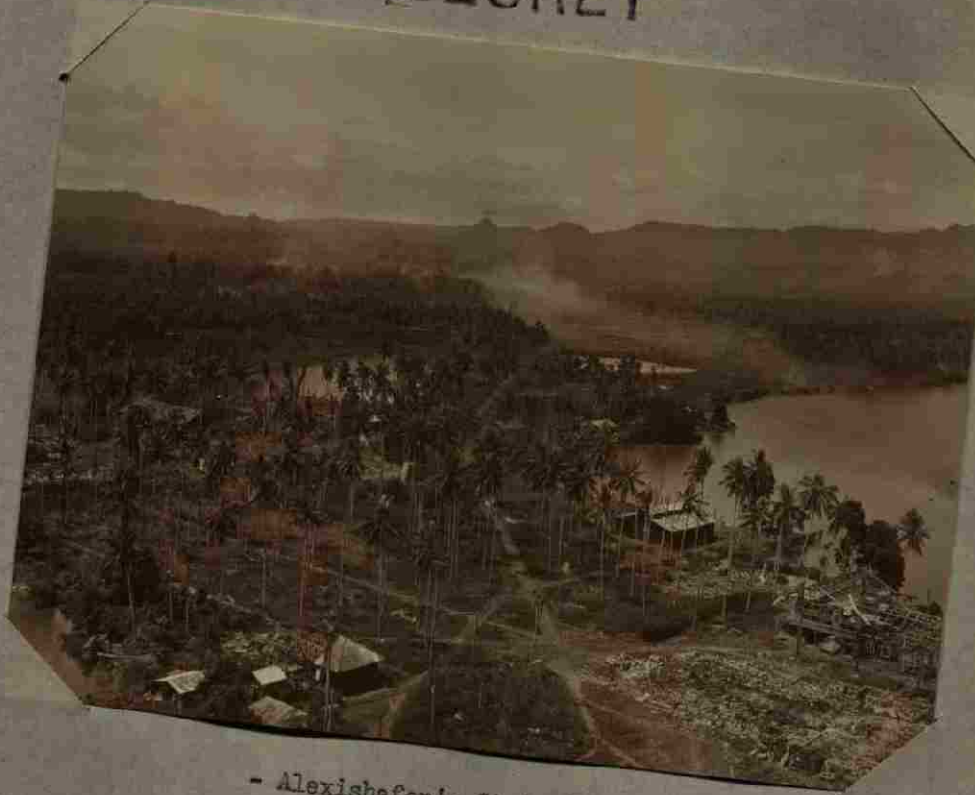
Flight #3 coming down the middle of the runway on their bombing and strafing run encountered some machine gun fire. The lead plane was hit by this fire wounding the pilot in the right leg, and hitting the co-pilot in the hip and stomach. The co-pilot was mortally wounded and fell across the wheel. Holding the Co-pilot off the wheel, the wounded pilot flew the plane with one hand until his navigator could take over and help with the plane. As they neared the base, the pilot took over and landed the ship.

Twenty miles southwest of Alexishaven, Flight A consisting of three airplanes and Flight B consisting of four airplanes, the 405th Squadron formed a flat echelon to the left and dropped to minimum

-230-

SECRET

SECRET



- Alexishafen's Strip #1 -

altitude for their bombing and strafing run over Strip #1. A total of twenty-five 500 pounders were dropped with eleven bombs dropped in the dump area south of the strip; five were dropped in the revetment area North of the Strip; seven across Bostrem Bay in Vitar Plantation and two on an anti-aircraft position on a narrow peninsula in Bostrem Bay. Bomb bursts were observed in all the area, but no fires or other indication of damage were observed.

The 822nd swept down on Strip #2 in a nine airplane abreast formation dropping thirty-one 500 pounders in the dump areas on both sides of the strip and across the township. All bombs exploded on land and well within the designated area. Two flaming fires of short duration were started in the dump area off the Northeast corner of Strip #2 and three small fires were started in the township, but other results were unobserved. At least one of the 75mm shells scored a direct hit on an unserviceable Betty at the Northwest corner of the strip causing further damage.

At 1155/L the 823rd Squadron hit Strip #1 in an eight airplane abreast formation. Bombs were dropped in the supply dump area just north of center of Strip #1, in the supply dump area on the extreme western end of the strip, and in the triangle near the hangar site, but the results of all bombs were unobserved due to low altitude and speed of the attack. The ack ack and machine gun fire encountered

-231-

SECRET

SECRET

during the attack was considered intense and accurate; in all, ten planes of the Group were holed by this fire.

The following day all four squadrons returned to the same general area but on this trip the Madang area took the beating. After take-off from Durand and crossing the mountains, rendezvous with the fighter cover was made at Gusap and all planes headed on course to the target. The approach to the target was made across the hills west of Madang and Alexishafen with the 822nd Squadron leading. As the turn over the hills to the southeast was made the squadron aligned six airplanes abreast and crossed the target at minimum altitude. Eight bombs were dropped at six large sheds or storehouses near the center of Belian Island causing one large fire. Other bombs fell among four or five barges in the northern lagoon of Gragat Island probably destroying one barge, on Gragat Island, Siar Island and on the peninsula east of Madang Township but the results were generally unobserved. The 823rd, 405th, and 71st Squadrons crossed the target in an abreast formation and during the course of the attack, one white European type building was completely demolished by a direct hit; bombs hitting in Madang Township caused explosions which threw off large quantities of black smoke and debris, and started numerous small fires throughout the target area. The bombing was considered excellent, but the results and damage assessment were difficult to determine. Three planes of the 405th Squadron were holed by the accurate anti-aircraft fire and one was seen to crash in the water just after leaving the target. Nine other airplanes were holed during the attack but none of them were seriously damaged.

Only two couriers and one recco carried out on the 22nd, but the recco was significant in that it took place over Wewak and the route leading to this much battered target. This enemy-held base was to be the target for the strike of the 23rd.

During the early morning hours of 23 December, thirty-seven B-25's circled the Moresby area to get into formation then chartered a course toward Gusap, where rendezvous was to be made with four Squadrons of P-38's, the fighter escort. Encountering bad weather enroute to the target, the entire 71st Squadron became lost from the formation and returned to base. Five planes of the 823rd became lost from the formation and decided to hit the secondary target at Hansa Bay.

The 822nd approached the target at minimum altitude across the Prince Alexander Ranges at a point approximately parallel to Dagua. At this point the formation formed a line abreast then followed the slope of the range down into Wewak Strip and Township. One Hundred Eighty clusters of 23 pound frags were dropped across the Southeast dispersal area, strip, northeast dispersal and workshop area and the township. As the bombs hit home, one large explosion followed by black smoke covered most of Wewak Township and several black and grey smoke fires were started along the Northwest end of the strip.

-232-

SECRET

SECRET



- Wewak Mission and its guns -

The five planes of the 823rd Squadron followed next over the target and dropped thirty-one clusters of frags on the dispersal area and township with generally unobserved results. One cluster of bombs were seen to fall across a six gun ack ack position in the northeast corner of Wewak Point. The Wewak Mission buildings was quite a nice looking place and would have been spared the destruction that war makes necessary, but the Japs were too stupid to realize that if it became necessary we would not hold back. Apparently they had made the building their headquarters, thinking that they would be safe from falling bombs - and they would have until they were stupid enough to surround the building with ack ack positions. During the attack by the 822nd Squadron, one 75mm shell was seen to hit the building then as the 823rd came over the target, three more of the 75's hit home. As the airplanes withdrew, a small fire had been started and was beginning to smoke. The attack on Hansa Bay was carried out by the other five planes of the squadron with the bombs being dropped on Awar Plantation and Condor Strip with generally unobserved results. A few small fires were started in Awar Village and bombs were seen to hit across the strip and plantation but none of the results were observed. The entire area was thoroughly strafed but here too, the results were just not there.

The original plan called for the 405th to attack Wewak Airdrome and township with nine airplanes abreast, but due to a mistaken approach by the first squadron over the target, the airplanes were forced to circle south of the target and make their runs in elements of three. Each plane dropped four 500 pound bombs and fanned out

-233-

SECRET

SECRET

that the first element skirted Newak Peninsula to the east, the second element attacked directly over Newak Peninsula, and the third element attacked to the West of the peninsula. Black bomb bursts and explosions were visible north of the east end of the airdrome, in the township area and west of the peninsula. One fire throwing off grey smoke was started in the dump area north of the airdrome and several smaller fires were started at the west end of the airdrome and in the township.

