

AIRCRAFT ACTION REPORT

4317 010059

RESTRICTED
(Reclassify when filled out)

OPNS
For
IDENTICAL

I. GENERAL

Fighting Squadron

(a) Unit Reporting FIFTY-THREE (b) Based on or at USS SARATOGA, (CV-3) (c) Report No. 2

(d) Take off: Date 21 February 1945 Time (LZT) 1420K (Zone); Lat. 24°19' N Long. 141° 53' E
(1630K posit.) (1630K posit.)

(e) Mission Combat Air Patrol over SARATOGA (Iwo Jima Invasion) (f) Time of Return - (Zone)
None returned - all planes ditched in sea about 2000K

II. OWN AIRCRAFT OFFICIALLY COVERED BY THIS REPORT.

TYPE (a)	SQUADRON (b)	NUMBER			BOMBS AND TORPEDOES CARRIED (PER PLANE) (f)	FUZE, SETTING (g)
		TAKING OFF (c)	ENGAGING ENEMY A/C (d)	ATTACKING TARGET (e)		
<u>F6F-5</u>	<u>VF-53</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>-</u>

III. OTHER U. S. OR ALLIED AIRCRAFT EMPLOYED IN THIS OPERATION.

TYPE	SQUADRON	NUMBER	BASE	TYPE	SQUADRON	NUMBER	BASE
<u>None</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

IV. ENEMY AIRCRAFT OBSERVED OR ENGAGED (By Own Aircraft Listed in II Only).

(a) TYPE	(b) NO OBSERVED	(c) NO. ENGAGING OWN A/C	(d) TIME ENCOUNTERED	(e) LOCATION OF ENCOUNTER	(f) BOMBS, TORPEDOES CARRIED; GUNS OBSERVED	(g) CAMOUFLAGE AND MARKING
<u>(1) ZEKE</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1650K (ZONE)</u>	<u>142°32' E. 25° 06' N.</u>	<u>(1) 4 machine guns, 2 in each wing, for 2 planes engaged.</u>	<u>others unknown since unobserved.</u>
<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>- (ZONE)</u>	<u>7-8 miles SE of above position</u>	<u>Unobserved on rest. Possible .20mm in one.</u>	<u>(2) Dull khaki & olive- green splash camou- flage on all. No in- signia on one engaged</u>
<u>(2) ZEKE</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1653K (ZONE)</u>	<u>Swicide bombing attack on surface units in vicinity of Iwo Jima.</u>	<u>(2) Unknown, but underside of one engaged seen to be clean. (no bombs showing)</u>	<u>Insignia for others unknown.</u>

V. ENEMY AIRCRAFT DESTROYED OR DAMAGED IN AIR (By Own Aircraft Listed in II Only).

(a) TYPE ENEMY A/C	(b) DESTROYED OR DAMAGED BY:			GUNS USED	(c) WHERE HIT, ANGLE	(d) DAMAGE CLAIMED
	TYPE A/C	SQUADRON	PILOT OR GUNNER			
<u>ZEKE</u>	<u>F6F5</u>	<u>VF-53</u>	<u>Lt. R. W. LUKE (114650) USNR</u>	<u>6 .50s</u>	<u>Starboard & port wing & cockpit. Level, 6 o'clock</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>
<u>ZEKE</u>	<u>F6F5</u>	<u>VF-53</u>	<u>Ens. L. C. RADFORD (368259) USNR</u>	<u>6 .50s</u>	<u>Engine. Level, 12 o'clock</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>
<u>ZEKE</u>	<u>F6F5</u>	<u>VF-53</u>	<u>Ens. C. SZYMBORSKI (346821) USNR</u>	<u>6 .50s</u>	<u>Cockpit, wings. Above, 9" Tail. Level, 6 o'clock</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>
<u>ZEKE*</u>	<u>F6F5</u>	<u>VF-53</u>	<u>Ens. J. P. NELSON (337916) USNR*</u>	<u>6 .50s*</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>

*(see note)

NOTE: The ZEKE, attributed to have been shot down by Ensign NELSON is based on the eyewitness report of Lt. LUKE who saw a ZEKE completely engulfed in flames, falling out of control. Since the combat air patrol covered in this action report were the only friendly planes known to have been at this location at this time, it is considered by the remaining three pilots that NELSON destroyed it, for none of the remaining pilots claim to have shot down more than the one plane which each is credited with above. Ensign NELSON is known to have been with Lt. LUKE's division right up to the time of the engagement, but during the ensuing melee the other pilots lost track of him. Ensign NELSON is listed as missing in action but this fourth plane could not have been he, since Ensign NELSON joined up and flew with his fellow pilots soon after the encounter. (See narrative for further details.)

stuck out about 18 inches from the wing, and had what might have been an inverted cone-shaped flash shield, about 4 or 5 inches in diameter, on the end of it. The size of the gun flash was figured to be 2 ft in length. SZYMBORSKI made his observations from a distance of 100 yards or less and definitely feels that the armament on this Zeke appeared heavier than the .50 caliber guns he had been so accustomed to seeing on the F6F-5. RADFORD did not observe the armament on this plane, but on the one he shot down and the one he saw in his rear-view mirror, he was of the opinion that each carried 4 machine guns, 2 on each wing. From the 4 flashes that he saw in each case, and that appeared like little red dots, RADFORD believed that the guns were 7.7 caliber and were set flush into the leading edge of the wings. LUKE made no observations as to armament.

