

Aircraft Action Reports

2-d (53) USS Randolph

AG12/A12-3.
Serial 0613

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
AIR GROUP TWELVE

3 March 1945.

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Commander, Air Group TWELVE.
To: Commanding Officer, USS RANDOLPH.
Subject: Comments and Recommendations on Action of 16 to 25 February 1945.

1. NEED FOR MORE EFFECTIVE STRAFING PLANE.

Considering the Tokyo operation and the probability of future operations of a similar nature where the primary mission is the destruction of enemy air power, a crying need manifests itself for a more efficient strafing plane. The P5F airplane equipped with 6 - .50 caliber guns bore-sighted at 900 feet is not the answer. The P5F airplanes of this Air Group are bore-sighted at 1500 feet, since they are equipped with the Mark 23 gunsight. This makes it a more effective strafing plane than the ones bore-sighted at 900 feet, but there is still much to be desired along these lines. To effectively strafe and destroy a grounded airplane, it is necessary to go quite low and well within effective range of small arms fire. It is recommended that VF type aircraft equipped with 4 - 20 mm. cannon be put into service as soon as possible. A satisfactory compromise would be 2 - 20 mm. and 4 - .50 caliber, the cannon to be used for strafing and the .50 caliber for air to air fighting.

2. MARK 23 GUNSIGHT.

Very little use was made of the Mark 23 lead computing gunsight since most of the air to air fighting was against enemy VF where the guns were fired only in "snap shooting". It is felt that the lead computing gunsight will be quite effective against less maneuverable targets such as enemy bombers and torpedo planes.

3. USE OF WINDOW AND RCM GEAR.

Both window and six VT planes equipped with RCM gear were used in the attack on the Tachikawa Engine Plant. The formation was under fire of intense heavy enemy AA for a period of at least 20 minutes and at an altitude of only 14,000 feet, but so far as can now be determined no plane was struck by heavy enemy AA fire. This may have been pure luck or poor gunnery on the part of the enemy. However, it is recommended that window and RCM gear be used on all attacks where radar controlled AA fire is probable.

4. USE OF NAPALM.

The use of Napalm bombs on enemy positions at Iwo Jima was a bitter disappointment. Estimates as low as 15% and never higher than 33% were made of the bombs dropped which actually burned. The Napalm bombs dropped from planes in this Air Group were equipped with the white phosphorous igniter M425 in the tank cap. Many casualties would undoubtedly have been prevented among the Marines at Iwo Jima had these bombs functioned satisfactorily. Ground troops should not be denied the use of this effective support weapon simply for lack of a well designed detonator.

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Comments and Recommendations on Action of 16 to 25 February 1945.

5. FUSING OF BOMBS.

The effectiveness of instantaneous fuses on bombs at Iwo Jima is questioned. The enemy was dug in in pill boxes etc. It is felt that a delay fuse would have been more effective.

6. VF TACTICS.

Our VF tactics are quite sound. Losses continue to occur, however, when pilots disobey the fundamental rule of remaining within tactical support of one another.

7. VF ESCORT.

VF escort of strike planes should not be loaded with rockets or bombs. As soon as enemy VF appear, these have to be jettisoned in order to effectively protect the bombers. If bomber fighters are desired, the operation order should state that fact. These planes should be loaded with bombs and their primary mission should be to drop the bombs on the target. Smaller, pure VF escort can be sent with strike groups of this kind since the bomber fighters can jettison their load if the formation encounters strong enemy fighter resistance.

8. NEW AIR GROUPS.

New groups should not arbitrarily be assigned comparatively easy targets just by virtue of the fact that they are new to the combat zone. New air groups (CV) now coming from Pearl and the States all have a good percentage of experienced pilots. These groups are usually fresh and eager to get into combat and oft times are more effective than more experienced and comparatively war weary groups.

9. WEATHER INFORMATION.

Weather information over the target area is of vital importance to strike and sweep leaders. The need and importance of this information is obvious. Definite steps should be taken to get this information to sweep and strike leaders by leaders already in the target area. This could and should be done over any channel that will get through. It is quite often difficult to contact pilots over the target area while the sweep or strike is proceeding to the target.

10. SURVIVAL GEAR.

The amount of survival gear furnished pilots is becoming far too cumbersome and heavy, even to the extent of decreasing his efficiency while simply sitting in the airplane. Pilots are loath to leave behind any survival gear with which they are furnished on the outside chance that they may need it. This gear has accumulated to such an extent that it will be quite difficult for pilots to extricate themselves from the airplane in the event they are forced to jump or ditch.