On the 24th, the Group began a series of attacks against the Cape Gloucester area - the operation was in conjunction with the Allied landings to be made there on the 26th. On these attacks, 300, 500, and 1000 pound bombs were used - the story of which can best be told by quoting the words of the Presidential Citation the Group received for this series of strikes:

38TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (M)

"For outstanding performance of duty in action from 24 December to 26 December 1943. In these three days the 38th Bombardment Group (M) aided materially in preparing the way for landings of American Ground troops on the western tip of New Britain. Making their target runs at dangerously low altitudes of from fifty to one hundred feet, B-25's of this Group accurately bombed and strafed the Cape Gloucester New Britain, airdromes and enemy pillboxes, barges, supply dumps, and personnel areas from Dorf Point eastward to Cape Racult. Over Eighty one tons of bombs were dropped and nearly 110,000 rounds of ammunition expended. The successful establishment and extension of the American beach-heads near Cape Gloucester on 26 December 1943 were to a great degree brought about by the terrific destruction inflicted by this group on Japanese troops, supplies, equipment and defenses. American ground troops moving in to occupy the area found that over 1,000 of the enemy had been killed and most of his equipment and supplies destroyed by the tree-top-level bombing and strafing, which so effectively neutralized Japanese opposition that our own losses were negligible. The occupation of the Cape Gloucester area by our forces was of the greatest strategic importance, as control of the Vitiaz straits between New Britain and New Guinea was essential to permit further operations along the northern coast of New Guinea and in the Admiralty Islands. The skill of the 38th Bombardment Group (M) in planning and coordinating the attacks of its four squadrons enabled the air crews to inflict maximum damage and destruction without suffering a casualty, although they were repeatedly subject to enemy fighter interception and heavy anti-aircraft fire. The heroism and combat skill of the air crews and the efficiency and devotion to duty displayed by the ground personnel of the 38th Bombardment Group (M) have brought great honor to the Armed Forces of the United States."

No better words could describe what happened during those three days of grinding combat. Every man in the Group put forth his every effort in order to make the landings of his American buddies as easy as could possibly be. The air crews went about their jobs daily

-234-

SECRET

SECRET



destroying the enemy's barges



killing his troops hidden in the jungles



and then the American boys moved in

-235-

SECRET

SECRET



- Christmas in New Guinea -

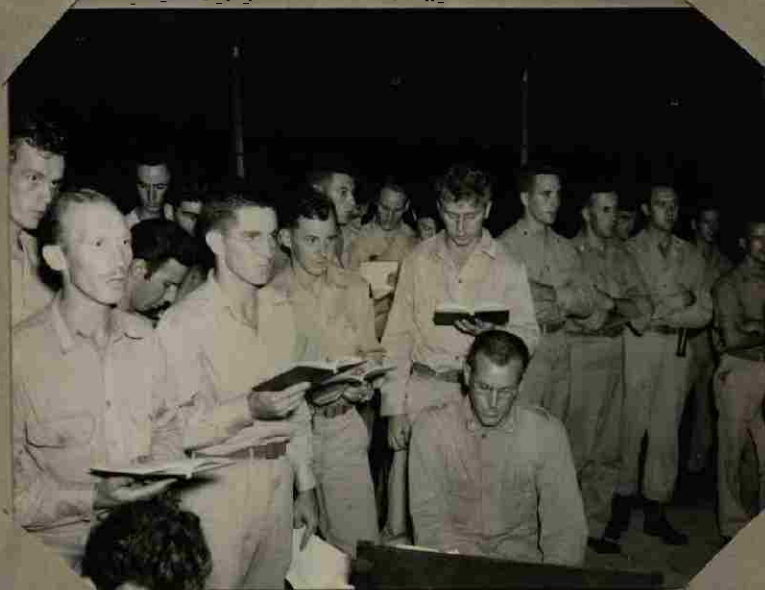
All over the world, War was taking the lives of thousands of men each day - in America the Birth of the Christ Child was not forgotten - in New Guinea, the men took time out to worship. It would be futile to try to tell what was in the hearts of these men who were spending the second Christmas away from home - a Christmas that came regardless of the war and its destruction. It was still Christmas to them and they made it so with their own initiative. This was their Christmas.



-236-

SECRET

SECRET



"Silent Night, Holy Night"



"Holy Communion"

-237-

SECRET

SECRET



"Prayers for a peaceful world"

When war is but a history lesson
Taught in grammar school;
When children wonder why we fought
And died in dismal gruel;
When battered slopes are ploughed again,
When the rainbow need not hide;
Who will explain to our children
Why their fathers fought and died?

WHY....?

-238-

SECRET

SECRET

On the morning of 27 December nine airplanes from the 71st Squadron and nine from the 405th took off from Durand to participate in an attack against suspected gun positions and supply and bivouac areas North of Walangai. Enroute to the target, they were informed to hit Kanomi near Finschhafen. Arriving in the target area, the planes made a dry run to make sure that none of our troops were in the area and then crossed the target in six elements of three airplanes each. Three (300) hundred pounders were dropped in the target area, causing grass fires, and possibly hitting a camouflaged barge. In addition, the entire area was thoroughly strafed. Light machine gun fire and rifle fire were encountered, but no damage was inflicted on the Mitchells. During the course of the attack, propaganda leaflets were dropped on the Japs just to keep them posted on how the war was going.

Then on the 28th the team of the 822nd and 823rd joined together for a barge sweep from Bogadjim to Saidor. Like the previous day, results were nothing to brag about. When it was seen that no big amount of enemy barges were in the area, the planes went about their business in single airplane attacks on targets of opportunity. Villages along the route were attacked and in some cases, native huts were destroyed or damaged, a camouflaged barge in a cove at Pommern Bay was destroyed by a direct hit, another barge partially loaded with supplies was destroyed, as well as some other that were possibly wrecked by near misses. Targets were not too plentiful and the Nips made no effort to fight back.

The following day the entire group went out in force for a strike against the Borgen Bay Area. Twenty-four planes participated in the attack, dropping 300 pounders along the coastal track from Natamo Point to Alaido Village. The area was already pock-marked with craters and some were filled with rainwater -- the target presented an almost desolate looking appearance. The bombing of the target was considered excellent, but the results were generally unobserved because of the nature of the target.

On the 30th the team of the 822nd and 823rd took off to paste enemy installations from Namariwa to Saidor. Five Hundred pound (500 lb.) bombs were dropped from minimum altitudes of 100 to 200 feet in the Sio Lagoon and along the banks of the Namariwa River. The bombing was considered excellent, but the nature of the target prevented accurate estimation of the damage done. A number of small fires were started along the bank of the river but no other results were observed.

The month ended with twenty-four planes of the Group hitting the Bogadjim sector. The entire area in the vicinity of the Bogadjim Plantation was thoroughly saturated with Eighty-four 300 pound and Forty-eight 500 pound bombs. The crew members observed that small fires were started throughout the area, and that at

SECRET

SECRET



- Over the Bogadjim trail -

least one large fire was started, but other than this the results of the mission were generally unobserved.

Thus the activities of the 38th Bombardment Group came to an end for the year 1943, as well as the month of December. During the course of the year, the Group inflicted heavy damage against the enemy and his installations. His planes were shot from the skies and destroyed on the ground - his ships were sunk and damaged - his air strip were gutted beyond use - and many of the Emperor's men left this good earth. In fact, the war that the Jap started was now leading him to the very brink of catastrophe -- and the 38th was doing its share in helping the Jap get there.

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SECRET

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW YEAR - A NEW HOPE

The start of a New Year -- even in the jungles of the Pacific, the fighting men of America took new hope in the events to occur in the ensuing year. Events of the past year proved to them that the Allies were definitely on the road to victory - it was just a matter of time. They knew the routes would be long and hazardous, but the fact that during the past year the Allies had erased the mythical strength of the Japanese and the Germans, was enough to raise their hopes that 1944 might be a year of important decisions -- it could be a year of victory. The 38th had contributed greatly during the past year to the destruction of the enemy - fifty four enemy aircraft shot from the skies - One hundred thirty nine destroyed on the ground - One hundred forty more listed as probables - five destroyers sunk - twenty-one cargo vessels sunk - one transport sunk - seventy four barges destroyed -- the achievements of the group could go on and on, but that story had already been told. During the year the men of the Group suffered too. Twenty one airplanes were lost and ninety-one men killed or mission in action.

Operations for the month as well as the year got off to a full start with an attack against enemy positions on Saidor. Operations for the day included the usual courier and reconnaissance flights, and a "supply drop", carried out by two planes of the 822nd and 823 Squadrons.



- Saidor targets -

-241-

SECRET

SECRET

The attack mission against Saidor involved twenty-four planes but the mission finally turned out to be one where the results were generally unobserved. The attack was made from minimum altitude with each squadron splitting up their planes into elements of three planes each and dropping a total of ninety-two 500 pound demolition bombs from Legap plantation to Fangger Village. The dense foliage throughout the area prevented the observation of results, however, large smoke fires were seen as a result of the bombing. Shells expended from the 75mm's of the planes of the 822nd and 823rd scored direct hits on native huts along the shore in the Legap plantation, destroying them. During the course of the attack, no ack ack was encountered but sporadic machine gun fire was directed at the formation at the mouth of Biding River. The fire was ineffective and all planes returned without damage.