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XII. TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL DATA. (Narrative and comment. Describe action fully and comment freely, following applicable items in check list at left. Use additional sheets if necessary.)

ENGAGEMENT WITH ENEMY

OWN AIRCRAFT

- Disposition
- Altitudes
- Speeds
- Approach Tactics
- Use of Cover, Deception
- Angles of Attack and Their Effectiveness
- Distance of Opening Fire
- Defense Tactics and Their Effectiveness

ENEMY AIRCRAFT

- Method of Locating, Distance
- Disposition
- Altitudes
- Speeds
- Approach Tactics
- Use of Cover, Deception
- Angles of Attack
- Distance of Opening Fire
- Defensive Tactics

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Own Weaknesses
- Enemy Weaknesses
- Offensive Tactics, Own
- " " " Enemy
- Defensive Tactics, Own
- " " " Enemy
- Flexible Gunnery, Own
- Escort Tactics
- Fighter Direction
- Use of Radar
- Night Fighting
- Recognition, Aircraft

ATTACK

OWN TACTICS

- Method of Locating Target
- Approach to Target
- Altitudes, Speeds
- Approach
- Dive
- Pull-Out
- Dive Angle
- Strafing
- Retirement
- Defensive Tactics
- Use of Jamming

DEFENSE, ENEMY

- Evasive Tactics, Ships
- Concealment
- Searchlights
- Night Fighter Tactics
- Use of Jamming

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Bombing Tactics
- Torpedo Tactics
- Effectiveness of Bombs, Torpedoes
- Selection of Targets
- Fuzing
- Strafing Tactics
- Defensive Tactics
- Use of Radar
- Reconnaissance
- Photography
- Briefing

OPERATIONAL

- Navigation
- Homing
- Rendezvous
- Recognition, Ships
- Communications
- Flight Operations
- Search and Tracking
- Base Operations
- Maintenance

SZYMBORSKI saw the Zeke afire and confirmed a definite kill for RADFORD. The enemy plane pulled up in a wing-over and fell flaming into the clouds. RADFORD's F6F5 was not hit, since the enemy's bullets passed directly below him. Still continuing on, RADFORD turned to port to get into position to engage his third plane which was at the same time turning into him. (Note: RADFORD at this moment, pointed toward SZYMBORSKI, saw SZYMBORSKI on the first Jap's tail shooting the rudder and stabilizer to pieces, and confirms a destroyed plane for SZYMBORSKI, based on the fact that it could not have been controlled with so much of the tail empennage shot off). However, while in the turn to port, bullets began hitting RADFORD's plane from the rear, striking the cockpit hood and the port wing just forward of the aileron. RADFORD saw a Zeke in his rear-view mirror and immediately shoved over into the clouds, ducking away without suffering any further damage. He emerged on top of the clouds to find himself only 500' directly below 3 Jap planes (apparently what was left of the original group), nosed up and gave one a short burst without any visible effects, and dove for cloud cover once again. This time when he emerged he saw 4 Zekes circling 5 miles distant with a lone Hellcat diving into their midst. This turned out to be Lt. LUKE who had just arrived at the scene of the encounter. Up to this point the entire action had covered a period of 2 or 3 minutes at the most. Lt. LUKE and Ens. NELSON had been circling the SARATOGA at 2500' when they got their vector from the FDO. They proceeded north and then turned east at maximum speed. LUKE was in low blower, and showing 2700 RPM and 61 inches manifold pressure. NELSON lagged behind, possibly because he did not go to blower, but did manage to get close on the turn eastward when he was only a mile to starboard of LUKE. After climbing to 7000' LUKE started down through scattered cumulus clouds and tallyhoed 4 Zekes who were orbiting 1000' below 2 - 3 miles ahead at 1130 o'clock. These Zekes had the same olive green - dull khaki splash camouflage as the others, but LUKE is emphatic that the one he engaged had no markings or insignia, as were seen on two planes that RADFORD engaged a moment earlier; however it could have been easy to miss seeing the "rising suns" in the hazy light and heat of battle.

It is not known whether this second group of Zekes included any of the first group or not. However, based on the total number observed in both sightings and the number of planes destroyed in the first encounter, there were more than the five Zekes which were originally spotted at 1650K by RADFORD. In both cases the enemy fighters were definitely recognized as Zekes by all of the returning pilots.

