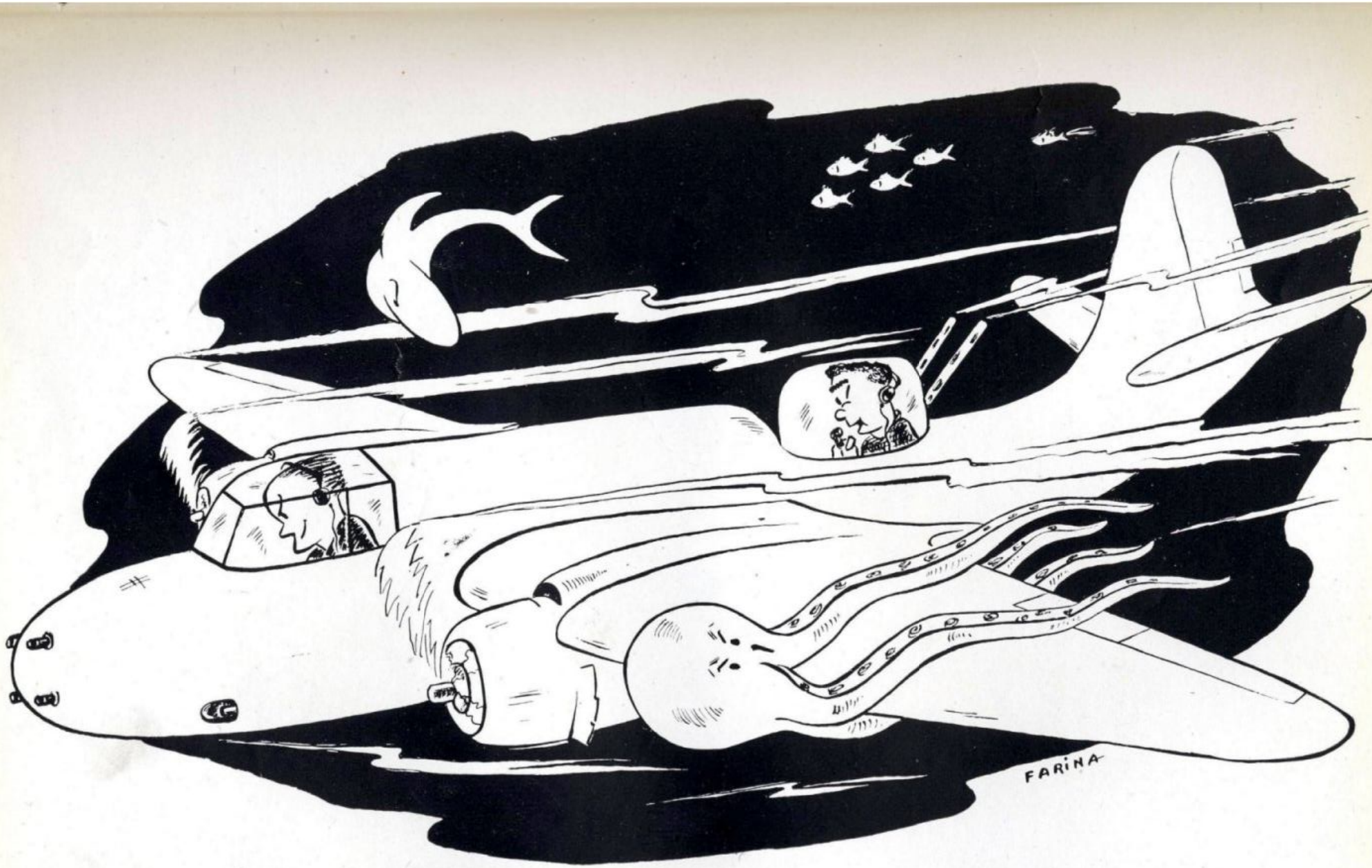
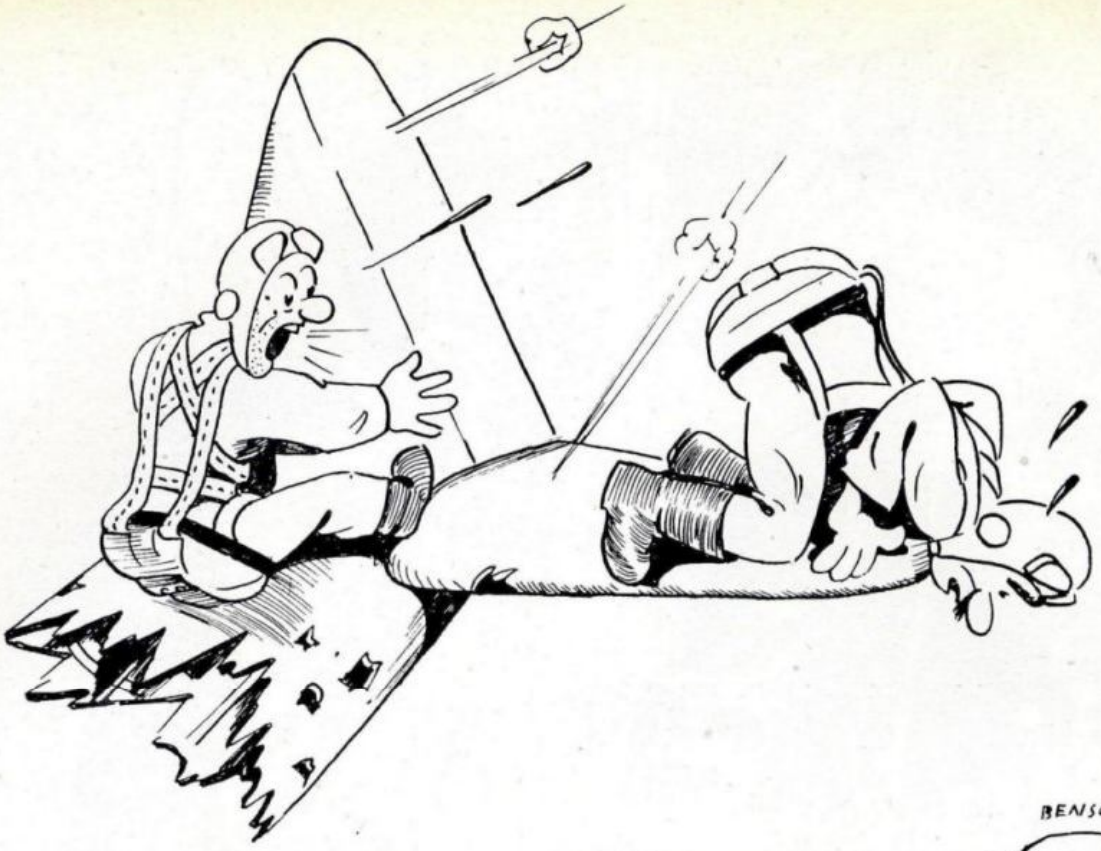
"SIR, YOU HAVE JUST MISSED THE SECOND LARGEST ISLAND IN THE WORLD."