There were no combat missions from the 2nd up to and including the 4th day of the month, just the usual reconnaissance and courier flights; however, on the 5th the Group marshaled twenty four of its planes for a strike on the Jap bivouac areas in the Sio - Kiari area. The target was such that the planes made a dry run over the target to determine the exact location of the supposed camp sites. The squadrons then formed elements of two airplanes each bombing and strafing the area at minimum altitude. The results of the attack were unobserved but as the planes left the area, two black smoke fires and several small fires were seen in the area bombed. A barge of questionable serviceability was sighted and strafed during the attack and then the planes returned to base.

Again after this mission against enemy installations, there was a lapse of two days before the planes flew again. On the 8th the target for the attack was Uligan Harbor, New Guinea where the enemy was actively maintaining an important barge staging point, supply depot, and personnel staging area. After rendezvous with the fighter cover was made at Gusap, the individual squadrons proceeded to the target area.

Approaching the target at 1000/L, the 822nd Squadron attacked in two elements of three planes each flying a tight V formation. This was necessary due to the undulating terrain surrounding the rectangular shaped harbor. Twenty-eight 300 pound demolition bombs were dropped and a medium sized fire emitting black and white smoke followed five hits in the supply dump area near the southwest corner of the harbor. One direct hit was made on a medium sized frame house covering a 20mm ack ack and machine gun position located 500 feet southwest of the harbor jetty causing the guns to cease firing. Ten bombs fell among Mission but buildings setting at least five houses afire. One string of five bombs was dropped on five to seven Type "C" barges moored parallel to the west shore of the harbor just south of the jetty. The bombs were seen falling very near three of the barges but the explosions were not seen by the crew

-242-

SECRET

SECRET



- Hitting next to home -

members. Other bombs hit near several small houses near the heavy ack ack positions north of the village setting two houses afire, hits were scored on or very near the heavy ack ack position north of the Mission Building and the position was completely silenced.

Airplane #766, number 3 airplane in the first flight, received what appeared to be a direct hit from heavy ack ack fire in the right engine when it was 1000 yards southwest of the harbor. The engine burst into flames and the fire rapidly began to envelope the whole right side of the airplane. The pilot, Lt Braun, kept the bomber under control, pulled up over a 200 foot hill, and in the opinion of all eye witnesses, made every effort to complete the bombing run but by this time the airplane was completely aflame. Lt. Braun lowered the nose, veered slightly to the right, passed under the remaining two planes and crashed directly into a large group of buildings surrounding Uligan Mission. The airplane skidded through the area setting many of the houses afire and finally came to a rest 300 yards northwest of the Mission near the motor road.

The 822nd squadron approached the target over the hills behind Uligan Harbor and made their run toward the sea. The two elements of three airplanes each attacked across the Southern side of Uligan Harbor dropping forty 300 pound bombs among barges on the southeast side of the harbor, at huts on tip of 200 foot ridge 1000 feet East of the southeast corner of the harbor, and along the entire length of the southeast shore of the harbor. Several small fires were observed from the bomb-

-243-

SECRET

SECRET

ing and a number of the bombs were seen to explode within five feet of the barges - the damage resulting from these explosions were not observed.

Letting down to minimum altitude about ten miles south of the target, the 71st Squadron formed two flights of three airplanes and bombed and strafed the target from the Dump area at the Southwest end of the harbor to beyond a known ack ack position 1200 feet north of the Mission. Two to three fires were seen coming from the area and the entire target was



covered with smoke. Other fires were observed in the target

-244-

SECRET

SECRET

area - these were caused by the attacks of the previous squadrons.

Upon approaching Uligan Harbor, the 405th Squadron took up a line astern formation for their attack on the Government Police Station, where a possible heavy anti-aircraft gun was located. Ruggedness of the terrain surrounding the assigned target precluded an effective bombing run and the squadron was forced out of position. A small village consisting of six native huts one mile east of the assigned target was selected as an alternate and twenty-eight 300 pound bombs were dropped in and around the village. Damage other than the bomb bursts were unobserved. By the time the 405th had crossed the target, much of the heavy, intense anti-aircraft fire which had greeted the other three squadrons had ceased firing. This alone tends to indicate that a number of the positions had received direct hits during the attack.

On the morning of the 9th the group returned in force to carry out a strike against the Erimahafen Plantation at the head of the Bogadjim road. Splitting up into elements of three airplanes each, the four squadrons carried out their minimum altitude attack dropping 300 pounders throughout the plantation and supply areas. A few fires of short duration resulted from the bombing and several huts in the vicinity were hit with their destruction affirmed. Two bridges were hit by the combined bombing and shelling of the area. During the course of the run, the target was also strafed but in every case the results were generally unobserved. On the following day a return visit was paid the Erimahafen Plantation and jetty area. On this trip 300 pound 8 - 10 second delay bombs were used and together with the speed of the attack, damage assessment was impossible. Bombs were dropped in the jetty area at fifteen to twenty piles of supplies and trucks; other bombs were dropped in Bibi Village near Herwarth Plantation destroying one hut and setting fire to two or three others; two bridges in the area suffered direct hits from the 300 pounders and were destroyed; shells from the 75mm cannon scored hits on two more bridges and set another hut on fire. These were the only results the crews could report.

For the third combat mission in as many days, Uligan Harbor was selected for the target on the 11th. The 405th flew as lead squadron in the group formation and spearheaded the attack against known barges along the East side of Uligan Harbor, stores, mission buildings, heavy ack ack positions and barges adjacent to the jetty on the west side of the harbor.

Approaching the harbor, the 405th and 822nd squadrons moved slightly ahead of the group and made a coordinated run on the West and East sides of the harbor respectively. Assigned targets for the 405th were supplies in the southwest corner of the harbor, and personnel and stores in the mission

-245-

SECRET

SECRET

building along the middle western edge of the mission. The run over the target was made along the entire western side of the harbor and a total of thirty-nine 300 pound bombs were dropped on the principal targets. The results of the 405th attack were unobserved and even the camera failed to be of much help. The 822nd Squadron then three elements of two airplanes each and attacked across the southern side of the harbor. Thirty five 300 pound bombs were dropped in two bombing runs at ten to fourteen barges along the southeast side of Uligan harbor and on the shore. At least five direct hits were scored on five barges destroying them, four to six others were badly damaged by near misses, causing twelve to be sunk during the two runs. Black smoke to 100 feet rose over the harbor after the second attack. Fire from the 75mm's scored hits on three



- The Nips take a dip -

other barges setting them afire. Every pilot in the squadron stated that no barges in the harbor remained undamaged after the attack - only two or three were still floating on the water.

The approach to the target by the 823rd Squadron was hampered by heavy plumes of grey smoke over the east side of the Harbor caused by the previous squadrons attack. However, thirty-six bombs were dropped on land along the east shore and in the supply dump on the southeast corner of the harbor and among five to seven barges. At least one violent explosion occurred on shore, indicating that a fuel dump had been hit - two direct hits were scored on two barges completely destroying them. Heavy smoke obscured results of the remainder of the bombs. Two machine gun positions at the southeast corner

-246-

SECRET

SECRET

of the harbor were silenced by the shelling and strafing.

The 71st Squadron followed last over the target and dropped forty-two 300 pounders through Uligan Mission area from the dump at the southwest corner of the harbor to a heavy ack ack position northeast of the mission. Other than bomb bursts, the results were unobserved. Heavy and moderate, accurate ack ack was encountered during the course of the attack, but usually the bursts were to the right of the formation. Five planes in the formation were holed as a result, but there was no serious damage done.

There was no attack mission on the 12th and on the 13th, the Erimahafen Plantation was to have been paid a return visit by three squadrons of the Group. The mission. The mission was incomplete however, because of severe thunderstorms and heavy rain storms encountered in the Yule Island sector. After making five attempts to break through the front, all planes returned to base.

On the morning of the 14th the 71st and 405th teamed together to send out fourteen planes on a barge sweep from Rein Bay to Kokopo. The planes arrived in the area at 0946/L and in single plane flights, flew along the coast toward Kokopo. The 71st sighted two camouflaged barges, but not until it was too late to make an attack. There were no other sightings so the bomb load of 300 pounders was dropped on Karai-Ai and Tavaliai Villages, unidentified possible dump or bivouac areas along the route of search. The 405th failed to find any barges and went about dropping their bombs on a number of villages along the coast. Results of the attack were not observed and the planes returned along the same route to base.

