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LINDBERGH IN BATTLE

BY COLONEL CHARLES MAC DONALD

As a technical observer, the Lone Eagle flew P-38s in a large number of missions, strafing enemy shipping and, in at least one instance, shooting down a Jap interceptor. Here for the first time are many details of his combat adventures, related by a flying companion

I'LL always remember Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, because of a fellow I met there.

It was an afternoon in the latter part of June, 1944. The short-lived relief derived from a bath in the near-by jungle stream was beginning to wear off as I sat in our shack playing checkers with "Smitty," otherwise Lt. Col. Meryl M. Smith, deputy commander of the 475th Fighter Group.

A tall, slim fellow dressed in Army khaki, hatless and with no insignia of rank, knocked on the screening. I looked up from the game and said, "Come in."

As he entered he spoke his name but I didn't catch it, and as we were taking seats again he said he was interested in learning something of our combat operations with twin-engine P-38s. He'd been sent to us, he said, by Brig. Gen. Donald R. Hutchinson, the task force commander.

Smitty and I carefully guarded our conversation, for we were not keen to discuss our operations with the usual type of visitor fresh from the States, who asked more or less intelligent questions and then disappeared. We casually resumed our game, with our tall visitor looking on.

I could see that Smitty was going to take advantage of my being the senior officer present by leaving it to me to ask the questions necessary to qualify the stranger.

"What did you say your name was, and what phases of operations are you particularly interested in?"

"Lindbergh," he replied, "and I'm very much interested in comparing range, fire power and your airplane's general characteristics with those of single-engine fighters."

Oh, my gosh, I thought. He isn't wearing any kind of wings, and he wants to know about things which can only be adequately shown by flying the plane.

In between two moves, which lost me four men and practically the game, I asked, "Are you a pilot?"

The "Yes" was a surprise. I looked up sharply at the lean, tanned face and the light brown hair balding over the forehead. The blue eyes evoked a memory. "Not Charles Lindbergh?"

"That's my name," he replied simply.

We abandoned the checkerboard and began talking airplanes. Here was the man the very mention of whose name, whether in civilian or military circles, could start a heated

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other pilots for the evening bull session added, "It helps to take along a few chocolate bars. This target is six hundred miles away, and it's a mighty long trip going and coming."

In a short while Lindbergh left to return to General Hutchinson's shack up on the hill. After he had gone, Smitty cried, "My God! He shouldn't go on a combat mission. When did he fly the Atlantic? Must have been in 1927 and he was about twenty-five then. That would make him at least forty-two years old, and that's a lot too old for this kind of stuff."

"Well," I replied, "he doesn't look that old. Tom, will you fly on his wing so in case anything turns up you can take care of him?"

McGuire said, "Sure thing. I'd like to see how the old boy does."

Later that evening Smitty and I bounced our jeep up the steep hill to the unpretentious shack in which General Hutchinson lived. We were overdue for a visit with "Fighter Hutch" anyway, and tonight we particularly wanted to discuss with Lindbergh more details of the mission.

As we sat around talking, mostly about the war, which lay heavy on the minds of all of us, Lindbergh explained that he was acting as a technical observer for the United Aircraft Corporation. His company produced and manufactured the F4U, the Vought-Corsair Navy single-engine fighter which had been used so effectively by the Marines in the Solomons. Because of the remarkable combat record the P-38s were making, his company wished him to explore the potentialities of twin-engine fighters in the Pacific war. Before we left, Smitty suggested that it would be more convenient for everyone if Lindbergh were to spend the night in our camp, to which he readily agreed.

What started as an overnight visit became a stay of nearly two months. During this time the man who came to observe and learn gave us from his store of experience knowledge which had a marked effect on the course of the war in the Pacific. . . .

Green-carpeted hills, plains of kunai grass and an occasional native village slid underneath as we droned through the coastal valley, across the Mambaramo River and out into Geelvink Bay. Long, thin Japen Island moved slowly past on our right. On we roared, four P-38s like avenging angels winging across the mountainous and rugged Vogelkop Peninsula.

During the long flight toward the target I watched Lindbergh closely. He flew a perfect formation, even though, as he had said the night before, he had only once flown a P-38 before his arrival at the rear area pilot training school at Nadzab, New Guinea, and I knew that he had less than eight hours of flying time in this fighter. He had flown to Hollandia from Nadzab in Captain (later Major) Richard Bong's plane.

We struck the coast just east of Sorong. In the harbor we could see three Japanese ships, one quite large, and immediately we went into weaving tactics to evade the anti-aircraft fire which had begun with our appearance. In the hope that we might catch some planes in the air, we began a diving glide toward Jefman Island, a little spot of land on which the Nips had built an airdrome. We banked across over the Samate airstrip on Salawat Island, but had no luck at either place. We weaved through the black puffs of ack-ack, most of which seemed uncomfortably close. I saw Lindbergh's plane steadily holding its position in the formation.

We flew east along the mountainous coast at a few hundred feet altitude until we saw a barge, camouflaged with leaves and branches.