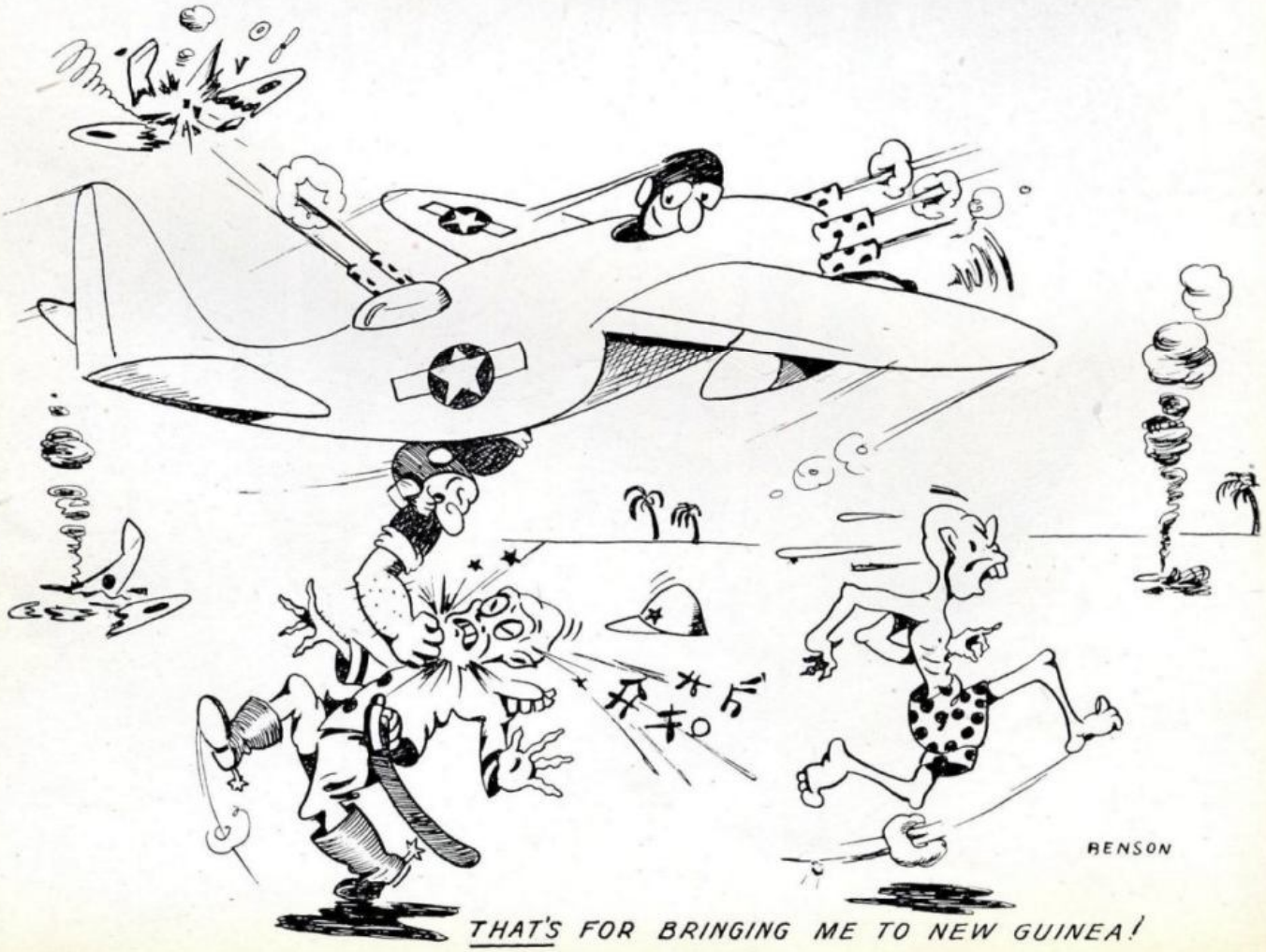


"BEG YOUR PARDON SIR, BUT AREN'T WE OVER DOING IT A BIT?"