The 15th saw a lull in the mission for the first time in four days, but again on the 16th three squadrons took off from Durand to carry out another barge sweep in the Cape Croisilles - Cape Gourdon section. Approach to the target was made over the ranges southwest of Cape Croisilles and here the 822nd broke up into single airplanes in file for their attacks up the coastline road. It was not a concentrated target and the planes went about dropping their bombs all over the place. Three hits in Walong Plantation and Village - two on Sarang Island starting a fire near the mission - one in Tukain and two in Yedikum Villages - three at Gabie River bridge damaging it - two in Marukunan Village destroying twelve to fifteen huts and starting numerous fires - two in Tawulte and two in Separa Villages, two in Bunabun Village - one in Kurunat Village - and two were unobserved. It must have been quite a day for the natives.

In two flights the 71st Squadron proceeded up the coast to Cape Gourdon. Throughout the entire sweep from Cape Croisilles to Cape Gourdon there were nil sighting of serviceable barges,

-247-

SECRET

SECRET

and villages along the route were bombed. In the case of the 822nd and 71st Squadrons, numerous small fires were started and numerous huts were destroyed. Regrouping off Cape Gourdon, the 71st started its homeward flight down the coastline. Cutting inland behind Alexishafen, the formation was intercepted by six to eight Zekes approximately 30 miles Southwest of Madang. The Zekes concentrated their attack on the first flight of the 71st Squadron. Coming in from five to seven o'clock, they picked the number three plane and managed to score a number of hits, causing the wheel of the plane to drop down. Then one of the attackers made a tight turn and attacked the damaged plane head on. Pieces of the left wing were blown off and the plane went into a steep dive followed by two Zekes pressing home their attack. During the course of the dive the right engine began to smoke heavily; one of the crew members was seen to bail out of the plane and during his descent he was attacked unmercifully by one Zeke -- this attack perhaps enabled the Jappilot to shout his only "Banzai" of the day. The stricken plane was brought under control just before it neared the earth, however, the terrain was hilly and the foliage was dense -- after leveling off in horizontal flight the plane was seen to disappear in the dense underbrush and the spot at which it landed was enveloped in clouds of heavy black smoke.

As the 405th went in for the attack, the lead ship struck a tree over the plantation, making a large hole in the leading edge. The plane then turned out to sea again, with the intention of flying offshore and accompanying the balance of the formation while they continued on their mission. However, all planes followed the lead ship out to sea, with the result that he made a figure eight and again headed towards land. Just off shore the plantation, approximately six enemy planes were sighted inland over Cape Croisilles. The Squadron immediately turned southwest and headed for Gusap and the Ramu Valley, flying at full throttle and tree top level. The enemy fighters came in for the attack concentrating on the first and second plane of the second flight. One of the first attacking planes tried to go to work on the leading plane, but the hot lead of the turret gunner sent the Jap crashing into the trees below in a burst of flame. Another Zeke, piloted by a Jap just a little more eager got a bit too close and met the same fate. The enemy planes pulled everything they had out of the bag, but the roaring fifties were too much for them. One other Zeke in a last desperate attempt to score a hit, came within the sights of the turret gunner and was last seen passing under the formation leaving a trail of hot burning gas. The sea claimed another victim.

With a rest of one day, the Group was called on to send four squadrons on a bombing and strafing mission in support of the 7th Australian Division advance in the area approximately eight miles north of Dumpu, on the ridge East across the Faria River valley from Shaggy Ridge. The crews were briefed that the

-248-

SECRET

SECRET



- The Aussies got their support -

terrain was suited for anything but close ground support work. However, all were eager to get in a few hits at the Japs. Attacks were made at medium altitude and the assigned area was covered with 500 pounders, but the results were not observed. Later the Group received a commendation from the Australian forces on the excellent bombing carried over the target.

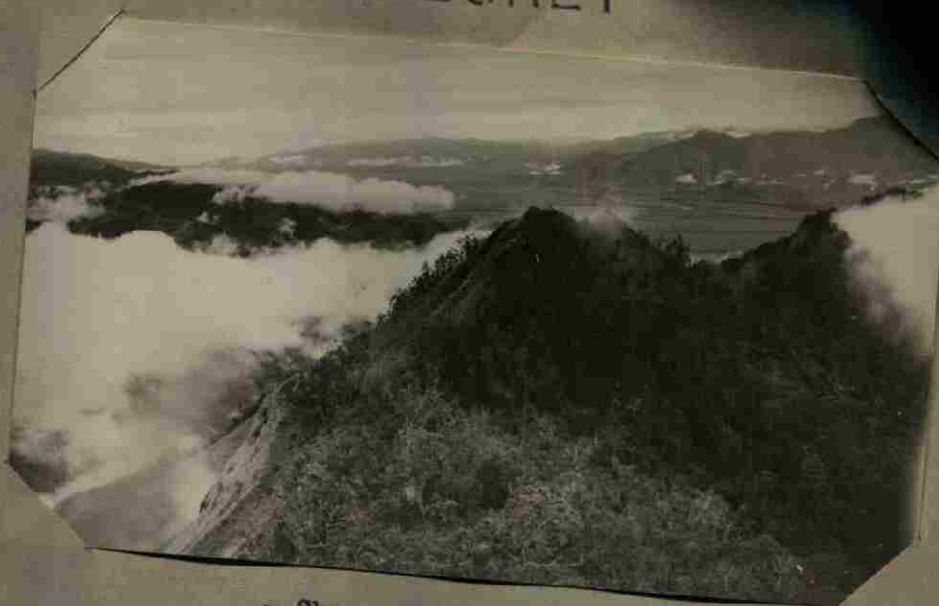
For the next two days the Group continued to give the advancing Australians support by relentlessly pounding the now famous Shaggy Ridge. Each day saw the Group send all out available planes to batter the Japanese and their installations located on Shaggy Ridge. The Nips on the ground put up a stubborn defense and were reluctant to give up their hold on this high point of ground. The little Japs knew that the end was fast approaching and there was nothing they could do about it. The Australians put out ground panels in front of their troops to show our boys just where the Japs were - in some instances, the wiry little Japs would fire red flares toward the ground troops in hopes that we would bomb or strafe the wrong area. This did them little good for the Allied forces were fighting this war as a team.

On the 20th, our planes pulled their last attack against

-249-

SECRET

SECRET



- Shaggy Ridge -

Shaggy Ridge and the Australians took over. The battle was a tough one for the ground troops and without the aid of the Air Force, it would have been even tougher. After the ridge had been captured, the Australians showed their appreciation in the form of an official commendation to the men of the 38th.

The next three days saw little activity other than courier missions, but on the 24th three squadrons were sent out to participate in a bombing and strafing attack on enemy installations at Hansa Bay. The squadrons took leave of Durand Strip during the mid-morning hours and headed toward Gusap where rendezvous was made with the fighter cover, then the entire formation headed up the Ramu Valley to the target area.

The 71st opened the attack by dropping sixty-three 300 pound bombs along the coastline from the mouth of the Awar River to the main ack ack position on Awar Point. The target area including stacks of supplies as well as ten to twelve barges along the shore were bombed and strafed, and although the bombing was accurate, the results were unobserved. Following the bombing run, the squadron passed out over Awar point and continued out over the water to reassemble the group formation.

The 405th Squadron followed the 71st Squadron in the attack hitting from Southwest to Northeast. Elements of three were employed at minimum altitude in bombing and strafing through the supply dumps adjacent to the jetty area in Awar Plantation, across Nubia and Condor airdromes and the shoreline south of the Awar River mouth. Forty-nine 300 pounders were dropped with most of them falling in Awar plantation northwest of the jetties

-250-

SECRET

SECRET



- The bombs fell through the plantation -

while several dropping south of the Awar River mouth. Other than a few small fires started in the area, the results were unobserved.

The eight airplanes of the 823rd dropped a total of thirty five 300 pounders beginning at Sismanauge Village to the north loop of the Awar River. Several fires resulted from the bombing, but the specific destruction of supplies was not reported. All during the attack, the Nips threw up and intense amount of heavy ack ack at the attacking planes but it was not their day for accuracy and the planes returned via the Ramu Valley to their Durand home.

