

ENTERPRISE AIR GROUP

CEAG/A16/Pb/

(579)

At Sea,
December 15, 1941.

DECLASSIFIED

From: The Commander ENTERPRISE Air Group.
To: The Commanding Officer, U.S.S. ENTERPRISE.
Subject: Report of Action with Japanese Air Force
at Oahu, T.H., December 7, 1941.
Reference: (a) Articles 712 and 874, U.S.N. Regulations.

1. At 0615 December 7, 1941 I took off from ENTERPRISE, whose position at that time was approximately 215 miles due west of Oahu, with a mission of searching a sector 058°-095° true for a distance of 150 miles, and then to proceed to Ford Island. Ensign P.L. Teeff, USN in airplane 6-S-2 accompanied me. My passenger was Lieut-Comdr. Bromfield Nichol, USN, Tactical Officer attached to the staff of Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, who had been ordered to report to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet immediately after my arrival at Ford Island.

At about 0720 I sighted a tanker to starboard, proceeding on an easterly course, which upon investigation proved to be the "PAT DOHENY" of Los Angeles, belonging to the Richfield Oil Co. Continuing on my track of 090° I sighted and passed the U.S.S. THRESHER accompanied by the U.S.S. LITCHFIELD at about 0740. At about 0810 I passed Keana Point abeam to port distance 20 miles. At 0820 passed Barber's Point to seaward and at this time I noticed approximately a squadron of planes circling Ewa Field in column. Believing them to be U.S. Army pursuit planes I gave them a wide berth, decreasing my altitude to about 800 feet and continued on toward Ford Island Field. At a point mid-way between Ewa Field and Ford Island I noticed considerable "AA" fire ahead. At almost the same instant I was attacked by Japanese planes from the rear without warning. Recognizing the insignia of one plane that had completed a dive on me - I immediately dove toward the ground zig-zagging. My passenger did not have sufficient time to man the free gun. My fixed guns were loaded and charged but I had no opportunity to use them. The planes that attacked me appeared to be low-wing monoplane fighters with retractable landing gear. My wing man was attacked at the same time but was not hit and stayed with me, circling low over a cane field to the North of Pearl City. It was immediately evident that I was under AA fire regardless of which direction I went. I did not have

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sufficient fuel to return to the ship had I been able to get away from the island. Hoping that I would be recognized as friendly I decided to make a low approach to Ford Island Field and land - I had no alternative it seemed. From this point on until I had landed I was subjected to heavy AA fire from ships and shore batteries in spite of making recognition maneuvers and the fact that my wheels and flaps were down for landing. My wing man turned away just prior to landing. I could not communicate with the Ford Island Field control tower. I estimate my time of landing to have been about 0835.. Inspection of the plane revealed several bullet holes through the wings but no serious damage.

2. Lt.Comdr. Nichol and I then proceeded and reported to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet. I informed him of the position of the ENTERPRISE and our mission.

3. Shortly after this I witnessed a dive bombing attack on the Navy Yard which appeared to be in the vicinity of Ten-Ten dock and the dry-dock. The attacking planes came in down-sun making shallow dives (about 45° - 50°). The average release height being about 1000', although in some cases releases were made as low as 300 - 400 feet, indicating that their bombs were armed the instant they left the rack. Approximately 18 planes participated in this attack, following each other down from the same direction with a considerable longer interval between drops than is our custom. However the attack was well delivered and none of the planes were seen shot down during their dive. After releasing, their evasive tactics were sound, keeping low and constantly changing course. They were subjected to heavy "AA" fire during the attack. These planes were of a yellowish - silver color, low wing monoplanes, with fixed landing gear and appeared to be similar to the Mitsubishi "Karigane" Mk.II, as illustrated in "Jane's all the Worlds Aircraft". The bombs appeared to be 500 pounders. My only criticism of this particular attack was that they all came in from the same direction instead of making a divided attack, however the ineffectiveness of our AA fire, lack of air opposition and the manner in which they pressed their attacks home in this particular instance combined to make the attack practically perfect. No further attacks were made.

4. I was then ordered to report to Commander Patrol Two on Ford Island. Upon ascertaining the number of planes from the ENTERPRISE Group that had landed safely at

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this time (13 planes of VS-6 and VB-6) I was ordered to send 9 planes out to search a section 330° - 030° distance 175 miles, and the remaining planes to investigate reports of hostile surface ships and sam-pans south of Barber's Point and if found, to attack with bombs and gunfire. I then obtained permission to station myself in the Ford Island Field Control Tower in order to be in direct communication with the planes and the ENTERPRISE as a Coast Guard officer was the only officer detailed to duty there. Due to the low-power of the transmitter in the tower I could at no time communicate with either. The lack of proper communication facilities, telephone and radio, were a contributory cause to the loss of 4 airplanes of VF-6, which were shot down by our own AA fire, during the night. I attempted to transmit landing instructions to them via the tower, but they were unable to hear. It was necessary for them to land due to the lack of fuel. Two of the six landed safely. I then attempted to communicate with the ENTERPRISE via the tower voice set in order to recommend that no more planes be sent in to Ford Island, without success. I then learned that the remainder of the group that had been launched had returned to the ship.

5. Lack of information that hostilities had started with Japan, proper communications, the inability of our ground and ship board forces to recognize friendly planes, or know the proper recognition signals were the contributory causes for the loss of personnel and airplanes of the ENTERPRISE Air Group.

6. No planes were equipped with self sealing tanks or armor - all guns were fully armed.

7. The suddenness and magnitude of the enemy attack caused such a stunning effect upon ground and ship personnel that all aircraft were fired upon regardless of their being friendly. I was under fire until my wheels touched the ground on Ford Island - some of the guns being not more than 50 yards distant from me. The importance of some means of positive identification of own airplanes, other than visual signals cannot be over emphasized. The loss of the four fighters of VF-6 that night is a good example of what happens unless proper communications and means of controlling and identifying aircraft in the air is available.

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8. I then received orders to rejoin the ENTERPRISE at sunrise the next morning with our remaining planes. Just prior to the time of our scheduled take-off, a utility plane (JRC) took off, and was immediately fired on by ships and other shore batteries. I had previously arranged that every means available be taken to notify all hands of our scheduled departure and route to be taken to the ENTERPRISE. It was necessary to delay take-off for nearly one hour because of continuous heavy AA fire. At 0625 the remaining ENTERPRISE planes took off, armed with 1000 pound bombs and returned to the ship without further incident.

9. All personnel of this group conducted themselves in accordance with the highest traditions of the service and under the circumstances did all that they could possibly do.

10. Lieut. C.E. Dickenson, USN, Scouting Squadron Six, after having been attacked by superior numbers of Japanese planes and under constant AA fire from the ground was forced to bail out, his plane having caught fire. In the midst of the third attack on Pearl Harbor, he made his way to Ford Island Field and immediately upon arrival there manned another plane and participated in the 175 mile search flight. At this time his ordeal of having been shot down was not known to his superiors and no mention of the same was made by him to anyone at the time, he thus displaying a superb courage, stamina, devotion to duty, unexcelled logic and coolness in action. It is requested that this officer be given an official commendation for his performance of duty.

H. L. Young
H. L. YOUNG.

[LCDR, USN]