BENSON

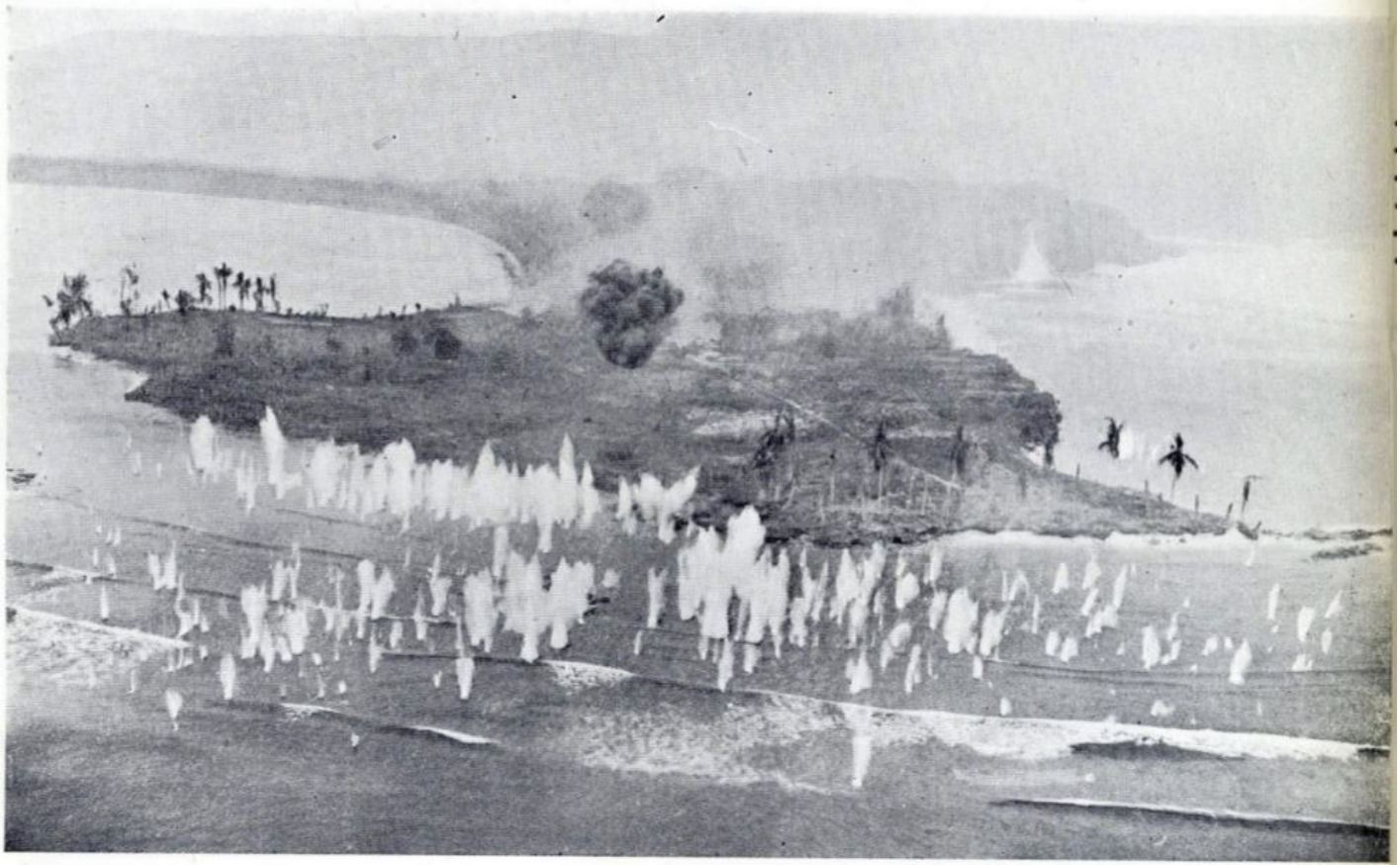
"OKAY — SO MAYBE THEY CAN SHOOT!"



BENSON

THAT'S FOR BRINGING ME TO NEW GUINEA!

A panorama shot showing the thick, matted undergrowth which lay on both sides of the jungle trail as it wound over the mountainous terrain. Our A-20's had to sweep low between these mountains and along the twisting trails to strafe these important supply targets.



These were taken during an average day for the Nips. The bursts in their harbour at Wewak, the murderous shower of fifties across their peninsula, so rapid and thorough that the gun switch could not be flicked off before the target was passed, were not new to them. A thousand headlines cannot tell of the individual tragedy . . . but the impersonal force of our own ships and their guns might cause the civilian to reflect that war is an unpleasant and deadly business. The waterspouts are only the final, lingering touch of the Grim Reaper's fingers as he sped low across his enemy's position. . . .

HEADQUARTERS

V BOMBER COMMAND

APO 713, UNIT # 1

AG 201.22 7 April, 1944.

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation.

TO : Commanding Officer, 3rd Bombardment Group, APO 713.

1. I wish to congratulate the 3rd Bombardment Group on the fine record which they have achieved during their first two years of operation. You have demonstrated repeatedly your high state of training and have always shown highest esprit de corps, even under most trying circumstances.

2. Your combat record has been most admirable. The tremendous number of sorties and combat hours flown indicate the great effort which has been expended by all your personnel. Again I wish to congratulate you and wish you every success in the future.

J. V. CRABB,

Colonel, Air Corps,

Commanding.

