

FEBRUARY, 1945

bombers had their only anti-submarine patrol the whole time we were out there.

On Feb. 16, by a curious coincidence my 30th birthday, came the real thing. The shipper led the first hop, which, as a matter of fact, attacked Kachigo Jima, an island some distance south of Tokyo Bay, and those of us who didn't go on that strike felt very anxious about things until everyone came back safe and sound saying it wasn't so bad, there having been moderate anti-aircraft fire and no fighter opposition.

MY FIRST  
STRIKE  
(ON JAPAN  
PROPER)  
HAMAMATSU,  
HONSHU

Doug Yerxa led the second bombing strike, and those of us who didn't go on the other went on this, the first in our task group as any rate to hit the mainland. Actually, we didn't get very near to Tokyo but aimed for Hamamatsu, well to the southwest, passing some of the rocky islands south of the entrance to Tokyo Bay, however. We passed fairly close to a DD. The weather was terrible until we got close to the "mainland" and then could begin to climb. I remember remarking to Ives something like: "Well, there's Japan," and a little later, "You can just make out Fujiama over there to the

MT. FUJI

night, sticking out of the clouds but, because of its snow, the same color as them."

We had brief glimpses of the shore line and the narrow coastal plain of rice fields, etc., on the way in to the target, which we approached from inland in order to make a quick get-away. The torpedo bomber, with bombs, of course, instead of torpedoes, went in first on one set of kargan and had started a good series of fire there just as we pushed over on another set. These we damaged considerably but just how much it was impossible to see. We were too interested in getting away to try and see where the individual bombs hit, retiring at maximum speed and low altitude over the city and thence out to sea. There should have been good strafing targets but I saw none. I saw no anti-aircraft fire except for the plaster of small stuff, if I remember correctly. Though others reported some big puffi right behind us on the way out. Well, that was all there was to it, and probably not a bad job considering it was our first. Certainly it wasn't as "rugged" as expected.

The next day we expected to attack Uobosuka Naval Base and thought the weather

TOYOHASHI

MT. FUJI

was much better. The flight leader apparently decided that Tokyo Bay might be closed in again and had us head towards our alternate target, Toyohashi airfield, which was further down the coast than even Hamamatsu. We had magnificent views of Fuji, passing much closer to it than the day before, and it stood out very clearly, an almost perfect cone, with its mantle of snow making it resemble a very fancy dish of ice cream. Hamamatsu was waiting for us this time and pried at us as we went by at good altitude. These were the first puffs I saw, but they didn't come very close, especially as we swung wide as soon as they were spotted. At the target itself I don't remember seeing any puffs. Though again we didn't linger around very long. I was thought we hit a building short of the main hangar, which might well have been the case, as I had observed that the hangar seemed to be well taken care of. The trip back was long and tiresome, over four and a half hours in fact, before we got down.

IWO JIMA

Three days later we were off Iwo Jima and still in poor weather. Most of us got in

M  
J

Two strikes or two successive days, giving support to the Marines, who had landed a few days before, but the targets (enemy strong points) were hard to pick out, especially on the first day, as I remember, and we probably didn't do as much damage as might have been possible under more favorable conditions. The island looked pretty grim and barren, though there were what looked like fields and at least scrubby woods, more than the curious island to the south had. This being a completely bare 3000 foot cone rising right out of the sea.

After I was the Air Group had quite a rest, except that our fighters had to have combat air patrols around the Task Group, taking turns with the three other fighter squadrons. On March 1 the Skipper led a strike to Okinawa, but not having been along I don't remember the details. Doug's division, along with the usual torpedoes and fighter divisions, were sent down to attack some ships reported to be in the harbor at Miyako Jima\*, the next important island south of Okinawa and not very far from Formosa. We found the ships, but the attack was poorly executed, perhaps because of fairly close AA

NEAR FORMOSA (TALWAN)

MIRAKO

JIMA

fire, the bombers making a miserable glide bombing attack on a destroyer escort, all missing except apparently Doug, largely because of obscuring low haze. The torpedo planes made good use of their "fish" and blasted a merchant ship or two to hell. One of them was a tanker and sent clouds of black smoke sky high.

ULITHI

We returned to Ulithi after that and had a really good rest this time. I think I went ashore only once, having got such a poor opinion of Moq Moq the previous time. Instead I just spend more time reading; my greatest source of entertainment the whole time I was aboard ship. Of course there were letters to write too, and after two or more of us chewed the rag for hours on end, especially if such a subject as the pros and cons of religion, marriage, etc., came up. Everyone in the squadron, of course, had particular extra-flying assignments. I was supposed to be Operations Officer, but it wasn't much of a job, what little there was to do being very dull - the filling out of forms and such indicating the number of planes "up" (in flying condition), the number that went on a particular flight