



Series C (Part III)

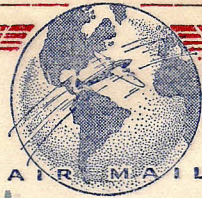
"Me and Tons"

(continued)

Things had been going pretty good on the beach during the first few days at Okinawa. The marines had an easy job cleaning up the northern half of Okinawa. The Army, in the Southern part had done well, but heavy fighting would definitely be coming up in a few more days. The Japs, you will recall, concentrated in Southern part.

The Navy was getting the works in a frightful way - with suicide planes.

It does not seem possible that a human being would kill himself deliberately by crashing his bomb-loaded plane into a ship. However, in exchange for



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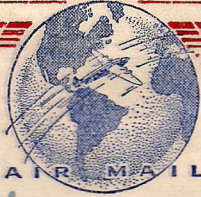
the death of one Jap, sometimes a couple of hundred Americans were killed by that one plane. This was a rich prize to the Japs.

They set out to destroy the ships and made an "all out" effort to do so.

To the North of Okinawa, the "picket-line" - made up of escort vessels - would pick up the Jap planes by radar and by sight and would then send warning to the Allied ships in the Harbor at Okinawa.

The Japs knew this, and hence they tried to destroy the "picket-line". That is why so many Destroyers were sunk.

However, the Yontan and Katana air-



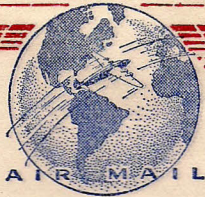
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strips were quickly put into operation. Hundreds of F4U "Corsairs" kept taking off and intercepted the suicide planes as they left Kyushu (Japan).

On April 5, when we received news that the Japs were going to launch a mass suicide air attack at Okinawa, everyone knew that the next day was going to be something terrific.

at 4 AM on the morning of the 6th, all ships were ordered to make smoke so that a complete fog would cover the harbor by the time the sun came up.

Very little happened during the day. However, we could hear the radio reports



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of the action taking place further to the North.

Nothing happened during the day — until 3 P M !!

Then, out of the clear blue sky, and directly overhead — a "Frank" shot out of the ~~sky~~ ^{sky} and dove !!

Not a single man in the harbor on all those hundreds of ships saw the plane — except an 18 year old kid back on 40 millimeter gun number 6. — on our ship.

He shouted over the phones to me —

"Plane sighted bearing 180°, position angle eight zero"

I took one split second look and



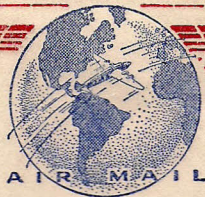
L5

shouted "commence firing".

We were the only ship firing. We were drawing attention. When everyone saw what we were firing at, they all started to fire. However, gun number 6 hit the plane on the very first shot.

The plane was suicide diving the LST 449. It came down and missed that ship by 10 yards. That ship never even knew what happened - they never even fired a shot.

The Captain of LST 449 later sent us a message thanking us for what we did. The Commander of all the LST's in the harbor saw what happened and even though the plane was not shot



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down, he said that the pilot of the plane was hurt by that one hit to such an extent that he could not control his plane; that is how the LST 449 was saved. The pilot had missed.

The crew of gun 6 collected the \$100.00 pool for having received credit for that plane.

But, not to stray too far from the story, that one plane started the fire works. Immediately after that, the suicide planes came in by the dozens. They were diving all over the place. It was the biggest aerial

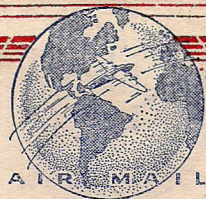


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circus I have ever seen. So many ships were being hit and sunk that it was hard to keep track of them. The hospital ships were crowded with dead and dying. Planes were blowing up too.

A stray bullet hit a gasoline barge about 200 yards from us, and the thing shot sky high with huge flames. The heat was intense. Stanley thought that our ship had been hit on that one. A informed him by blinker light as soon as A could, to let him know A was O.K.

On that day, 500 suicide planes had headed for Okinawa. 350 were



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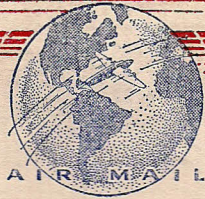
"splashed" (shot down)

Of those 350, the Corsair fighters, who intercepted the planes as they came from Kyushu, accounted for 190. The other 160 were shot down by the "picket-line" and by the ships in the harbor.

But the Japs still came - in great force! Okinawa was to be their "all out" 100% do or die attempt to beat the

Americans.

South of Okinawa lies the Saki-Shima Islands. Off the coast of Saki-Shima, British Battleships, Cruisers, and Carriers were in action. Their job: to pin down the Japs in Saki-Shima and to intercept the planes coming up from Formosa. To the British "Seafires" (they are Carrier based "Spitfires") fell a great task. It is



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this group that lightened our burden at Okinawa by not allowing any Jap planes get through their sector. They did their job well.

Meantime, the Japs were being shelled by warships over at Naha. This kept up day and night. TBF's and F4F's hit them with rockets from the sky. The Army was moving, but moving slowly. Okinawa was to be a tough ordeal.

By this time we were once again loaded with more troops from the 10th Army. On the 8th of April, we went a few miles to the Southwest - to Kerama Retto. There, we formed up a small invasion force to make another landing.

And here proved to be the luckiest episode to befall the "558." Only God could have foreseen what was about to take place. Bunny.