THIS IS THE ARMY

To the infantry, with its landings against the enemy on narrow, jungle edged beaches . . . to the navy, and their men who send their landing craft into the shallows, with the sign of hostile fire thick and dangerous, from hidden emplacements . . . to the engineers, for their men and machines, cutting through jungle, hills and valleys of the completely primitive islands to build roads, landing strips in country that had been marked before only by slender, intricate trails.

We had been with all of them and as we advance nearer to the end, the coordination shall be even closer, and will create a finer unity pointed towards the complete victory. In this war, the admiration for another unit's work is not usually expressed, except for the written letters of commendation, and the rare statements by the highest officers, but it is understood by all of us and does not require expression. This theatre has required a cooperation between all arms of the service as intense as in any theatre of the world war. The great distances, the bare fact that we could not follow the immemorial practice of armies and live off the country but had to bring each one of the countless, distinct items of materiel over thousands of miles to the men and units requiring them, the necessity to build bases in each newly captured sector . . . the accepted fact of fighting against nature, and not only the dug-in Japanese—these were the fundamental reasons which led to an understanding and the readiness to assist in the solution of each other's problems.

The first months were the Air Corps' war, and the Navy's. Then the Japanese began their advance over the Kokoda Trail, our A-20's went into action, supporting the ground troops . . . and the war was open. We began to know the infantry, to appreciate their style of fighting. There is not an Air Corps man without a serious respect for the men who fought it out on the ground, because we know the weather, the jungle, the terrain, and all the combination signifies. The salt-water swamps of Sanananda were as pitiless a battle-ground as the history of warfare has ever known. They had to fight it out on New Britain in terrible humidity and rain, they had to face the brooding, dangerous cliffs of Biak, they have had to go in against every opposition nature and the enemy could provide.

We have flown our ships from strips still under construction by the engineers, and have trailed along behind them as they battered a road through country that seemed impassable. Our association with the engineers has been closer than with any other service, because roads and landing strips had to be built before ships could fly from the captured areas. Their accomplishments, against problems not to be found in the manuals, have been a tribute to their traditions, because each road, each long runway surrounded by its labyrinth of revetments, represents a job done that cannot be appreciated unless the country they had to defeat is known.

Quartermaster, Ordnance, the Service Groups—the Signal Corps which tied the areas together with telephone systems over the great ranges, across the wide, rushing rivers—the artillery, which waited, ready and patient, to send up a curtain of fire against the raiders—to every single unit which served to form the organization which has driven the Japanese to their inner lines of defense. The 89th saw all of them at work and in action. We give credit where it is due.

LAE AT MINIMUM

ALTITUDE: MINIMUM

THE palm plantations of New Guinea were not referred to in the War Department's orders, dated January 15, 1941, which activated the 89th Bombardment Squadron, Reconnaissance, at Savannah, Georgia. The war in Europe was looking bad for England, and her allies. Our own forces were only beginning their expansion, and to the daily, faithful readers of the press of our nation, Japan had not made any moves significant of war. The Air Force was just beginning to preen its wings, and when the cadre of men and officers was formed, by shanghaing personnel from protesting, under-strength units, we knew that preparations were being made. Then, in the fall of the year, the A-20's went on the Louisiana maneuvers where their terrific speed and the aptitude and need of their low-level attacks was demonstrated repeatedly. . . . It wasn't the same, however, because the pilots charted their course by the white concrete of the roads, and made their right turns at the

highway intersections . . . over here, they learned to mark the course by a promontory, an island, a distinct, unmistakable ridge, a gun position . . . and, in Louisiana, we dropped paper bags, filled with white flour.

The months of 1941 saw the roster built up to a fair percentage of the strength stipulated by the Tables of Organization. The training never relaxed, and the men returning from schools of engineering, armament and radio, photography and clerical, were saddled with responsibility, in between their sessions with the China Clipper and the fatigue details. The 89th began to be a squadron. There is no other phrase as accurate, because the mere designation of an official order cannot create the spirit and unity which is an organization's very existence. We trained, at Savannah and through the maneuvers, and were looking forward to the long awaited Christmas furloughs, when the radio told us of Pearl Harbor. We sailed for Australia on January 31, 1942.

The ground echelon went to work, almost immediately upon arriving overseas, maintaining the 17's of the 19th Bombardment, which had escaped to the mainland from the crumbling defenses to the North. Our combat personnel went into service in the mediums, with pilots and gunners going into the B-17's as members of the crews on the first strikes over Rabaul. These first missions were flown in conjunction with the Royal Australian Air Force, and letters of commendation were received . . . the first of the long series given to the Squadron, and to the 3rd Group, for its effectiveness in action.

We moved to New Guinea on August 20, 1942, to begin our unbroken service of two years on the island—with the duration to come. The Japanese had slowed down in their attacks on Moresby, but they were still hammering at the strips, the fuel and supply dumps, and the shipping in the harbor, in raids that came at day and in the night. Their ground patrols were filtering through the passes of the Owen Stanleys. They were bringing strength into their newly-taken base at Buna, only an hour's flight away—but the Squadron began to get into stride, as a member of the Grim Reapers. The parent Group was winning its colors in the Southwest Pacific Area, and our missions were increasing in number, and in the vital importance of the targets—Lae, Kokoda, Buna, Salamaua and Sanananda. The Japanese air force, on the ground and in the air, felt the guns of the 3rd Group ships. We drove in to attack ack-ack positions, to give direct ground support to the Australians, strafing and dropping bombs, when they were within 200 yards of the enemy—letters of commendation from the Australians told of the accuracy, the havoc upon the positions hit, the fact that there was not a single attack in close support by the A-20's which had caused a casualty to our troops.

