

61-307-50 (Benes)
5-26-42 (1942)

COMBAT MISSION REPORT

P. R. C.

371st Bomb Sqdn (H)
APO 959
D.B. Billings, Capt. A.C., Commanding

Reported- December 26, 1942.

MISSION Destroy Japanese Installations & Personnel on Wake Island

INTRODUCTORY The details of the flight to Midway Island from Hawaii are not reported here since all ships arrived in formation without incident. Likewise, the details of the return trip to Hawaii are not reported for the same reason,- except for minor malfunctions in ships #910 & 923 which were corrected immediately after landing from 1st takeoff for Hawaii, delaying the arrival of these ships at Hawaii one hour.

GENERAL The Squadron formation-- #D-- consisted of 2 flights of Vs, three (3) planes each. All 6 ships went over the target at the indicated altitude, information, made their attack, peeled off and turned for the return as directed,-except Lt. Hoefler who attacked a secondary target because clouds obscured his primary target, and Lt. Irby who circled the reef and made a second run on his target because clouds obscured the target on his first run.

TIME Takeoff from Midway- this formation- 4:3 to 5 p.m. Yoke time, Dec.22.
"BOMBS away"-- from 0010 to 0015 Yoke time, Dec. 24.
ARRIVAL at Midway-- from 0600 to 0700 Yoke time, Dec. 23.

WEATHER Left Midway thru heavy overcast ceiling at 800 feet, drizzling rain. Clear on approach to Wake Island at 8000 feet- moonlight. Cloudy over Wake Island with coverage of 4/10s by scattered, cumulous clouds between 3000 and 4000 feet. Returned thru clear weather at 8000 feet to Midway, letting down thru heavy overcast over runways.

BOMBS All aircraft carried 5- 500Lb. HBE bombs, fused instantaneous, and one cluster bomb of incendiaries. Each m/g was provided with 100 rounds.

D-1. first flight leading ship #972-^{Target #6} Capt. Billings, commanding; Capt. Lippincott, Pilot; Capt. Benes, Navigator; Lt. Beasley, Bombardier.

Thru failure of other squadrons to maintain formation, thinks this ship 6th or 7th over target. Came in on course indicated on target map. When about 15 miles out, saw the bursts from the 1st bombs dropped and then spotted Wake Island. Observed fires which lighted the whole runway in the area of target #1, and some ~~xxx~~ smoke there. Also, a searchlight on the southwest portion of Peacock Point. Anti-aircraft fire was general along the eastern shore of Wake Island, with lots of tracers, but seemingly of small calibre, i.e. 30 cal or Jap 7.7 stuff. To the right of the ship and at Heel Point the ack was heavier, with lots of tracer and also big red bursts.

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There were 2 searchlights on Heel point which had been on during the approach. They went out and then came on again when the plane was directly overhead, but did not catch the plane. An ack gun, larger than .50 cal., at Heel Point seemed to be firing at random. The lights and the ack were generally inaccurate, although when the plane made its turn after bombing there were several orange bursts underneath, the ack seemed more accurate for altitude, but trailing, but the lights were easily avoided, and the plane turned out of the ack fire.

The bombs were dropped in train, 320 feet apart if the plane was making a ground speed of 300 mph which the Bombardier thinks it was doing. The 1st bomb hit the edge of the shore going in, and the rest ~~was~~ were all in the target area, for the buildings in this area could be clearly seen, altho visibility of the rest of the island was poor because of clouds. Bombardier Beasley and Navigator Benes both thought there were more buildings at Heel Point than indicated on the target map-- looked like many small shacks, such as squad shacks for men. Led about 6 ships to Midway.