On the 25th the last combat mission of the month took place when three squadrons of the Group pulled their first attack on enemy held Admiralty Islands. At 0718/L on the 25th, the planes of the Group began their take offs from Durand strip and proceeded to Dobodura when the formation landed. At 0924/L the planes were again airborne and the three squadrons, 71st, 405th and 823rd joined formation with the 345th Bomb Group and set course for the target area. At 1144/L, over Rambutyol Island the formation broke up into their nine abreast squadron formation in preparation for making their attack. In another ten minutes the 71st Squadron commenced their bombing and strafing attack on Momote Airdrome. With the exception of one plane, all planes dropped their bombs in the drome area and the surround-

-251-

SECRET

SECRET



- Momote Airdrome - A new target -

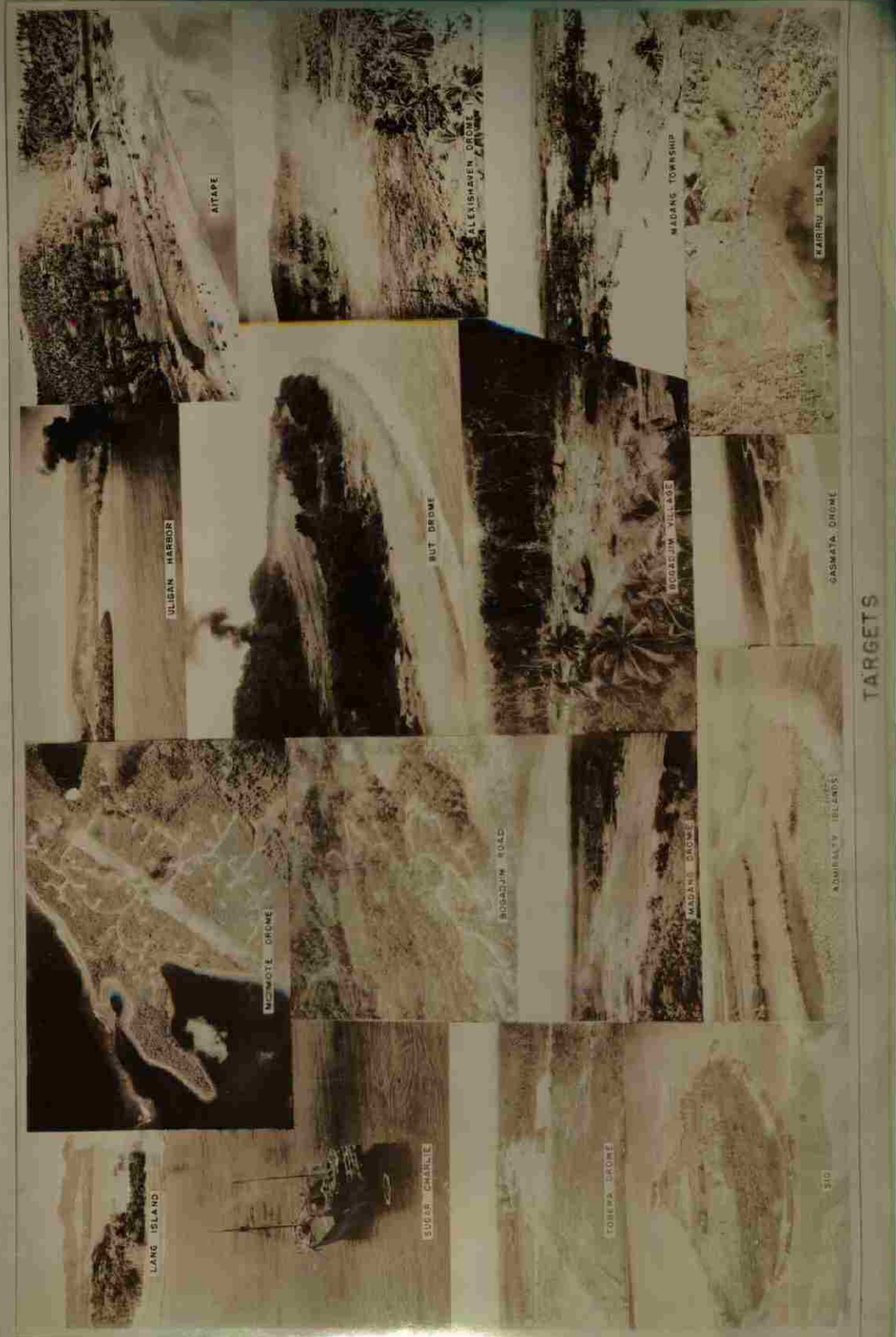
ing vicinity. Leaving Momote Drome the Squadron proceeded to Salami Plantation where the Squadron strafed the area while one plane dropped its bombs on the plantation houses. The formation continued to fly north while the others squadrons did their work, then made a sharp turn and came back over the plantation and drome to give them a final working over with their nose guns. Apparently the enemy had been caught with his pants down for during the time the squadron was over the area little enemy fire was encountered.

The 405th followed the 71st Squadron in the attack hitting Momote Airdrome in a squadron abreast formation at Minimum Altitude. Thirty-two 500 pound bombs were well dispersed throughout the dispersal areas East and West of the strip as well as along the length of the runway. One bomb burst 2000 feet north of the runway throwing off heavy black smoke and debris - several small fires were started in the dispersal loop, and the eight unserviceable Oscars and two small fuel trucks on the strip were undoubtedly further damaged by strafing and bomb fragments.

The six planes of the 823rd made their attack in an abreast formation dropping a total of twenty-four 500 pounders on the drome and dispersal areas. As the planes continued on their run north-wardly, two medium sized white smoke fires were seen in the area just bombed but the other results were unobserved. Thus went the last mission of the month. The remaining days of the month saw only the regular courier flights on the docket. Combat crews rested up, planes were worked over, and guns were reconditioned. And with all feeling quite jubilant with their monthly pay of Aussie "Quids", the month came to an end.

-252-

SECRET



SECRET

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WAR SPEEDS ALONG

February began with a courier to Nadzab, Gusap and return to Durand and the second day was a repetition of this same courier duty in addition to the practice formation; however, this was not indicative of what was to follow. Enemy installations in the Admiralty Islands, Wewak Area, Kavieng all came under attack by the "Sun Setters" of the Pacific. Enemy shipping, though small in amount, was not to be overlooked.

On the third day of the month, two couriers and a strike were conducted by the Group. Three squadrons, the 71st, 405th and the 823rd, participated in this coordinated strike, with But Airdrome as the target. Twenty B-25 D's and ten B-25 G's took to the air, from Durand. Two airplanes of the 405th Squadron developed engine trouble and returned to base. Another was forced to execute an emergency landing at Rodgers Field near Redscar Bay, on the Coral Sea. The difficulty forcing this plane back was water in the fuel tanks. One stand-by airplane from the 71st and one from the 823rd Squadron brought the strength of the 405th formation to nine airplanes.

The Group led by the 405th Squadron proceeded along the usual course past Mt. Yule, down the Ramu River to the Bismarck Sea. The Group made rendezvous with fighter escort of P-40's & P-38's near Gusap and then proceeded on to the target. In keeping with the policies of physiological warfare, native propaganda leaflets were dropped by the 71st Squadron when nearing the Sepik River.

The 405th Squadron struck first, with three elements of three planes. At minimum altitude, on a heading of 270 degrees, one hundred fifty 100 pound para demo bombs with 4 to 5 second delay fuses were dropped among supplies and fuel near But Village - four bombs were dropped beyond the West flight gap near Tjakombali Village while the rest hit well dispersed over the strip and revetment areas. This was the first experience with parachute bombs for these crews, and the report of the function of these bombs was very satisfactory.

The 71st Squadron was second over the target. As the first flight of three planes began its bombing run there was a large concentration of heavy anti-aircraft fire off the East end of the strip. Tracers were seen to enter the pit and immediately fire from the pits ceased. Taking evasive action, under ack ack fire the planes spread out laterally over the target which proved to be an advantage for the attacking planes. Two single seat fighters on the south side of the airstrip were set afire by strafing and a large explosion giving off orange flame and black smoke arose from the dump area southeast of the strip.

-253-

SECRET

SECRET



- Two grounded planes were destroyed by strafing -



-254-

SECRET

SECRET

As the third flight was halfway over the target, a bullet penetrated the cockpit of the lead plane, wounding the pilot and co-pilot in the legs. The pilot continued to fly the plane while the Navigator gave the more severely wounded co-pilot much needed first aid.



- An ammo dump explodes -

The crews reported this as one of the most lucrative targets they had yet observed. Eleven enemy planes were observed in the revetment area, these observations were confirmed from low-angle, oblique photos. Large quantities of stores and supplies were noticed west of But Drome.

One Hundred and one clusters of parafrags were released by the planes of the 823rd Squadron. This squadron's targets were the supply dumps east of the strip, the revetment areas, north and south of the strip, and the personnel and supply areas West of the strip. Excellent cover of the revetment areas was obtained by the three flights and a large fuel fire was started near the shore.



- Fuel goes next -

-255-

SECRET

SECRET



- The Japs had airpower on But Airdrome -



-256-

SECRET

SECRET

During the raid three men were wounded by anti-aircraft and machine gun fire and six airplanes were damaged, but the RAAF close fighter cover stayed close enough that if any enemy planes were in the area, they didn't put in a showing.

A Group formation of twenty-eight B-25's departed Durand on the 4th to participate in a coordinated attack on Modillion Plantation. These planes passed Mt. Yule and arrived at Nadzab, the rendezvous point at 0949/L. The formation circled until its fighter escort of P-38's joined them and then proceeded up the Valley to the end of the Finisterre Ranges where the formation cut across to Madang.