The parachute fragmentation bomb entered the war during this stage. Deadly little bombs, parafrags, that fell out of specially-built, pigeon-holed bays to flutter gracefully and wickedly to the earth. We went across at the A-20 minimum altitude, on the deck.

The tempo of our attacks steadily increased until the day in December, when the 89th Squadron flew nine separate missions, in support of the 32nd Division, fighting a bitter, costly battle across the range at Sanananda and Buna. It was on the 3rd day of March, 1943, that we helped to write a page of history . . . the Bismarck Sea Battle. We had been out after shipping, and the targets searches had revealed had only been barges, and coastal shipping. This time we went out with every fighting ship the Fifth Air Force could get off the ground and into the target area. All squadrons of the 3rd Group, and B-17's, B-24's, RAAF Beaufighters, all American fighters—and the formations struck the death

blow at a Japanese convoy on the Huon Gulf. The Nips had taken the great gamble on the weather, in risking their convoy which carried reinforcements for the hard-pressed troops in the Lae-Salamaua area. The weather betrayed them, and the convoy was spotted through a break in the heavy overcast by a recco. The A-20's scored twelve hits on seven ships, and followed with strafing passes that cleared the decks of the men who stayed at their guns, fighting a losing battle. The Allied fighters kept the skies open against the enemy Zeros to permit the heavies, the mediums and the attack bombers to make run after run across the convoy. The official photographs of the air-sea battle show the Japanese ships cutting weirdly-twisted white wakes through the water . . . ships lying soddenly,

quietly burning . . . great, pall-like columns of smoke rising into the sky, to roll flatly along the clouds . . . survivors in the water, and others massed in life-boats, rafts and floating wreckage like black ants. The attacks made by the 3rd Group were at mast-height and after the bombs were gone, they went in again and again, smashing with their forward-firing, grouped fifties and thirties—and there was nothing the convoy had that stood up beneath the vicious strafings. It was the first decisive victory of land-based aircraft against enemy shipping guarded by war vessels. A victory for the Fifth Air Force and the RAAF, and one of untold importance, for it marked the fate of the Japanese Forces at Lae. Of that convoy, not a single ship escaped—and the survivors drifted to their islands, weaponless, without food, without organization. If they reached their own forces again, they knew that their propagandist had been wrong. We have always wondered, mildly, why the Japanese Government failed to send in a letter of commendation on the results of the immediate, devastating action of the Bismarck Sea Battle. If Radio Tokyo had commented on the action, there was little the newscaster could have said, unless he would have announced that the Allied attack upon the Lae convoy had been repulsed successfully without loss. Banzai! Build more ships.

We moved across the Owen Stanleys in May, to set up camp in a thick jungle, carpeted with matted leaves and heavy with underbrush. It became the camp of high-floored tents, sago-palm roofed barracks and buildings, days of sun-baking on the sand-strip across the brown river . . . and the base of our operations against Finschhafen, and the targets of New Britain. It was the month which saw our first combat crews relieved, and sent back to the United States. Captain Dunbar was among that first group. He returned, but the habit of combat was too strong, and he went to England, in A-20's—and, somewhere with the Eighth Air Force, he ran his last mission.

The reports began to turn up information about heavy night traffic of Jap barges along the coast of New Guinea. They had already begun to refuse further risk of their heavier vessels for the movement of men and supplies during the daylight hours when they would be exposed to the coldly-precise attacks of the Fifth Air Force. Their recourse was to turn to the slower, less-weighty barges. We ran missions night after night, along the hostile coasts, with success, until the enemy learned to hold up his traffic for the nights of weather, of clouds and heavy rain. Night missions failed, after that, to pay off a profit against the very definite risks involved.

Invasion of Lae. A long-dreamed-of actuality to the men who had been here since the first months, for Lae and Salamaua and Rabaul meant, to all of us, the enemy strongholds from which their ships came to hit us from the skies—the bases which guarded against any further advance along the long, southern road to their homeland. We were called out to support the landing of the paratroops at Nadzab, in the Markham-Ramu valley. It was an unforgettable sight—our ships low across the wide, beautiful valley, with wedge-shaped streamers of smoke pouring from beneath their wings. We supported the landing of the paratroops, went ahead to direct ground support, and the 89th was the last squadron to strike Lae before it fell to the Allied ground troops. We covered the Finschhafen landings, and helped towards the reduction of Satelberg. It was all A-20 work, for the ships had been designed for low-level, direct and close support to the men on the ground, and their accurate strafing, and placing of bombs, justified their design and speed.

There is a definite physical thrill in the movements of our ships in the sky . . . even in their rapid, purposeful movement through the revetments, taxiing towards their take-off positions. Guns jutting forward out of the nose, wide wings stretching across the

revetment roadway, ship sitting forward slightly on the nosewheel as it rolls. The pilot sitting high in the cockpit, and the gunner waiting behind in the rear compartment, ready to get into the turret. The takeoff is an illusion, with the size of the ship giving the impression that it takes off slowly . . . but to watch the ground pass by beneath, and the horizon drop swiftly away, with the trees at the jungle's high, sullen edge still reaching out for the wings, it is realized that the slowness is illusion. . . .