- Comments
1. Think mission a success largely because Col. Matheny's flight took them by surprise.
 2. If formation had been tighter & better kept, last ships would have been exposed to little ack fire.
 3. Camouflage - blacking bottom of planes-- and clouds over target contributed to success.
 4. Speed of 160 mph IAS okay for assembly, but too slow thereafter. Better cruising speed, 170 to 175 mph IAS.
 5. If weather conditions at takeoff ever obtain again, better to go out directly on course and assemble when clear of overcast.
 6. Diving speed of 230 or 250 mph IAS entirely okay; ship did not seem to show any strain in dive.
 7. After flight of $14\frac{1}{2}$ hours, had about 450-500 gallons of gas left upon return Midway Island.

Target #7

D-2, 1st flight right wing ship #906--/Lt. Irby, Pilot(Lt. McCloskey

divided some time); Lt. Smith, Navigator; Lt. Priester, Bombardier.

After takeoff this plane joined the squadron formation using the indicated light signals. The entire squadron went into attack in perfect formation. Peacock Point was clear and some fires were observed there as the plane went over, and there were 2 searchlights on the point. However, the weather had closed in over Toki Point, obscuring the target area so that the plane was to the right of the area on its first approach. Not having come 5000 miles (from home) to make a dry run, the pilot turned left when past the target and circled the reef. In passing to the west of Kuku Point on Wilkes Island, the plane was caught momentarily by a searchlight on said point which it evaded by a slight turn, and was fired on by ack that seemed to be about 20 mm stuff, with lots of tracers.

After turning north to make the second run, and when over the lagoon, Lt. McCloskey sighted a biplane to the left about 300 yards away at about same altitude (4000 feet). The plane was painted black, had a large, single, radial engine, and looked like a Steerman Trainer. The landing gear could not be observed. No gunfire seemed to be coming from it, and it ducked rapidly into a cloud so that there was no time to shoot at it from this plane. This observation was likewise made by Staff Sergeants Drew and Duster, waist gunners.

Bomb flashes and ack fire were observed in the area of target #1, but this area was also covered by cloud at time of second approach of this plane, and no fires were reported here. Fires were reported in target #6 area. Could see bombs bursting all over island.

Bombs were dropped in train at about 0017 Yoke time, and all hit in the target area except the last one which caught the shoreline (not as far out as the coral reef but the actual shore) north of the target. Turned right, and returned to Midway alone, there being some clouds clear up to 10,000 feet, making it difficult to pick up other elements.

- Comments
1. Jap lights inaccurate and poor. Ack seemed to be small stuff, most of it short and trailing, altho some did arch over the plane. The lights and ack guns did not seem to be coordinated, altho near target #7 there were 2 lights which seemed to cone their beam.
 2. Thinks mission well worked out, and red and green signal lights made assembly easy. Blue not so good.
 3. Until assembly 160 mph IAS okay for speed; there-after it should be increased to at least 170.
 4. Marines did good job bringing him in; called for bearing on way back and could hear signals clearly given- excellent coordination in this respect.
 5. All should practice keeping tighter formation. Such would have avoided all flak fire.
 6. Engineer reports about 600 gals. of gas left on return to Midway Island.

Malfunctions Radio compass "out", and fuel transfer pumps from bomb bay tanks to wing tanks would not operate.

D-3, 1st flight left wing ship #898--Target #9--Lt. Hoefler, Pilot; Lt. Shaeffer, Navigator; Lt. Severson, Bombardier.

This plane joined the formation about 100 miles from Midway, flying at 10,000 feet, with visibility clear at that altitude. There was an overcast below during the 1st 500 miles which cleared. This flight, and the following flight of this formation maintained good order with signal lights, altho some signals were too fast and were hard to read. The red and green lights were easy to see. When about 15 miles out of Wake, pilot heard Col. Matheny talking over Command, in making attack, The Colonel's flight took the Japs by surprise, for there were no searchlights or ack fire observed until after he had pressed home his attack, and his bomb flashes had been observed. Then a light at Toki point came on, and others elsewhere,

the one at Toki point horizontally out to sea, as if looking for ships bombarding from the sea.