The "Wolf Pack", 71st Squadron, led the attack and five well camouflaged anti-aircraft positions near the mouth of a small creek were thoroughly covered by strafing fire. Likewise, canvas covered stacks of supplies were thoroughly strafed. A total of fifty 500 pounders were released over the target and although the bombing was considered excellent, the results were unobserved. Flights "A" and "B" of the 823rd Squadron attacked the Western half of Graget Island releasing thirty-two 500 pound bombs and expending twenty-five rounds of 75mm shells. Flight "C" dropped twelve bombs south of Madang township and three bombs on Sek Island, but like the previous squadron, the results were unobserved.

Traffic difficulties caused two planes of the 405th Squadron's second element to leave the target area. These two planes circled to the south and dropped eight bombs in the vicinity of the Gum River delta, and two more bombs on Jacob Island in Astrolabe Bay. The other planes released thirty-four bombs in the Modillion Plantation on both sides of the road leading to Madang township. Generally the results of the bombing were not observed. After leaving the target, the Group reassembled and returned to Durand along a course from Astrolabe Bay, over the Finisterre Mountains into the Ramu River Valley, thence to Yule Island and Southeast to base.

A courier to Gusap, Nadzab and return, local formation flights and practice bombing comprised the activities of the Group on the 5th of February. Similarly each day to and including February 12th, were spent by the members of the Group.

Thirteen Mitchells of the Group departed Dobodura on February 13th at 0700/L to execute, with four squadrons of the 345th Group, a medium altitude bombing attack on Momote Air-drome in the Admiralty Islands. The formation was comprised of thirteen 71st Squadron planes, twelve 405th planes (plus one 823rd plane) and thirteen 823rd planes. The 405th Squadron led the attack for the Group. The formation flew a course to the target via a crossing of the Owen Stanley Range, Finschhafen, past Umboi Island, Tolokiwa Island, Lou Island, to the Admiralty Islands. Rendezvous with the fighter cover was to have

-257-

SECRET

SECRET

been executed over Tolokiwa Island at 0830/L, but the fighters were not sighted and the formation proceeded to the target without fighter cover.

Momote Airdrome was approached from the Southeast at an altitude of 9,000 feet. The 405th Squadron spread into two six plane elements in "V" formation; each element was led by one B-25 D equipped with a Norden bombsight. Both elements made a diving approach from 9,000 feet to 7,500 feet on a heading of 350 degrees and two 1000 pound demolition bombs were released from each plane. The bombs were observed to have exploded on the strip and the revetment areas. Two bombs dropped in the water just off shore southeast of the airdrome.

The 71st Squadron approached the target at approximately 8,000 feet. The Squadron formed two elements of six and seven planes respectively, and bombed the target from 0945/L to 0950/L. The bombs from the first flight exploded in train down the center of the runway. The second flight made a parallel run and the bombs were released to fall in the revetment area and roads West of the airfield. The bombing was better than excellent.



- The pickle barrel was hit -

-258-

SECRET

SECRET

A group of frame buildings, jetties and known ack ack northeast of Momote Strip was assigned as the target for the 823rd Squadron. Visibility was unlimited except for a thin coverage of cumulus clouds at 4,000 feet. This squadron made its run on a heading of 340 degrees, at an altitude of 8,300 feet in four flights of three planes. The Squadron was armed with fifty-eight 500 pound instantaneously fused demolition bombs and fifty-one of these fell in the assigned target area. Three bombs fell short of the target, in the water and four bombs fell in the Hyane River.

This days mission was an example of one of the finest bombing operations that any combat unit could perform. All of the assigned targets were hit, and hit hard. The bombs released by the Bombardiers found with great accuracy the "pickly barrels" that every Norden Bombardier dreams of. After the attack all the planes, all uninjured, were flown back to the base along the same route flown to the target.

Before mentioning the strike for the 14th of February, it is noteworthy that the Group carried out other routine flights. One courier was executed to Gusap, Nadzab, and return; another to Nadzab, Dobodura and return. A weather Recco to Osprey Reef, Horn Island and return was completed one-hundred percent as ordered by Fifth Bomber Command.

This day the Group returned to Momote Airdrome to continue pounding that sector of the Japanese Air Power. Three Squadrons participated in this raid. The 823rd Squadron led, and was followed by the 71st and the 405th Squadrons in turn. Secondary to the bombings of the airdrome, six planes let down to minimum altitude to strafe townships on Pak and Rambutyo Islands, in the Eastern portion of the Admiralty Islands. The strike was accomplished by Thirty-six airplanes, twelve from each Squadron. The Group took off from Dobodura at 0745/L. Passing Finschhafen the Group made rendezvous with fighter cover over Tolokiwa Island near the end of an arc extended westward from New Britain.

At 1038/L the 823rd Squadron released sixty 500 pound demolition bombs, with one tenth second delay fuses, over the target. The entire target, the airdrome and its revetments, was thoroughly covered with bomb bursts. As the last flight of this Squadron cleared the target, two large columns of smoke were observed to rise above the level of the dust and smoke of the bomb bursts. One of these columns rose from the Northwest corner of the strip and one in the East dispersal area near the center of the strip.

Two flights of six planes of the 71st Squadron let down from 10,000 feet to approximately 8,000 feet to begin its run on a heading of 350 degrees. Twenty four 1,000 pound demolition bombs were released to fall on the runway and the dispersal areas of the Momote Airdrome. After the Squadrons left

-259-

SECRET

SECRET

the target area the formation turned out to Sea and let down to 1,000 feet over the water. As the twelve planes approached Pak Island, three planes peeled off and strafed Ulunau Village from minimum altitude. The planes met opposition of machine gun fire from the East end of the Village.

The 405th Squadron approached Momote Airdrome from the Southeast by twelve planes, in a six plane "v" formation. Each of the two elements was led by a B-25 D equipped with a Norden Bombsight. Both of the elements made a diving approach, leveling off at 8,500 feet. Two 1000 pound instantaneously fused demolition bombs were released from each plane in the formation. Although no assessment of the damage done by the bombing was made, good coverage of the strip and the revetment areas was assured. After the formation left the Airdrome area three planes of the second flight let down to minimum altitude and strafed Pak, Patnam and Rambutyo Islands southeast of the primary target. Native shacks and three European type buildings were fired by strafing.

The squadrons came off their targets and rejoined formation before starting the flight to base. Upon return the crews reported no interception and there was no anti-aircraft fire over the primary target, but one plane of the 71st Squadron returned with a hole, possibly due to ground fire.

Three squadrons of the Group departed Doboedura on the morning of February 15, at 0750/L to make a 440 nautical mile hop to the target, Kavieng Township. The 71st Squadron led the 405th and 823rd Squadrons. Departing on a course of 350 degrees the formation passed over Finschhafen, then altered course to pass between Sakar Island and Cape Gloucester, following Lampier Strait. The formation reached the rendezvous point, Sand Island at 0950/L. With fighter cover of P-38's the formation departed the Island at 1007/L on a course of 55 degrees. Avoiding Dyaul Island where possible radar stations were located, the Group spread formation to begin the run on the target.

The 71st Squadron let down to 75 feet in two flights of four planes to make their bombing and strafing runs. Bombs released by the first flight set fire to large warehouse building near the main wharf. A gigantic flash of fire erupted to an altitude of 200 to 300 feet, this flash was followed by the evolution of a terrifying pall of black smoke. When the last flight of this Squadron left the target area the entire waterfront and township was blanketed with dense smoke.

As the 71st Squadron approached the target several bursts of anti-aircraft fire were seen at approximately 2,000 feet. There was intense and accurate machine gun fire from the shoreline the entire length of the township. Two planes received minor damage over the target. As the second flight was making

-260-

SECRET

SECRET



- Bombing was considered excellent -



-261-

SECRET

SECRET

its run, plane #306 was hit in the left engine. Fire started and the wheel dropped from the nacell. The navigator pulled the Lux system putting out the fire in the engine. The tire was still burning and started fire to the engine again. Turning out to sea away from the target, the plane fell behind the formation, losing altitude and airspeed. By this time fire had spread to the bomb-bay and the rear of the plane. The tail-gunner came forward before ditching but the radio man remained in the tail and evidently was burned. The plane was brought to a successful controlled landing in the water three to four miles west of North Cape. The pilot crawled to the wing while the Copilot aided the Navigator out of the tip hatch. The pilot then tried to return to the cockpit to secure a life raft but the flames which were rapidly spreading through the plane, drove him back to the wing. One crew member bailed out approximately one-half mile west of North Cape and was last seen by crews of the 405th Squadron. The three survivors paddled away from the burning plane. Strange things happened and while swimming in the open sea near the wreck these men were strafed by a flight of friendly aircraft. Gardenia #6 was notified of the position of the men and after two hours made the rescue and the men were then flown to Finschhafen where they were given first aid and returned to base.

