

After pulling out we sped at near Tree-Top level to the rendezvous point over the bay. On the way the first three of us spotted a train. Bollinger stopped it. Richel put some more slugs in it, and, though only one of my guns was working, which put the plane in a slight slide when it fired, it had enough to blow up the boiler, as a huge cloud of steam arose. Finding at the rendezvous that my big bombs hadn't released as I had expected, I let them go or, ^{what} looked like some kind of cement plants but forgot to arm the bombs. One of the aircrewmembers, however, reported an explosion later, which made me feel better.

The plots seemed a little closer the second trip. I aimed for one of the buildings that looked untouched, but, as usual, results were undetermined. After pulling out this time I shaped a gas or oil tank, and though again only one 20 mm. fired, I could ^{see} hit from its tracer. Disappointingly, the tank didn't explode. The last flights over Kausha were pretty grim, the Air Group losing three more planes.

Our last few strikes were not tough and were uneventful. One over Okinawa aimed at knocking out an already pretty well gutted warehouse, and I'm

TRAIN

LOCOMOTIVE

HIT

OIL TANK

HIT

OKINAWA

TOKUNA

none too sure we made it any worse. The only new island to me was Tokuna, found only after a long search because of terrible weather and very high winds, which put our navigation off. As a matter of fact we had started for Kikai but never found it because of the clouds, and even Tokuna we could see so little of that we dropped our bombs in level flight over where we thought the air field was. The next day we found Kikai all right and bombed revetments.

KIKAI

We thought that might be our last flight and felt sure of it when we went through a typhoon and had the forward corner of the flight deck folded down. When a visiting F4U caught a bad air current and went in the dirt*, however, they decided to launch planes backwards and got a whole group of fighters, which was to search for lost ships, off without mishap. That wasn't a very efficient way to operate, however, and by placing metal wind batten in in a certain area of the folded portions of the deck, they made it safe for planes to take off over the bow again. We even went on another strike after that, to Okino Daito, a tiny island well southeast of Okinawa.

TYPHOON

DAMAGE

6/5/45

6/6

OKINO DAITO

(LAST STRIKE)

* PILOT SAVED

JUNE, 1945

We got off the deck in good shape just by starting from a little nearer the stern than usual, but there wasn't much to bomb on the island. We were instructed to have a try at a weather station, but going down in the dive I found it hard to identify and aimed for the most convenient building.

There was a pretty strong cross-wind, and some of the fighter bombers experimenting with napalm bombs dropped their bombs in the ocean.

Well, after that we went straight to the new anchorage in the Gulf of Leyte, between Leyte and Samar, in the Philippines. It was a much more interesting anchorage than Ulithi. As we steamed up into the bay, islands of all sizes loomed up on both sides, the peaks of the larger ones disappearing into the clouds. Some of the smaller ones were little more than rocks and some, especially along the shore of Samar, were of fantastic shapes, higher than they were wide, and had overhanging cliffs on all sides, but every land one had some vegetation on top. Native sailing canoes with out-riggers were seen here and there, and some even came closer to the ship.

There was a huge officers club on Samar, as usual good for nothing except drinking. Though it paid to say it was a good place to run into

GULF OF LEYTE

ANCHORAGE,

PHILIPPINES

SAMAR

friends* The temptation to strike off into the jungle and explore was strong, but steep cliffs faced one on all sides. It was possible, however, to walk short distances along the shore, and Matthew and I soon found plenty of shells to fill our pockets. The birds were pretty quiet, and the only one I got more than a glimpse of were a very ordinary-looking crow and a few small swifts.

We soon found, however, it was not difficult to get over to Leyte, where it was much easier to get around. This island being much less rugged and much more developed than Samar. Tacloban, the capital, was a rather filthy town and not particularly oriental looking except for the population, but not uninteresting. The stores had little to offer.

Though we found some small but pretty, cowry shells for sale, some on necklaces or bracelets, some not. Our most successful trip took us first to Tolosa, a comparatively unspoiled little native town twenty-odd miles south of Tacloban at the foot of an interesting-looking little hill topped by a ruined Spanish fort. We intended to climb the hill after visiting the town but never found the trail and instead walked around the

* Skipper Goodhue for one