There were scattered clouds at 2000 feet over the island, and Target #9 at Toki Point seemed closed in so that the target could not be seen. The plane was approaching slightly to the left of Peacock Point, and rather than risk losing the primary target to clouds, a secondary target was attacked. These were a series of buildings south of the east-west runway near target #3, which looked like barracks. S/Sgt. Spitals, tail turret gunner in this plane is positive that this secondary target was hit and destroyed by the bombs of this plane which were dropped in train.

A building on fire was observed to the west of this target, also located along the runway, but near the west end.

Ack fire had been observed from Target #4 area, but after seeing bomb flashes from some other plane in this area, no more shooting was seen from this ack gun.

A searchlight was observed at Kuku point or a little southeast thereof, and another one was seen on Toki Point. One was also seen in Target #1 area, and 2 were seen in Target #6 area, one being a low angle light, searching horizontally out to sea.

While crossing the island westerly of Heel Point, a big explosive flash was observed on the Peale Island northeasterly area about opposite the location marked "observation point" on the ~~map~~ target map. This flash was followed by dark smoke.

There was another large explosion, yellow in color, located (not accurately) to their rear and right on Wake Island when this plane was on its way out over Northwest portion of Wake Island, which made such a big flash other planes coming in were lighted up. Could not identify this as any target.

Other fires were observed on Heel Point while this plane was making its run in.

Ack guns seemed to be firing from all parts of the island, and one chap reported that at one time he thought he saw 8 streams of tracers, ~~came~~, but this was not corroborated by anyone else in this crew and not reported by anyone else. The ack was generally short, and the pilot thinks he dodged several bursts, and had no difficulty evading the searchlights by banking to the right, even when down to 3000 feet. He had dropped bombs at about 3800 feet but continued to glide to keep up speed in evasive maneuvers. Halfway back joined flight led by Capt. Lippincott. after heading due north 4 or 5 minutes to avoid other planes coming in.

- Comments
1. Radar receiver was on, and operator reports he received under 100 megacycles (thinks about 75) which was very strong when near Wake Island.
 2. Speed of 160 mph IAS too slow for this type mission.
 3. Jap ack seemed to be small calibre with some 37 mm., but hard to locate on map. Generally dispersed.
 4. Need more practice in this type formation flying.

v D-4, 2nd flight, leading ship #959, Target #6- Lt. Lundby, Pilot, (Lt. Wood in plane also); Lt. White, Navigator, Lt. Tekyl, Bombardier.

Flew outbound with setting of 35 inches, 2300 RPM, 160 mph IAS. Broke thru overcast at 7500 feet, after takeoff from Midway and used blue lights to bring formation together. Code signals were very effective, and the red and green lights were easily seen, but never did see the amber. When 4 or 5 hours out, picked up plane of Lt. Andrews with Aldis lamp, so that approached Wake Island in perfect squadron formation. When about 15 miles out,

heard the Colonel over command phone when he began his dive, talking to bombardier. Thinks the Colonel took them entirely by surprise for there was no ack and no searchlights until after the first bombs had been dropped.

There seemed to be a searchlight on the northwest part of Heel Point and one on the southeast portion. Another searchlight could be seen on the southeast portion of Peacock Point.

The Jap ack along the east coast of Wake Island was of small calibre, being about 7.7 stuff, except that at about the bulge on the east coast there was a battery that looked to be about 3 inch ack. Another of the same type was located on the southwest shore of Peacock Point. There was another of the 3 inch type just west of target #6. All this type flak came up in big red bursts like a Roman Candle, one trailing the other, and arching over before dying out. The flak was generally trailing, but the pilot felt some burst under the ship. By the time this ship got over the target the tracers seemed to be coordinated with the lights at times, and came boiling up together. None of the flak looked like .50 calibre, being either larger or smaller.

Altho the plane was not caught in lights, when it seemed apparent it was going to be so caught, S/Sgt. Copeland fired at a light which seemed to be near a BOQ, and the light went out immediately.