11. ANTI-BLACKOUT SUIT.

The anti-blackout or "Z" suit is a marked success. Pilots are unanimous in their praise of this suit. It is highly recommended that all VF type planes be equipped with the fittings and that all VF pilots be required to wear the suit in combat.

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Comments and Recommendations on Action of 16 to 28 February 1945.

12. GUN CAMERAS.

A great deal of difficulty was experienced with gun cameras in all types of planes. This was due primarily to the heavy rains encountered on the way in to the target, which either drowned out the camera or fogged the lens. A reliable gun camera, particularly for VF types, would be an invaluable aid in damage assessment. It would be absolute evidence to separate the "doers" from the "claimers." The knowledge that a pilots gun camera film will be shown the following day to himself in the presence of his shipmates and his errors pointed out by the squadron commander will in itself cause the individual to make steadier runs and destroy the target. This in itself would justify the use of the gun camera. Some pilots have no particular desire to make effective gunnery and strafing runs and are more interested in saving their own lives, but none desire to be ridiculed, which would happen if he brought home a film showing his ineffectual attacks.

C. L. CROMMELIN.

VF12/A16

Ser.0307

3 March 1945.

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Commanding Officer.
To: Commander, AIR GROUP TWELVE.

Subject: Combat Operations, 16 to 25 February, 1945 -
Comments and Recommendation on.

1. During the subject period this squadron participated in fighter sweeps and fighter escort missions over the Tokyo Bay Area, and maintained routine patrols as required.

2. The following comments, recommendations and observations are pertinent to these operations:

(a) Japanese Aircraft and Tactics

In very few incidences were the Japanese pilots aggressive enough to make comparisons in aircraft performance. However, I believe they have made notable progress in some of their tactics. In most cases, the enemy fighters climbed to a definite altitude advantage well away from the area in which they intended to do their fighting. This advantage coupled with cloud cover allowed them to attack only when conditions were ripe, that is, a straggler at the end of a strafing run, or a lagging wingman. They operated, for the most part, in very loose teams, and tried to strike a single target. Other enemy fighters acted independently and tried to maintain altitude advantage at any cost. This necessitated pushing their nose down and taking absurdly long range shots in order to recover in time to hold the altitude advantage. Once they lost their advantage they were at a loss as to what to do. They dove for the deck, taking minor evasive action, and offered easy targets for pursuing planes. A team of fighters maintained in a good position of mutual support were very seldom attacked. The first two days of combat, I noticed a bad tendency among my own pilots to give chase to any enemy aircraft, regardless of the situation. It was not uncommon to see eight, and even twelve, F6F's strung out in a line chasing one enemy plane. Had there been any enemy support above, the tail end of the chase could have been clipped off one at a time. I believe this tendency was remedied on the 25th by assuring that only one division (the division making the "Tally-ho") gave chase. In the case of single enemy aircraft one section attacked while the other

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Combat Operations, 16 to 25 February, 1945 -
Comments and Recommendation on.

section covered the attack from above. One other tactic was noted. Planes diving for the deck attempted to carry their pursuers as far inland as possible, and to fly them across their own airfields at a low altitude. The apparent reason was to obtain aid from their own A.A.

(b) Target Assignments.

It is my firm belief that more damage could have been inflicted on our fighter sweeps on the 16th and 17th, had definite assignment been made of one or two priority targets, as was the case on the 25th. In cases where good and advance reconnaissance is not available, a multiple target coverage assignment might be made with the stipulation that fields will be attacked in proportion to the number of vital targets observed. Having a single field to work over allows the attacking divisions to stay together and establish a central rendezvous point from which the divisions feed out as necessary to protect those planes making the attack.

(c) MK 23 Gun Sight

It is the opinion of this squadron that the use of the "Wandering Willie" (MK 23 Gunsight) is limited to planned shots,- that is, on formations of bombers, or on other aerial targets against which a planned or standard gunnery run may be used. If a short tracking period is allowed and the proper span setting used, the sight is tops. However, for "snapshots" and tail chases, most pilots will automatically use the fixed pip and tracer control. The MK 23 also requires a change in the recognition problem. It is not enough to determine "friend or foe", but also to know the type of foe and the corresponding span setting. For this reason, our recognition training now consists of distant shots, attempting to recognize enemy planes by over-all appearances at a distance which will allow the span to be set and a run to be planned. I hope to see the continued use of the MK23, and to concentrate on a doctrine which will make the sight

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Combat Operations, 16 to 25 February, 1945 -
Comments and Recommendation on.

suitable for all kinds of aerial gunnery. Maintenance of the sight has been no problem of importance. The changes in climatic conditions and the effect of exposure to salt have not affected the sight noticeably.

