

General Ralph Royce's Account of the Mission Bearing His Name
(undated personal manuscript draft)

General MacArthur took over the High Command. General Brett became commander of the Southern Pacific Air Force, and I became his Chief of Air Operations [in March, 1942]. Some weeks later, we received orders from MacArthur to send what bombers we could back to the Philippines to attack the Japanese naval vessels at the entrance to Manila Bay so that small coastal vessels being fitted with medicines and other supplies could slip into the Bay and land their cargoes on Corregidor.

While we did not like the idea for various reasons—our forces were very scarce—we were doing all we could to retrain and equip—a myriad of reasons—yet an order was an order and we had no recourse but to do as we were ordered.

A short time previously, ferry pilots had brought in some fourteen North American B-25s that had been purchased by the Dutch and were to be delivered in Java. We had a few Dutch officers in our headquarters, but no pilots or crewmen to man them, but we turned them over to the Dutch as they wanted them. It was decided to take those B-25s for the expedition north, aided by the three B-17s of our heavy bomber group—three being all that were in commission.

After our plans were complete I received General Brett's approval, sent out the order and then went back to Brett's office. I told him that I was afraid we were not too high in our High Commander's estimation, that this job must not be a failure, and that he should take personal command of the expedition. He could not see it that way. He had too much organizational work at hand, too many conferences with other generals and admirals, etc., etc., and then I asked permission to go. That was refused. But two days later he authorized me to take the detail and I worked late that evening clearing my desk so I could leave before daylight the next morning.

About six thirty and almost alone in our office building my phone rang and when I answered a voice said, "This is MacArthur," and all I could do was gulp and reply, "Yes, sir." "Ralph," he said, "the news that you are going to lead the airplanes going north is the best news that I have had since leaving Bataan. It is an inspiring thing. It is something I shall always remember." He must have talked for ten minutes. It seemed twice that time, with me putting in an occasional "Yes Sir" and "Thank You, Sir." I was really embarrassed by the nice things he said, especially when he ended by saying, "And when you get back here there will be a D.S.C. awaiting you. Good luck." Of course, I reported this conversation to my commander, General Brett, when I joined him at dinner that evening.

I went north. We got the B-25s with all instructions in them printed in Dutch. We flew to Batchelor for our take off. One B-25 blew a tire and there was no replacement in Australia so it had to remain behind.

Three B-17s and thirteen [ten] B-25s arrived at Del Monte just about dusk. The long range tanks were taken out, the bombs loaded for early morning take-off, and order given for dispersal landing on their return. That is, all ships were readied but mine. Bostrom was piloting it. It had made the last four hundred miles on three engines. The mechanic worked that night on

the engines and at three I went to bed with everything ready to make a strike at daybreak, and the report that my ship would be ready by noon.

The ships departed. But shortly thereafter two little Jap float planes appeared and proceed to dive and drop a bomb and finally located my airplane. That noon as I was preparing to take off on a strike they finally hit it and it went up in smoke. At the same time the other two B-17s were [doomed]. So by working throughout the night they were put in condition to go back, which they did, each taking out about twenty people including the crew of my B-17.

After four strikes the B-25s were followed home by Jap Zeros. Knowing the game was up, we put back the long range tanks and headed south. All arrived safely in Batchelor, and then with Captain Bostrom I flew with Colonel Davies the B-25 commander to Melbourne. Arriving there at nine thirty in the evening we were met by General Lincoln who, in the name of General Brett, pinned DSCs on Davies, Bostrom and myself.

I hurried to General MacArthur's hotel to report what had happened. General Sutherland came out and said that General MacArthur had retired but to come to his office the next morning. I did so. I did so the second morning, but I never saw the General, nor has he to this day ever said anything about that expedition to me. Shortly thereafter we got word that no decorations would be conferred except by his orders and no messages sent to the States except through his office.