We have tried to guess at the feelings of the Japanese, as they hear the sound of guns, and look up towards the sound, and see again a flight of A-20's, streaming gray gunsmoke, bombbays open, lowering in perfect formation down to the trees, in their bomb-

dropping run. The very speed of the attack ship, like the speed of the P-38 with its beautifully synchronized twin-engines, permits only a last instant of warning, at the low-level, before the airplane itself is overhead, only seconds behind the sound of its engines. We have made attacks which caught the Japanese at sun-bathing, servicing their own aircraft with fuel, at volley-ball in a sheltered area—in a complete surprise, driving their guncrews to shelter against the sides of the gunpits. . . . But not all the guncrews. . . .

Lae, Finschhafen and Satelberg, and then we began to hit Cape Gloucester, Gasmata and the other targets on New Britain, in preparation for the invasion that was to come late in the year. The field orders sent us over Alexishafen, in November, and it was four Japanese bombers destroyed on the ground during the first strike. The campaigns were intensifying. The twenty-two missions run by the 89th Squadron in December were largely concerned with preparing the way for the Allied landings on New Britain, and the landing at Saidor, far up the coast of New Guinea. We were still operating from the jungle camp, but our advance echelon was farther up the coast, building in readiness for the next move. The Squadron was split on Thanksgiving Day, 1943, and the men of the advance echelon really came out on top, after the comparison of the meals served at the two camps.

Bogadjim and Alexishafen remained as targets. After our move north we began to work over enemy positions in the vicinity of Hansa Bay, and went up the coast as far as Dagua. The big mission of the early part of 1944 was the February strike against Kavieng, on New Ireland. The A-20's staged out of Finschhafen for the long run to the target. Twelve of our A-20's went across the intense opposition fire of the harbor, scoring direct hits on shipping, went over the town strafing and bombing, and twelve A-20's came out. The Kavieng mission was made against long odds of distance, and ack-ack fire, as intense and accurate as any in the theatre.

Wewak and Boram, But and Dagua, with their areas of stores, personnel, their lines of communications, their shipping, received the consistently destructive attention our ships so efficiently handed out. The smoke of the fires rolled sluggishly into the hot New Guinea skies, the ack-ack guns lay awkwardly, in grotesque positions, blasted from their iron mounts, stores were blown wide open and scattered . . . barges with their sides riddled and bottoms torn out lay on the bottom of the coral seas, their camouflage greenery floated to the shore, trucks rusted in the drainage ditches beside the narrow roads, planes sprawled broken and smashed in the revetments of their fields . . . and the burial grounds were beginning to be studded heavily with the square, stubby, character-painted marker of the Japanese grave.

The March 19th mission, against the Wewak convoy, was complete disaster for the Japanese, in the manner of the Bismarck Sea. Every vessel went down, literally blasted apart by the bombs that actually crowded their way to the targets. This was the mission that resulted in the most genuine of proofs being brought back to the Squadron intelligence officer. The leading flight of our Squadron had hit a small transport, and the debris from the explosion was falling back to the water's surface as the second flight approached, to go through the cloud of metal, fragments of wood, and bodies. When the planes of the second flight returned to base, the air intake of the oil cooling system of Jew Louie was choked—with paper. The crewchief removed it, carefully, and, torn slightly but unscorched and perfectly legible, was a page from the Japanese transport's log, giving the cargo listing, the name of the vessel and the tonnage. The War Department publication which noted this rather unusual method of securing the confirmation of a sinking, stated that the pilot had modestly disclaimed any credit for his spy work. It was all in the day's work, of course, and it happened off the coast of New Guinea.