The pilot dived to 3500 feet and then came up to avoid the leading plane piloted by Capt. Lippincott, and then dove again on his target. The target was seen three times thru the clouds which were scattered at 2000 feet, and the bombs were dropped in train, at about 0012 Yoke time. All of them were observed to fall in the target area. Lt. Beasley, bombardier on Capt. Lippincott's ship (D-1) observed the fall of the bombs from this plane and states that one big barracks was definitely blown up, the last bomb of this plane falling directly on his incendiaries which had started fires. The crew of this ship also state that bombs from Capt. Lippincott's plane were going off when this ship was over the target, and that fires and explosions in the target area were seen, especially when this plane turned to the right and started back to base.

S/Sgt. ~~The~~ Burrows, the tail turret gunner, reports seeing 4 or 5 fires in Target #1 area, with big ~~big~~ blazes lighting up the runway. No Jap planes were seen on the runways or in the bunkers.

This plane came into the attack directly on course as indicated on the target map, and turned off as indicated.

- Comments
1. Clouds, altho obscuring the target at times, were good cover, and were made use of by this pilot in avoiding lights and ack.
 2. After assembly, 160mph IAS is too slow and 170 to 175 mph IAS is much better cruising speed for this plane.
 3. This plane hit 260 mph IAS on its dive down toward target, and there seemed to be no unusual strain--the plane took the dive in stride, so to speak.
 4. There seemed to be no organized, sustained coordination between the Jap searchlights and ack guns.
 5. This plane had a few chips on it where the paint was knocked off right down to the metal, but the metal was not bruised and nothing else resembling an ack hit was seen after inspection.
 6. The Japs seemed to use lots of tracer.
 7. Operator reports he picked up Wake Island with radar when 35 miles out at 8000 feet. Also picked up Midway Island on return 75 miles out at 5000 feet. Thinks radar most effective for flat island surface when plane at 5 to 6000 feet.

B-5, 2nd flight, right wing ship #923, Target #5--Lt. McGreevy, Pilot; Lt. Bocker, Navigator; Lt. Van Dyke, Bombardier.

Joined formation easily after takeoff, by use of signal lights. Saw bomb flashes and explosions before saw Wake Island; then saw Lt. Andrews (on left wing) turn, and Lt. Lundby (leading flight) start his dive so counted 4 and then started own dive from about 8000 feet, and came in on course indicated. There were scattered clouds at 2000 to 1000 feet, obscuring part of the target, but got sight with Bombardier, and dropped bombs in train at about 0012 Yoke time. Sure that the last bomb hit and blew up the last big building in the target area, either BOQ or administration building. Had dived to 4000 feet on release of bombs. Had seen a square of red lights in the target area before release which went out when bombs fell.

On the approach, and to the left of Target #6, Lt. Van Dyke and S/Sgt Turlo saw a big fire, followed by a large flame and explosion which looked like gasoline or an ammunition dump had been hit. This fire, after the explosion, was visible after this plane had turned right from the target and was 10 minutes out on its way back to Midway. They could observe no smoke-- too far to see they think, but the glare from the fire was easily seen.

Altho clouds obscured the southwest portion of the island, several fires could be seen in the vicinity of target #1. Just southwest of this and on Peacock Point there was a heavy flak battery firing big red

bursts, looking like Roman Candle shots, following up in line and arching over.

The crew observed the same type of heavy flak on the Heel Point area which they described as 3 to 5 inch guns, firing big red bursts. They also observed flak bigger than .50 cal. which looked to be about 20 mm. in type, coming from just south of target #6.

They report generally dispersed flak along the east coast of Wake Island, of about 7.7 variety, and ~~saw~~ state that they saw a train of bombs knock out a searchlight in the center of this island-- the light not dimming out, but going out immediately upon a bomb burst.