The 405th Squadron approached the target over Balgai Bay to the South and formed one element of six planes abreast and one of five planes, which included three planes from the 823rd Squadron. Both of these elements approached the target on a heading of 360 degrees at one minute intervals. Forty bombs were released by this Squadron to explode through the Northern half of the township, along the shore line, from Government Wharf to Chinatown. Heavy Anti-aircraft fire was encountered but was of moderate intensity and inaccurate, with bursts far above the formation. Machine gun fire from the Shore line was intense and accurate with four of the planes being holed by this cross fire.

With good visibility before the target, the 823rd Squadron began the bombing run. The attack was made in a formation of six airplanes abreast; one flight of three planes joined the 405th Squadron as mentioned above. The planes of this Squadron released forty five bombs in train along the coast, through Kavieng Township, Chinatown to Mongol Village. One bomb hit a possible fuel dump just east of the main wharf causing black smoke to rise to 2,000 feet. The second wave of planes encountered smoke, debris and large portions of bombed targets. The pilots cleared the target afterflying for several miles on instruments. Crews reported that observed portions of buildings, oil drums, and supply boxes were blown into the air to the level of the flight. Five of the bombs released fell across the salvage aircraft dump south of Chinatown.

Airplane #873 of the 823rd Squadron received a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire. The bottom of the plane burst into

-262-

SECRET

SECRET



- Instrument Weather -



-263-

SECRET

SECRET

flame, and the wheels dropped, indicating that the hydraulic system was destroyed. Lost for a short time in the smoke the plane appeared diving in the clear just before it plunged into the ground between the shoreline and the West side of Chinatown. The results of the bombing could not be ascertained for this Squadron due to the pall of smoke and debris over the target.

Sightings made by the crews on this mission proved the value of this strike. A Fox Tare Baker was observed near the main Wharf, this ship was burning violently. An enemy destroyer awash at the stern was seen between Eruk and Blobie Islands in Nusa Channel. In the target area three landing craft, a small power launch, a Sugar Charlie, and several barges were observed. Large stores of supplies and fuel were covered with canvas and tents near the main wharf. A possible Radar Tower and manned gun emplacement were observed in the target area. Retreat was made between New Hanover Island and New Ireland, thence the same route was flown back.

Operations for the sixteenth of February included a courier to Gusap, Nadzab and return, a Weather-Recco to Osprey Reef and Horn Island, and a shipping strike to New Hanover Island. A convoy of fourteen vessels was reported to be in the vicinity of New Hanover and the 38th and 345th were assigned this target.

The 405th Squadron led the Group formation behind the 345th Group, enroute to New Hanover by way of Cape Gloucester and Sand Island. Rendezvous with P-38 fighter cover was effected over Sand Island at 0930/L. One of the planes of this Squadron was forced to return to base due to engine trouble, from a point just South of Finschhafen. The 405th leader received a radio message from the 308th Bombardment Wing, ordering a search of the area north of New Hanover between Cape Matanalom and Cape Entrance. Radio contact failed with two B-24's and one B-25 that were to be in the area and direct the striking force to the convoy.

When abreast Three Island Harbor the 405th leader instructed the 823rd Squadron to attack a merchant vessel and gun boat which were sighted South of Dunning Island in the Harbor. At this same time the sightings were also made by the 345th Group and they began an attack on the same target. The 71st also began attacking the ships so the 405th Squadron alone continued the search for the convoy in Ysable Channel. There was no sighting during this search and so the Squadron returned to Three Island Harbor at 1125/L. At this time the 4,000 to 6,000 ton, stack aft, freighter was sinking and the gun boat still underway was making for the shore. The nine Mitchells made lone passes on the gun boat. Thirty-three 500 pound demolition bombs released, five hits were claimed by the crews but the vessel was not sunk. A raging fire was spreading along the deck as the ship

-264-

SECRET

SECRET



- Unserviceable -

washed against the coral beach. The pilots strafed the gunboat, thoroughly and ten to twelve Japs in the water near the boat, the Harbor shoreline and small Islands in Lai Bay.

At 1057/L in four flights of two planes each the "Wolf Pack" began attacking the Sugar Able and Patrol Craft in the Harbor. Several direct hits were observed on the Sugar Able. The gun boat tried to evade the attack and churned wildly about in the narrow confines of the harbor. The squadron claimed at least one hit on the elusive little craft. The Squadron, as the others, ran riot over the islands in the harbor area, bombing and strafing targets of opportunity.

Upon call from the Group leader the 823rd Squadron leader began immediately his attack on the enemy ships. Thirty-seven 500 pound 4 to 5 second delay fuse bombs were released in an attempt to sink the ship. The crews claim seven hits which left the freighter listing and burning. Seven bombs were released from mast-head height at the Patrol Craft, which was maneuvering violently. One of these bombs was claimed to hit the bow, others were near misses. As the planes left the area, the freighter was dead in the water and emitting a huge column of dense black smoke from amidships. As in the 405th report, when they returned to attack the target the vessel was already sinking and there was no need to make another attack.

Anti-aircraft fire was received from both craft during the attack. One 71st Squadron plane was rocked by an explosion while flying above the Sugar Able. It is believed that at this same time the plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire. The plane was flown safely to base but due to a failure of the hydraulic system, the Pilot crash landed the craft without any injury to any of the crew.

-265-

SECRET

SECRET



- "Good" Jap Ships -



-266-

SECRET

SECRET

On this mission a total of Two Hundred Eighty Four (284) 500 pound demolition bombs were released, and 97,045 of .50 caliber and 14,135 rounds of .30 caliber machine gun ammunition were expended. Due to the single plane activity it is best to summarize the days work. One Sugar Able was definitely sunk and one Patrol Craft was damaged beyond repair; this craft was burning and beached when the Group left the Harbor area. Three luggers were strafed and bombed, one sank and another left burning. Garove Island was strafed and bombed, one European type structure was hit and fired.

A summary of the activity of the Group for the period from February 17 to February 20 inclusive, is an easy one to prepare. Five couriers were flown to Gusap, Nadzab and return one to Dobodura, Gusap and return and one to Nadzab and Finschhafen and return. Three Weather Reccos were flown to Osprey Reef and Horn Island. One escort mission was flown, guiding twenty-two P-47's from Horn Island to Port Moresby. The ingenuity of the personnel was being tested during this time - para demos, developed by the 38th, were tested on practice flights. Practice formation and bombing was also a part of the training during this period of four days.

The 822nd Squadron conducted a Sea Search of the Bismarck Sea on February 21st. Eight of the Squadrons planes took to the air to participate in this flight. The Squadron proceeded to Lampier Strait across Huon Gulf and then Northeast toward Garove Island. A solid front covered the Bismarck Sea south of New Hanover. This front extended from 1500 feet to 25,000 feet with frequent rain squalls. This weather prohibited the formation from continuing the sea search. The Squadron returned to the North coast of New Britain Island and bombed and strafed Linga Linga Plantation on the shores of Eleonora Bay. Thirty-one 500 pound demo bombs with four to five second delay fuses were dropped throughout the plantation. One large explosion occurred sending flame and black smoke to 400 feet. The town of Apea was thoroughly strafed with unobserved results. After this attack the Squadron returned to base via Cape Gloucester and Huon Bay.

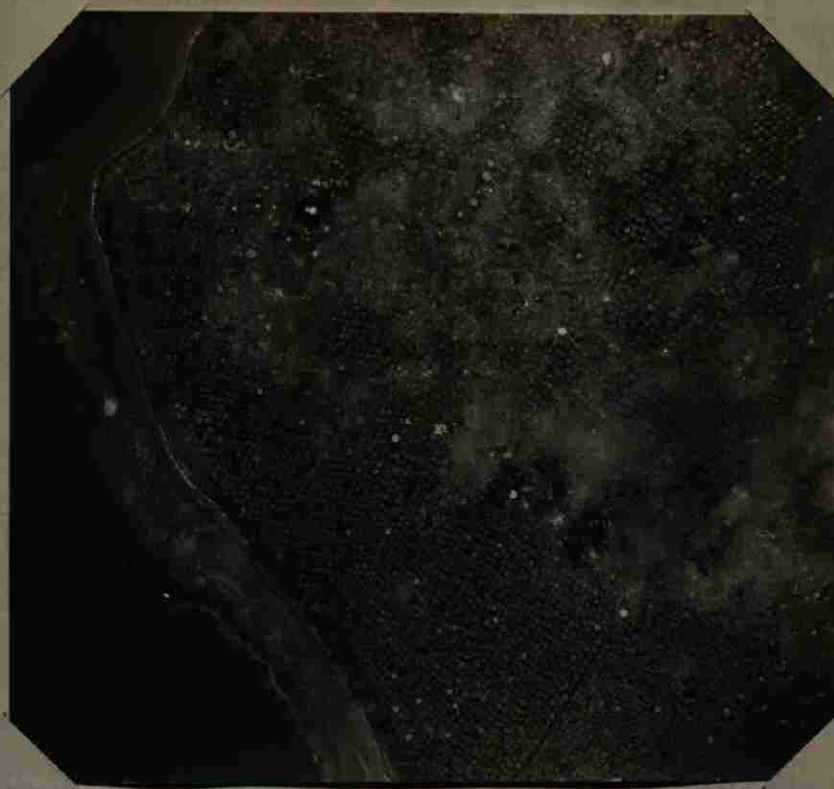
On the 22nd of February eleven planes of the 822nd Squadron took off from Horana Airdrome, New Guinea at 0831/L, to attack Momote Airdrome, on Manus Island in the Admiralty Islands. The formation preceded across the Huon Gulf and through the Vitiaz Strait to Tolokiwa Island where rendezvous would take place with the 345th Group. Seventy miles south of the target a solid front covered the Bismarck Sea. The formation turned with the leader to attack the secondary target, Rain Bay, New Britain; but here too, the weather was poor and visibility was low.