The Fifth Air Force began to make the final arrangements for the obliteration of

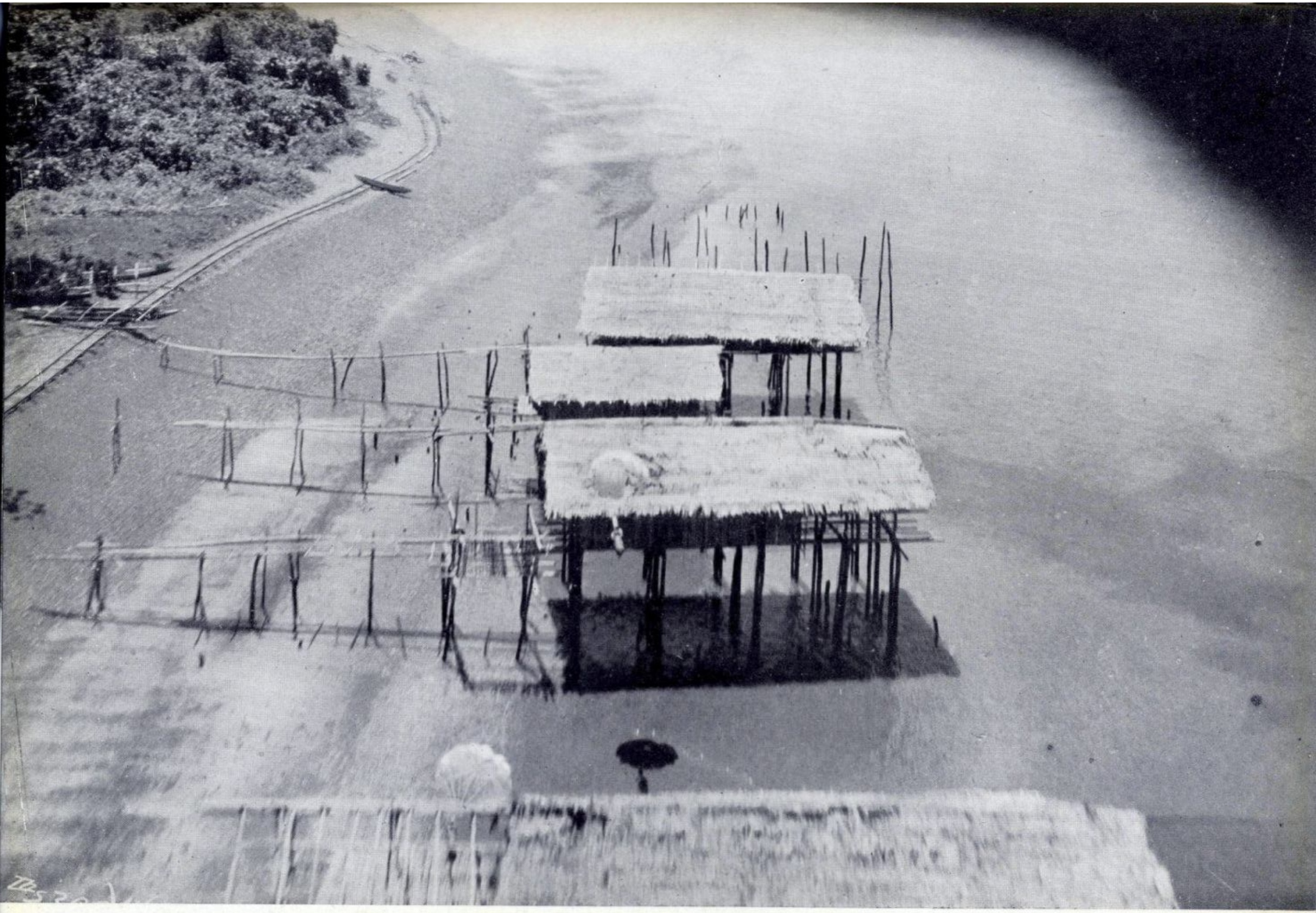
Hollandia, the major Japanese base, off the coast of Dutch New Guinea, near Humboldt Bay. The 3rd Group was called in to take part in administering the final blow, and the 89th had twelve planes on the big mission. They swept in low in the face of extremely heavy ack-ack fire, to drop a total of 119 demolition bombs, each bomb attached to its own small parachute. The ground fire was very intense, but they passed through the low-bursting flack, through the intercepting Zeros, and the twelve returned safely to our field. We participated in two more heavy strikes against Hollandia, dealing out heavy losses to the Japanese, and when the ground forces moved in against the light opposition which provided a startling, gratifying news release to the Allied world, they paid high tribute to the work of the Fifth Air Force.

There have been Biak, Manokwari, Babo and the oil fields and refineries of Bolea where the oily smoke blackened the sky as squadron after squadron of attack bombers drove in low with demolitions, and thousands of rounds of strafing fire. . . The war has moved on, to the west and to the north. To the Halmaheras, into the Philippines. It is our destiny to move with the war. The targets of the past were dangerous, stubborn, fighting targets that took a toll of good men, and good ships, yet finally went down beneath the unceasing, mauling blows of concentrated power. The targets of the future are going to be equally dangerous . . . or more, with the Japanese perimeter of defense tightening, narrowing towards their islands. Our job is not ended, and our story is not over. There is more to come, before the peace is reached.

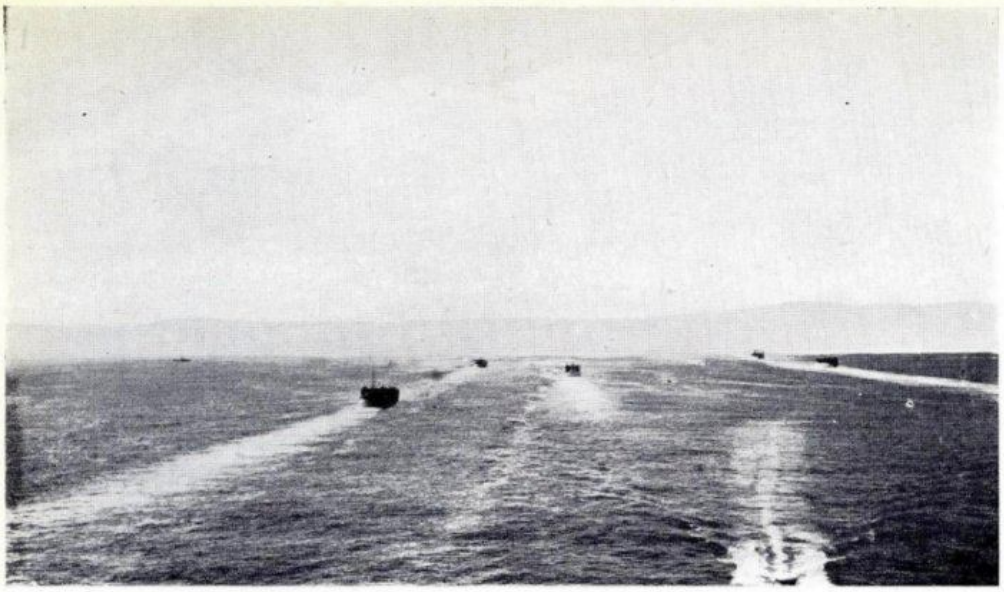
The Southwest Pacific did not ordinarily afford the sensational targets of the European theatre. The place-names of headlines in the newspapers of home usually represented a tiny cluster of buildings in a clearing dug out of the jungle. A mission and its church, a tin-roofed trading post, and a handful of native-built dwellings. A narrow street that might run two hundred yards before suddenly disappearing into high