- Comments
1. Lt. Lieb (Copilot) reports that he timed the interval elapsing from the time he saw the first bomb flashes from the Colonel's ship, and the time the first Jap ack and lights came on, and that this interval was about 10 minutes in duration. He says he carefully timed it, altho others think the interval was much shorter.
 2. Incendiaries from the ship ahead were seen to drop in the water just off shore.
 3. The Jap flak and lights were not coordinated, the lights first searching seaward. They were individually operated and not coned.
 4. The lights were easily avoided by a banking turn, which this pilot employed on one occasion when two searchlights got on his nose.
 5. The green & red signal lights were effective, but the blue and amber were not good. Amber too glary. Blue did not look blue and had to be deciphered.
 6. Jap ack of 7.7 variety uses lots of tracers. Most of their ack seemed to top at 4000 feet. Thinks the 7.7 came closest of all to his ship.
 7. The briefing was too sketchy. More photos, if available would have been very helpful, and more time spent describing targets.
 8. Need more drill flying this formation.
 9. Had easily 300 gallons ~~of~~ of gas on return to Midway.

#6, 2nd flight, left wing ship #910-- Target #8-- Lt. Andrews, Pilot; Lt. Sellars, Navigator; Lt. Dykes, Bombardier.

After takeoff from Midway island, climbed to 8000 feet to clear the overcast. Picked up right wing ship flown by Lt. McGreevy, and in hour or so joined formation. Planes from 424 Sqdn kept falling back, and finally fell in behind, out of place. Even at 8000 feet there were scattered clouds, topping at 10000 feet, and dropping down in layers at 1500 foot intervals.

This plane began its attack on course and in squadron formation as indicated on the target map. As the plane began its dive it was indicating 200 mph, and reached a speed of 260 to 280 mph IAS on the way down from 8000 feet to 3800 feet when it levelled off and the bombs were released.

All of the bombs hit in the target area, having been dropped in train at 200 foot intervals, and the plane kept on course during the bomb run altho search light caught it momentarily during run, and altho there were ack bursts below and to the left of the plane near the end of the run.

On the way in, large fires were observed in the vicinity of Target #1. Fires were also observed in Target #6 area. At the left of target #8 and while the plane was practically over the target, fires were observed to the left which looked like a hangar on fire.

Some 6 searchlights in all were seen, being on various points.

An ack gun was seen to have been knocked out on Kuku Point by a bomb from another plane, by Lt. Dykes and S/Sgt. Elrod.

Jap ack of small calibre was generally dispersed and in action along the east shore of Wake Island. Near the parade grounds in Target #5 area, fire from at least a 3 inch gun was observed, firing big, red bursts. The ack from the vicinity of Targets #7 & 8 looked to be about 20 mm.

Fires were also observed in Target #5 area, and this verifies observations of other crews going in ahead of this plane.

Clouds obscured any close observation of installations near Heel Point.

After passing over the target this plane made the indicated turn, and returned to ~~Midway Island~~ Midway Island alone.

- Comments
1. On the return trip this plane indicated 175 mph with a setting of 29 to 31 inches making 2050 RPM. Pilot thinks this speed much better cruising speed for this type plane, and thinks 160 mph IAS too slow after assembly for this type formation.
 2. Crew observed the incendiaries and 1 bomb from another plane fall into the water. Plane was to the right of them on approach to island.
 3. Plane showed no extra strain in making this type dive.
 4. The Jap lights seemed to be lacking in coordination, but appeared to be easily maneouverable. However, a change in course was sufficient to evade them.

Malfunction This plane was troubled on entire trip by #2 oil pressure indicator, and the left antennae broke off.

CONCLUSION & NEGATIVE REPORTS

1. No Jap aircraft were seen by any members of any of these 6 crews, either in the air or on the ground, except for the biplane reported.
2. No Jap naval or cargo ships or vessels were seen by anyone, and none of the ack seem to come from naval vessels offshore.
3. None of the members of these 6 combat crews fired any of their guns except as reported concerning Lt. Lundby's right waist gunner.
4. None of the 6 planes were hit by Jap ack unless some of the paint grazes on Lt. Lundby's plane could be so considered as glancing shots from small calibre guns.
5. All the men enjoyed the "show", thought it generally well planned and were raring to go again the next night.