LUKE had the impression that the Japs were looking for something to come up at them from below and that they were merely playing around and waiting while circling and alternately diving and climbing seemingly unaware of his presence. Picking the nearest Jap, LUKE dove on him as he came around in his circle and opened up from 500' with 6 .50s for a level 6 o'clock shot. Tracers were seen to enter the Zeke's starboard wing about midway from the root to the tip. A second long burst, from the same position, saw a stream of bullets go into the cockpit and cross over the fuselage into the port wing. Fire was observed at the port wing root in the form of 4 or 5 streaks of flame 3 ft long as the bullets hit. LUKE, getting too close, pulled up 400-500' and reversed course, observing the Jap plane roll slowly on its back and disappear into a cloud ahead. LUKE believes that besides being definitely afire, the plane now had a dead pilot since it rolled so long and slow, when a more violent evasive action would have been normal. The time was approximately 1653K.

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OWN AIRCRAFT

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- Altitudes
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ENEMY AIRCRAFT

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- Disposition
- Altitudes
- Speeds
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- Defensive Tactics

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Own Weaknesses
- Enemy Weaknesses
- Offensive Tactics, Own
- " " , Enemy
- Defensive Tactics, Own
- " " , Enemy
- Flexible Gunnery, Own
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ATTACK

OWN TACTICS

- Method of Locating Target
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COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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On the other hand, the second group were circling aimlessly when encountered and offered the impression that they were merely having a good time not knowing what they were doing. It was for this reason that Lt. LUKE dared to attack them single handedly. Lt. LUKE feels that the team work displayed by his division was largely responsible for its success. With the possible exception of NELSON, each pilot was in a position to cover another, and the division leader feels that NELSON must have been likewise, since very possibly the fourth plane might have been after him (LUKE) and NELSON got it.

All pilots concur that the Jap pilots certainly were not smart in not using evasive maneuvers and not making more use of their advantage of numbers through combat team work.

Since none of the Hellcats returned to base no definite information is available on any damage that might have been sustained, or to the total number of rounds fired. Fuel consumption figures are based on an average obtained from information furnished by the three returning pilots. SZYMORSKI landed with 3 gallons left in his tanks, RADFORD with none, and LUKE with 30.

In several instances, particularly after dark, planes inadvertently approached too near to or actually flew over friendly forces, and were taken under AA fire. Fortunately no casualties occurred.

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XIII. MATERIAL DATA. (Comment freely on performance or suitability, following check list at left.
Use additional sheets if necessary).

ARMAMENT

- Guns, Gunsights
- Turrets
- Ammunition
- Bombs, Torpedoes
- Bomb Sights
- Bomb Releases

COMMUNICATIONS

- Radio, Radar
- Homing Devices
- Visual Signals
- Codes, Ciphers

RECOGNITION

- IFF
- Signals
- Battle Lights
- Procedures

PROTECTION

- Armor; Points and Angles
of Fire Needing Further
Protection
- Leak Proofing

EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT

- Parachutes
- Life Belts, Life Rafts
- Safety Belts
- Emergency Kits
- Rations, First Aid

NAVIGATIONAL EQUIPMENT

- Compasses
- Driftsights
- Octants
- Automatic Pilots
- Charts
- Field Lighting

INSTRUMENTS

- Flight
- Power Plant

OXYGEN SYSTEM

**CAMOUFLAGE AND
DECEPTION DEVICES**

STRUCTURE

- Airframe
- Control Surfaces
- Control System
- Dive Flaps
- Landing Gear
- Heating System
- Flight Characteristics
At Various Loadings

POWER PLANT

- Engines
- Engine Accessories
- Propellers
- Lubricating System
- Starters
- Exhaust Dampers

HYDRAULIC SYSTEM

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

- Auxiliary Plant
- Lights

FUEL SYSTEM

FLIGHT CLOTHING

MAINTENANCE

BASE FACILITIES

- Plane Servicing Equipment
- Personnel Facilities

No difficulties because of material failure were experienced on the flight covered by this report, with the exception of a rehostat failing to dim the light on one of the plane's gunsights. However this was of minor importance. Otherwise, all pilots reported excellent performance on the part of the Helicat.

The life jackets used by SZYMBORSKI and RADFORD developed slow leaks immediately after inflation. A test showed that SZYMBORSKI's jacket leaked as a result of a loose hexagonal nut located on the CO₂ flask housing. RADFORD's jacket was not returned.

The Model A Pararaft packages (manufactured by NAS, Barbers Point A & R) were in all cases easily removed from the cockpits of the airplanes. RADFORD and SZYMBORSKI found it difficult to open the pararaft packages and discarded them in the water. Both complain that the QAC Connector U-bolt was too difficult to locate and was fastened too tight for easy release. LUKE had no difficulty in opening the package, having had plenty of time to open it before leaving the wing of the plane and getting into the water.

LUKE did complain of difficulty in opening the Kidde type rotary valve CO₂ bottle as is often the case; the safety pin mechanism was too complicated for easy release under emergency conditions.

REPORT PREPARED BY:

J.R. Branch

J.R. Branch, Lieut., A, U.NR

SIGNATURE

ACIO, VF-53

RANK AND DUTY

APPROVED BY:

Robert W. Conrad

SIGNATURE

ROBERT W. CONRAD, Lieut. Comdr., USN

Commanding, VF-53

RANK AND DUTY

19 March 1945

DATE