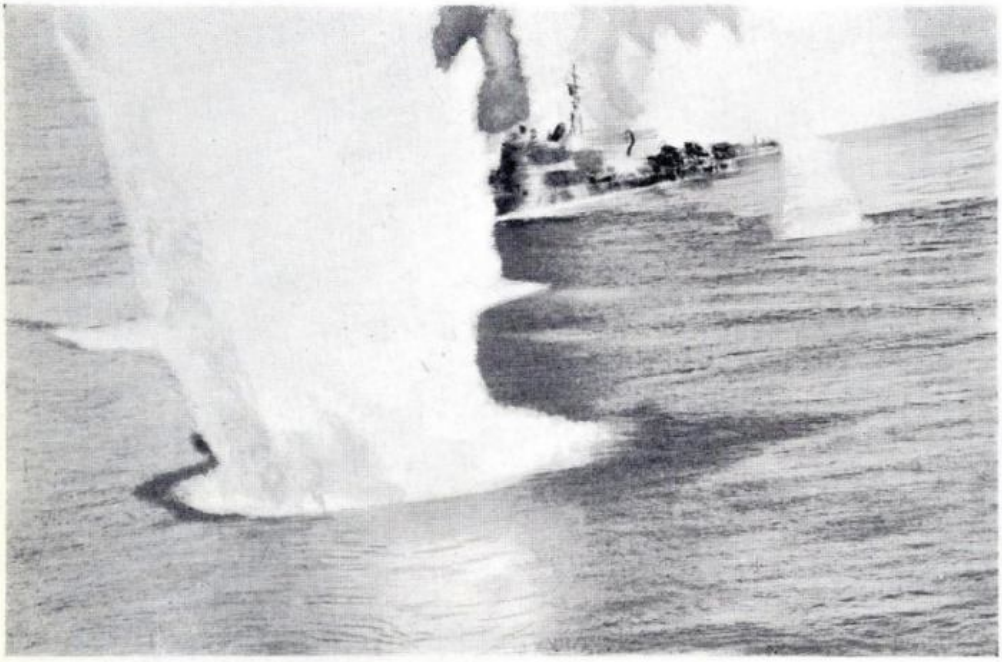
kunai—and that was all. If there was an ammunition or gasoline dump, or a personnel area sheltering a thousand men, the very patient Japanese made use of every natural advantage to conceal their installations against the inquisitive eye of the camera. It was a major problem, on many missions, not only to reach the target against opposition, but to find the target. It meant that the destruction of a native building, or the thorough strafing of a designated section of a palm plantation was of more significance than even the mission photographs would reveal. The air-ground liaison men worked together too closely to permit of unwarranted actions. Japanese Intelligence could answer for the accuracy of their observations and decisions.

BEACH AT MANOKWARI



PARAFRAGS AT MANOKWARI

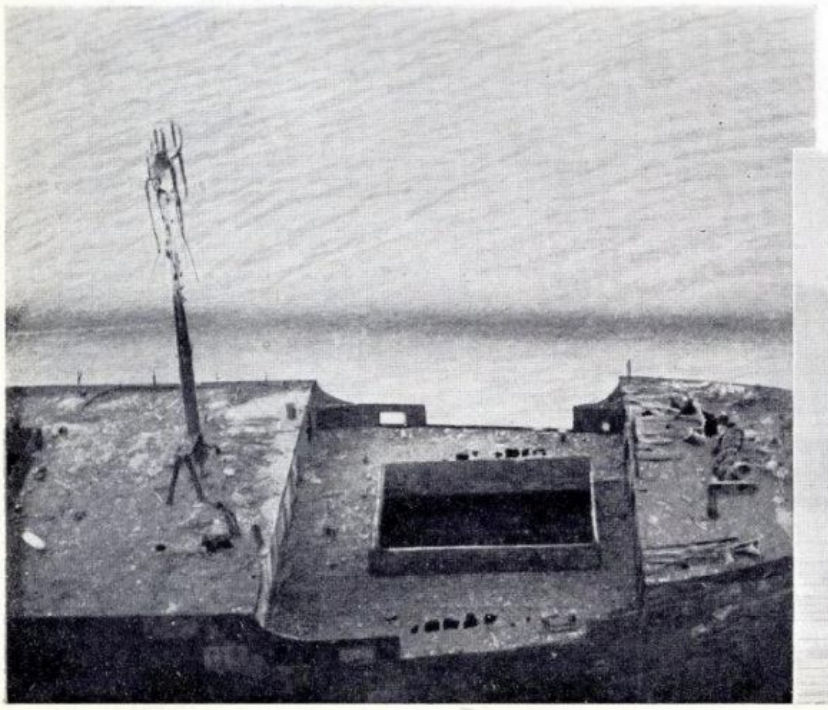




Arawe . . . Wewak . . . that Nip destroyer . . . the Moresby Hulk. This war is compounded of a hundred thousand incidents and places, but each one will hold its own significance.

The Moresby Hulk has paid its own disaster over a hundred times. It hit the reefs of the harbor twenty years ago and laid there rusting into red dust until the war came to the Island. We all will remember it as the recipient of countless rounds of fifties, and the way it received the impersonal pounding of practice bombs. It was always a real satisfaction to go across the old, shattered freighter, and watch the red flare of ammo exploding and splattering on the deadened sides, ricochets spinning away into the blue sky . . . for it was the final rehearsal for the genuine mission.

And can the straight white wakes of Arawe be forgotten—the first landing on the dangerous stronghold of New Britain?—White lines across a blue sea, leading to the evergreen of the island. . . . The cavalry took the water route that time.



BOLEA—OIL