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## BISMARCK SEA VICTORY

### Afternoon Patrol of Allied Bombers Finds Scene of Attack Littered With Debris

Two destroyers and three transports or cargo ships--the latter disabled and listing badly--were the only survivors of the 22 Japanese ships struck in the Bismarck Sea the morning of March 3, 1943, by the co-ordinated attack of more than 100 Allied planes. The scene of the holocaust was marked on the surface of the water by great oil slicks and black specks which the pilots on the second attack of the day realized were the heads of swimming Japanese. Capt. McWhirt, who furnishes the following account, led the afternoon attack of B-25s. He is the son of Burr McWhirt, 710 Oglethorpe Street, N.W., an official of the Internal Revenue Bureau.

#### CHAPTER XI.

By Capt. Joseph R. McWhirt

As told to

George Kennedy  
Star Staff Writer

I did not go on the morning attack because I tossed a coin with Art Small to decide who was going to lead the six planes of our squadron, and I lost.

Our B-25 squadron was operating from the strip variously known as Laloki, or 14 Mile or Schwimmer Field. The second name was the distance of the field from Port Moresby; the third was given it in honor of an American pursuit pilot who was killed down under in 1942.

We had been on the alert several days. The feeling among our crews was somewhat similar to that described as prevailing at the Kila Kila strip among the crews of the A-20 squadron by Capt. Chudoaa. The men were all afraid that the convoy reported north of New Britain was going to Wewak, well beyond our range.

Our machines were the first B-25s in Australia. They had been consigned to the Dutch, and we got them when Java fell. They were not equipped with forward guns for deck strafing, so our assignment would be medium altitude bombing, if and when the Japanese ships came within our range.

#### Weather Changes

The Japanese had expected to move under the five days or so of thick weather that usually followed the type of storm they were hiding under. But on Wednesday the wind changed and blew their cover away from them.

Art was pretty tickled about winning the toss. We only had six B-25s in condition to fly. They were soon all in the air and winging their way toward the gap in the mountains.

We could hear the pilots as they sighted the enemy.

Capt. Jock Henebry's voice came over the radio:

"There they are, let's get their rice wet."

Henebry was leading one flight of Larner's squadron of strafing and skip-bombing B-25s.

A few minutes later we heard Capt. Jake Hutchinson, one of our own pilots, report that he thought he had got a transport and we all felt pretty happy about that.

## Feared Being Too Late

From the chatter on the radio we feared that there would be nothing left for the afternoon mission, which I was to lead.

We heard one Flying Fortress pilot say:

"Look at all those Japs down there. Let's go down and strafe them."

And another pilot reply:

"Good idea. I'm followin' you."

There were some whoops and yells of "got 'em."

After a while all our planes came swooping in. Maj. Shearer, the intelligence officer of the group, had forgotten to get his laundry bag out of one of the planes. A navigator had used it to sit on, and a piece of shrapnel had smashed into the laundry bag, giving the navigator nothing worse than a kick in the pants but messing up the laundry considerably. Shearer never did get over kicking about his laundry.

The weather was terrible in the afternoon. We had an awful time getting over the mountains. We finally crossed at 20,000 feet. We were an hour late in getting to the rendezvous at Cape Ward Hunt, a big knob of land up the coast where our patrols on the ground and the Nips patrols were still mixing things up. No pilot could miss it.

To our surprise the Fortresses were still there, circling about upstairs with a swarm of P-38s about them like gnats. Every one had been late and they had waited for us.

Off we went, the Fortresses leading the parade at about 15,000 feet. There were 12 of them and they flew in two Vs, like migrating geese.

## Could See Oil Slicks

Our flight of six B-25s followed a minute later at 8,000 feet. Behind us and much lower, were 15 B-25s of one squadron and the 9 B-25s led by Maj. Ed Lerner.

After having listened to the radio chatter and to the pilots returning from the morning mission we were all hot to see what was left out there at the scene of the battle.

In about 15 minutes I could see great oil slicks on the water from my 8,000-foot elevation. Haze on the horizon soon turned out to be smoke from three smoldering cargo ships, lying stricken and listing, far apart in the water.

Above me the Flying Fortresses split into four flights of three, each picking targets. To the right of the cargo vessels, as I came in was a destroyer in a disabled condition.

Just as we came opposite the destroyer, a little pencil in the water from our 8,000-foot elevation, it blew up. One of the three Flying Fortresses above had made a direct hit with a 1,000-pound bomb.

## Spot Jap Destroyer

Far ahead of us near the horizon, about 20 miles away in Vitiaz Strait, the passage between New Britain and New Guinea, we could see the wake and the smoke of a vessel trying to get away. Three of the Flying Fortresses above us were giving chase. I led our flight of six B-25s after it.

It was a destroyer which evidently had been picking up survivors but started away when they realized that another swarm of attackers were speeding in to complete the destruction.

We could see it ahead and below us turn sharply to the left to avoid the bombs from the Fortresses. The Fortress on the left dropped a string of 10 bombs, each of them hitting the water about 100 feet apart, right across it--but the destroyer was lucky. Its beam fitted safely in one of the 100-foot spaces of the bomb string.

When we came over the destroyer it was completing a circle in its effort to avoid the missiles of its tormentors. Our six planes closed into a tight formation and each dropped five bombs. The 30 bombs exploded in a square pattern. The whole aft of the destroyer was in the pattern, concealed from above by the splash and explosion of the bombs. The destroyer slid ahead a little and stopped dead.

## Jumped by Zeros

We started back and a minute later we were jumped by Zeros. Three of them came in almost head on. I turned toward them and the front gunner let go a long burst as they swished by.

They must have made two more passes at us diving at our tail because I could hear the turret gunner opening up on them twice. But they failed to get us. We evidently had gone too far beyond our fighter protection in chasing after the destroyer in Vitiaz Strait.

We came back over the battle area at 1,000 feet and I could see hundreds of Japs in the water clinging to rafts and lumber. The truth is I was keeping watch for the Zeros when we passed the debris. I didn't have much of a chance to look at the Japs in the water.

We were unable to get back across the mountains and landed at Dobudura that night, our new strip near Buna. Fortunately, it rained, so the Nips were unable to catch us on the ground. We heard a Jap recon plane overhead, but he couldn't get in.

Some of the boys had to sleep without mosquito netting that night and I think that accounted for a few of the cases of malaria that struck our men about a week later. We did get back all right the next morning.