

AMAMI  
OSHIMA

of some kind (still unknown to us) nearby. We encountered considerable act-act. Two days later we were getting ready to take off for Oshirawa again when a radio message reporting many merchant ships ad Amami oshima, the next big island north of Oshirawa, was intercepted, which called for an obvious change in plans. Arriving over the island we found nothing but a bunch of small fishing vessels, so small, in fact, that in spite of each pilot making three or four runs dropping a bomb each time, very few were hit. I may have hit one, but rather think I didn't. What stands out more clearly was encountering some disconcertingly accurate anti-aircraft fire from one gun position I could see all too clearly on retiring from the first run. Hearing a thumping and perhaps feeling it a little too, I thought something was wrong with the engine until I spotted bursts of AA fire just below us. Thence forward until we got safely behind a cloud our movements were so erratic that I've nervously called up to ask if everything was all right.

AA

OKINAWA

The next day, March 28, came an easy attack against some hidden coastal defense guns on the southeast coast of Oshirawa that had apparently been something of a nuisance to our ships ~~leaving~~ lying

a little way offshore. We had a try at where we were told they were, but as usual results were undetermined at the time.

In the afternoon it was reported, presumably by B-29's, that the Jap fleet had come out of the area and were either trying to escape around southern Kyushu or were heading south to attack us. Everyone got very tense, and of course the planes were loaded up as soon as possible - Two 1000 lb. semi-air-piercing bombs for us, with torpedoes for the Avengers. Because of a late start it was obvious that those of us who would return would have to land after dark, which didn't make us feel any happier. We carried extra gas tanks for the first time and so didn't have to worry about gas. Well, we got right up to Kyushu without seeing anything but some fishing vessels and a patrol craft or two. Finally we turned around and spotting another patrol craft (perhaps one ~~we~~ we had seen before) went in to attack it. Two nearby submarines were seen but dove before we even made a pass toward them. The Skipper section had three instead of the usual two planes. The Skipper and Rittmeier, the extra man, just missed, and Joe Gross's bomb didn't release, which may have been lucky for me.

OFF KYUSHU

ATTACK  
ON FRIGATE  
OR DE

HIT.

Then I dove, with Dusty right behind me. The little ship fired up at us all the way down but ineffectively if close, and just after we pulled out it exploded in a most spectacular fashion. First there was a huge ball of orange flame with rocket-like things off in every direction, and then a great mushroom of smoke went up thousands of feet in the air. I was credited with a hit, though so was I see, but since I was ahead and, according to him, went lower, my bomb must have gone off before his no matter how close he was, and everyone said it was the third one that did it, though it could have been with his help. The ship was later identified from photographs as a patrol frigate, probably about 300 feet long and of around 1000 tons with a complement of perhaps 200 or more men. Though pictures published much later in Naval Aviation News called it a DE or destroyer escort, not that there's very much difference.

Well, that was pretty satisfactory except that if I hadn't got so excited, I'd have had enough wits to circle the sinking ship low enough to give I see a chance to get some really good movies. The good stills were taken by Corrier, Dues's gunner.

We returned to the Task Group after dark all

night, and though it was a little hard to tell what ship was ours, colored lights helped. I was the first bomber to land and no trouble, the signal officer and his motions being as plain as day. That was my 13th strike. Two of the boys made minor crash-ups, and, though it was too bad that it had to be borders, it was a good record, as we had never even practiced night carrier landings as an air group. We had had night field carrier landings once many months before.

AMAMI  
O SHIMA

Another strike, against Amami<sup>arr</sup> Oshima on April 2, proved more successful than the earlier. Though a supposed cruiser reported as badly damaged turned into an LST, that was something, and there were several patrol craft and medium-sized merchant ships sunk or damaged. On the first pass I somehow dove ahead of the Skipper and Goose, not being used to the way the former zig-zags before he pushes over, and pretty well fouled all three of our dives up. What with all the smoke, it was hard to see who hit or missed what, but the Skipper led Russ and me around for another pass, as not all of our bombs had been dropped the first time. Though I had pretty surely missed the supposed cruiser the first time with my smaller bombs, Chief Steeber, the

HIT

5 <sup>Shipper</sup> <sup>a big explosion</sup>  
 a crewman, reported after I dropped my 500's the second time, so it looks as if I got the already damaged ~~ship~~ ship I aimed for that time.

TRAGIC  
INCIDENT

On the way back to the ship one of our fighters came alongside obviously in trouble, and I being nearest to him accompanied him back, while the rest of the bombers circled to wait for everyone else. He didn't get very far before his failing engine coughed out completely and forced him to make a water landing. He got in his own little life raft obviously all right, and we contacted "Bull Durham" (The Hornet), which answered that it would send a Kingfisher immediately. We also dropped our own two-man life-rafts in case he wanted it, but the drop was poor, and he ignored it. By this time another Helldiver had joined me. The Kingfisher finally arrived, landed all right and picked our man up, but in trying to take off caught a wing on an extra large wave and rolled over on its back. The occupants (it turned out there were three) clambered to safety and sat on the overturned float. The only visible part of the plane, which, however, seemed to want to stay afloat indefinitely. In the meantime we had contacted the ship again, and this time they said they'd direct a trio of Kingfishers to the spot.