Approach to the target was made at 1120/L from East to West, the formation divided into two elements. From an altitude of 5,000 feet, eighteen 1,000 pound demolition bombs were

-267-

SECRET

SECRET



- Bombing was excellent -

released. All of these were observed to explode in the Iooki Plantation. Two bombs were salvaged over the open sea, and two were returned to base due to mechanical failure of the racks. This squadron returned after completing this mission without incident other than weather.

This same squadron sent eight planes to search for enemy shipping in the Bismarck Sea, on the same afternoon. Rendezvous with P-38 fighter cover was executed over Sand Island. The formation with fighter cover began searching but was forced to turn back by the dense, impenetrable front over the sea. The fighter cover left the formation, but the squadron turned east to New Britain and attacked Linga Linga Plantation dropping thirty-five 500 pound demo bombs. One black smoke fire was observed in the plantation. The entire Plantation was strafed, expending 7,750 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun ammunition.

On the 24th three Squadrons, 71st, 405th, and 822nd, took off from Horanda Airdrome to attack Momote Airdrome. At Sakar Island the formation was turned back due to weather and returned to base. This frontal activity on the 24th had moved south to the northern shores of New Britain. Solid down to sea level,

-268-

SECRET

SECRET

the front extended upward to 25,000 feet; rain fell in heavy showers all along this area.

After activity had been interrupted for several days by unfavorable weather all four Squadrons of the Group took to the air to strike against Jap defenses. Three squadrons, the 71st, 822nd, and 823rd participated in a raid on Boram Airdrome. The 405th executed a reconnaissance, bombing and strafing mission to the Admiralty Islands.

Without forming as a group the three squadrons proceeded up the Markham Valley, and turned to the sea at the mouth of the Sepik River. Following the coast to the target the 823rd Squadron formed one six plane element and one four plane element, two of the planes joined the 71st on the attack. Approach to the target was made by the ten planes of the 823rd Squadron at 1230/L. Heavy, intense, and accurate anti-aircraft fire was evaded by maneuvers before the beginning of the bombing run. Eighteen 1,000 pound demolition bombs were released from 7,000 feet with a good general coverage, but the results were not observed.

The 822nd Squadron, as the other, proceeded along the Markham, Ramu, and Sepik Rivers to the Bismarck Sea. Over Gusap rendezvous with fighter cover of one Squadron of P-47's and one Squadron of P-40's was accomplished. One of the Squadrons B-25's was forced to land at Gusap due to engine trouble. The other eleven planes began their bombing run over Boram Airdrome at 7,500 feet in one three plane element and one six plane element. The Fifty-four 500 pound bombs were released to fall in an excellent pattern over the strip and the dispersal areas. One Bombardier claimed two direct on three unidentified aircraft. However, this report could not be confirmed because pictures were not taken by the Squadron.

Planes of the 71st Squadron were last to attack the airdrome. Thirteen planes in all, made a bombing run from the East at an altitude of 8,000 feet. The first flight's bombs fell in the dispersal areas at the southeast corner of the strip. The second element was off course on its first run and so circled and made a second run. Forty-three 500 pounders with instantaneous fuses were dropped in the dispersal areas on the south side of the strip by the eleven planes of the 71st Squadron making this attack. Return to base was along the usual course down the Markham Valley.

This same day nine Mitchells of the 405th Squadron took off from Dobodura at 1125/L on a mission mentioned above to the Admiralty Islands. This formation proceeded to the target without fighter cover. Upon reaching Momote Airdrome at 1345/L, the Squadron separated into three elements of three planes each - one element was dispatched to Salami Plantation, one to Lorengau and the last to Momote. The first element released all of its six 1,000 pounders to hit roads and clusters of build-

869
SECRET

SECRET

ings in the Salami Plantation. The second element deplicated this task in the area around Lorengau township, one bomb was salvoed due to rack malfunction. The third element covered the plantation area surrounding Momote Airdrome. Over 22,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition was expended, strafing the targets on this island. The crews reported that there was little or no activity in the area and the results of previous bombing was not repaired. One light machine gun fired upon the element of Mitchells bombing the Lorengau area, this position was silenced by the strafing. No other opposition was encountered by the attacking planes.

The Mission assigned to this Group on the twenty-sixth of February was not completed due to weather. A solid front covered the Bismarck Sea, along the entire coast of New Guinea and New Britain. Another active front was building up in an East-West line fifty miles north of Buna.

On the morning of February 27, eight B-25's of the 71st Squadron took off from Dobodura at 0710/L to participate in a coordinated attack on targets near the Lorengau Airdrome. The Squadron proceeded across Huon Gulf and through Lampier Strait, then northwest to the target. Approaching the target in elements of two's the Squadron let down to approximately 150 feet for a bombing run. Thirty five 500 pound demolition bombs were released over the target area. Four small fires were spotted south of Lorengau Airdrome. After completing the bombing run the Pilots "hit the deck" to make strafing runs in the vicinity of Lorengau Strip. Two red-roofed European type buildings on Papitalai Point were strafed with unobserved results. The anti-aircraft positions in the Lorengau area appeared empty and deserted. Three members of one crew reported a camouflaged single seat fighter at the southwest corner of Momote Airdrome. Generally no activity was reported in the entire area covered by this squadron.

The 405th Squadron was second to take off at thirty minute intervals to attack assigned targets on Manus Island. This Squadron used single ship passes as a mode of attack. In all twenty-eight bombs were released from the six Mitchells on the strike. One large fuel fire was started on Lombrum Point; a large building on the point was destroyed. The shores and Lorengau Airdrome were thoroughly strafed.

The same tactics were employed by the 822nd pilots. Thirty-seven bombs fell in the assigned area with unobserved results. Four of the bombs were released too short of the target and fell in the sea. The 823rd Squadron concentrated its attack along the road from Hyane Harbor to the center of Salami plantation and havoc was wrought in a village along the road near Hayne Harbor. The boys bombed houses in Moker-and Plantation, Polusu Village, and Salami Plantation in ad-

-270-

SECRET

SECRET

dition to dropping Japanese propaganda leaflets throughout the entire area.

On the morning of February 29, "Leap Year's Day", five B-25's of the "Wolf Pack" took off from Horanda at one minute intervals. Taking off in darkness the pilots headed for a light beam over the water thrown up by a searchlight near shore. With running lights on the planes tried to follow one another to the target. Encountering two fronts between Buna and Vitiaz Straits, the planes became separated. Flying on instruments the pilots tried to reach the target individually. Five of this squadrons planes reached Circular Reef, the first rendezvous point. Two planes followed a formation of the 822nd squadron in a vain effort to find a waythrough the weather, but were forced to return to base.

Plane #182 of the 71st Squadron reached the rendezvous point and circled until 0718/L. Picking up two planes of the 823rd Squadron, several attempts were made to break through the front between Circular Reef and Pak Island. At 0750/L the planes reached Pak Island and circled until 0814/L, at which time a star shell, fired by a naval craft was seen and this was the signal to attack. Letting down to approximately 200 feet on a run of 200 degrees was made on Jamandili Point the target. The bombs were observed to fall in the target area with unobserved results. As these planes started their run, intense, inaccurate machine gun fire was received from five of our landing craft in Hayne Harbor. However, our planes suffered no damage.

The 405th Squadron reported the mission of the day "incomplete". The lead plane of this Squadron crashed on take off, killing the Navigator, Lt. N. Johnson. Three planes remained together in flight and turned back when they encountered the front. Plane #252 departed alone and was never accounted for. Thus, the second month of a new year of combat had come to an end. The month was a busy one - as long as weather would permit our planes to reach the target.

-271-

SECRET