(d) Gun Cameras

The wing gun camera film during this period was of very little value. A good deal of research is recommended to obtain a sealed camera, and a mean aperture setting which will allow good results when light conditions at the target are unknown. Although I know little of the photographic problem, it seems that the physical shape of the camera itself and the access to opening to the magazine would allow sufficient sealing to keep water out of the magazine.

(e) Survival Equipment

There has been a tendency of late to overload pilots with too much survival equipment. Such tendency was apparently stimulated in the days of "Island Jumping" when the necessity of survival for weeks on the water or on an island often was necessary. However, in operations over the Japanese homeland, or in support operations of small islands, the fact that a pilot is either rescued with dispatch or becomes a Prisoner of War makes his fifty odd pounds of survival equipment a hazard rather than an asset. I recommend that survival equipment in future operations over the Japanese Empire consist of a raft, flashlight, whistle, Very's pistol and cartridges, a compact first aid kit, a sheath knife, a signal mirror, plenty of dye markers, and a water marker. Most of this equipment can be carried on the pilot and thus dispense with the cumbersome jungle kit. For operations where immediate rescue is not probable and where opportunities to reach friendly forces is remote, additional survival equipment should be carried.

(f) "Zebra" Suits

The "zebra" suits are unanimously accepted in this squadron as fulfilling a definite need. In two different instances POF's at medium speed (190 kts) were able to turn

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Combat operations, 16 to 25 February, 1945 -
 Comments and Recommendation on.

 inside of enemy fighters known to be more manouevrable under normal circumstances. Our only objection to the use of the "2" suit is that it may allow too much "G" to be applied to the aircraft, thus stressing it when not absolutely necessary. One other minor objection is that the hose connection from the suit to the air lead unfortunately necessitates adding another item to pre-ditching check off list.

(g) Air Sea Rescue

In this squadron's only rescue case, we were very disappointed in not receiving any information as to the efforts that were being expended in effecting the rescue of our pilot, until the following day. At that time we received only the information that the A-CAP was not relieved on station, and that the rescue had not been effected. This gave no indication of what steps had been taken toward rescue, or whether the rescue submarine had sent a "Roger" for the position. I feel that the parent squadron, in cases of this nature, should be called upon to aid in the rescue, under the direction of the responsible command. Under the conditions of the rescue in question, our pilots had the position accurately and could have been of the highest value in assisting the operation. Further they were vitally interested in effecting that particular rescue. It is not my purpose to infer that others aiding would not be interested in the rescue. I merely feel that any time the parent squadron's pilots can participate in a rescue mission, that there will be no question in the minds of the squadron personnel that everything possible was done to effect a rescue. In all cases, the squadron concerned should be kept informed as to the steps that are being taken. This is in my opinion definitely in order if high morale is to be maintained.

(h) Napalm

Only about 30% of the Napalm filled belly tanks, or wing tanks, ignited. The prescribed anemometer type fuse vane was used with a single igniter. Napalm tanks with two igniters were prepared for use on the afternoon of 21 February, but the flights were cancelled. I believe that this type of bomb would be extremely effective against personnel on any type of terrain and I recommend that every effort be made to assure successful ignition in the future.

VF12/A16

Ser.0307

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Combat Operations, 16 to 25 February 1945 -
Comments and Recommendation on.

(I) Aircraft

Our aircraft were maintained well, and performed well. We had a few cases of high gas consumption, but corrected this deficiency by checking and adjusting all the gas transfer systems. It was found that when pumping from the belly tank to the right tank the cutoff was not operating and fuel was being discharged to the atmosphere. In a few cases, belly tanks released and left sway braces still attached to the plane. This was due to uneven tension on the sway brace turnbuckles. This resulted in rolling the tank to one side so that it did not release evenly.

There were a number of cases where propeller control linkages froze. Every case of this trouble occurred when climbing to altitude after passing through heavy rain at low altitude. Exercising the propeller control proved an effective guard against this trouble.

There were very few cases of failure in the ARC-1 radio equipment.

(J) Japanese Tracer

A very low tracer load was observed in both Jap minor calibre AA guns and in airborne machine guns.

(K) Strafing and Rockets

From the few camera gun films that were of any value, it was noted in certain cases that there was not enough care taken to hold a steady point of aim when strafing and firing rockets. This must be constantly stressed on every mission to avoid "spraying".

3. I hope that the above comments will be of some value in preparing for and executing future operation. This squadron has learned a great deal from the past operation, and hopes to show great improvement in all phases of combat in the future.

F. H. MICHAELIS,
Lieut. Comdr., U.S. Navy.