The northern coast of the Vogelkop was ideally suited to the tactics the Japanese had adopted in order to supply their front-line forces. Our air superiority had made it impossible for them to move anything in the daytime by air or water, but barges. under cover of darkness, were bringing in a steady trickle of supplies and reinforcements. The barges were for the most part flatbottomed and gasoline-powered. Despite their length, they did not draw much water even when loaded, thus allowing them to anchor extremely close to the shore, and in this area the steep jungle-covered shore line offered perfect protection.

During the daylight hours they would hole up in deep inlets, often actually under the overhanging branches of giant jungle trees. They went to great lengths to cut and pile branches and foliage over their craft so that it took a sharp eye to spot them.

We strafed the first barge, leaving it shattered and smoking, and proceeded on the prowl. A little farther on we found two more targets, a barge and a lugger. We strafed them both many times. After one pass I looked back and saw Lindbergh coming in on a large barge, his plane skimming the water. I could see the flames from his guns as he opened fire, and as he passed over it a large column of fire exploded from his target. His bullets had hit the barge's fuel tank. We searched for more targets and found them, and in each case, left them useless.

That evening, as we sat around in the shack, Lindbergh was no longer a visitor fresh from the States, here only to

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Lindbergh and Major Thomas B. McGuire, Jr., look a the weather before starting on a mission from Hollandia

ask questions. He was a fighter pilot and he talked like one. He told us that before he came to New Guinea he had flown fifteen times with Marine squadrons flying off Green Island and Emirau Island. He wasn't the novice we had thought him to be.

"I'd certainly like to see some Jap planes in the air," Lindbergh said wistfully, "but you fellows seem to have knocked the Jap air force out of the sky."

McGuire laughed. "Stick with us and you'll wear diamonds. We have slow periods, but we keep moving up into them, and we should start striking Ceram and Halmahera pretty soon. We're sure to run into the Zeros there."

A Series of Dangerous Missions

In the days that followed, Lindbergh was indefatigable. He flew more missions than was normally expected of a regular combat pilot. He dive-bombed enemy positions, sank barges and patrolled our landing forces on Numfoor Island. He was shot at by almost every antiaircraft gun the Nips had in western New Guinea. Before returning to the United States to put to work on the production lines of United Aircraft Corporation his knowledge of airplane requirements in combat, he was to fly a total of fifty missions with Marine Corps and Army pilots.

It was normal procedure for our ground crews, God bless them, to check the gasoline left in each plane after a mission. I flew a few missions with Lindbergh before I realized that he always had more gas left than anyone else. He explained, in answer to our questions of how he did it, that he always used as low r.p.m. (revolutions per minute) as he could and still stay in position in the flight, by using more "boost," or manifold pressure. This may be expressed in terms of power the pilot is getting from his engine by reason of the quantity of gasoline and oxygen he is feeding into the cylinders. Lindbergh was getting nearly maximum power, and using it to drive the propellers which he had pitched to bite the air deeply, at the relatively low speed of 1,600 revolutions per minute. Although his power setting was high and his engine cylinders were taking big gulps of fuel and air, they were gulping less frequently than were cylinders in the other P-38 engines which were turning over at a faster rate. The result was a saving in fuel at a cruising speed. For the higher speeds of combat it was necessary to make the propeller settings shallow and drive them at about 3,000 r.p.m.

We had all known before that this was the way to save gas, but what startled us was the extremely low r.p.m. Lindbergh was using against what was to us a very high power from his engines.

"When I want to save the most gasoline possible," he said, "I slow the propeller r.p.m. down to 1,600."

I thought to myself as he said it: It's too bad. He's really a nice fellow but I expect the way he's flying he's going to damage his engines and end up in the jungle.

None of us was convinced. When it came time for the mechanics to give Lindbergh's plane an inspection I was on hand. I expected them to find fouled-up spark plugs and scored valves; instead they found his engines in as good if not better shape than most of the others. This convinced me, and we went to work on the rest of the pilots.

When he left Hollandia to go to Australia for a visit with General MacArthur in the early part of July, the hundred-odd pilots of "Satan's Angels" fighter group were beginning to realize that their "long-legged" P-38s hadn't really been stepping out as far as they could.

Instead of the six and a half to seven hours which we figured we could stay in the air, it was now possible to stay up for nine hours. The "longer legs" meant safety for pilots who were lost and in bad weather; it meant they could go farther, have a better chance to find a spot clear enough to land safely. Translated into distances, the extra hours meant around six hundred miles more range, and from the military standpoint it meant the bombers could hit targets three hundred miles farther out and still have their "little friends" along. This was the greatest *(Continued on page 75.* advantage. Lindbergh had, in effect, redesigned an airplane.

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It didn't take Brig. Gen. Paul B. (Squeeze) Wurtsmith, commander of the 5th Fighter Command, long to find out what was going on and to realize the implications. He kept close touch with his fighter groups, even to knowing minor details, and this certainly wasn't a minor one. In a short time Lindbergh had sowed the seeds which months later grew into the long-range strikes against Balikpapan and Mindanao and still later the strikes against China and Indo-China from the Philippine Islands.

About the middle of July, our ground forces had cleared out the burrowing Nips from the caves and captured the airstrip on Biak Island. We had hardly set up a temporary camp at the end of Mokmer airstrip when Lindbergh returned.

The latter part of July we were all set for the first strike on the Halmahera Islands. Galela strip was to be the target for the B-25 strafers. Our squadron of fighters was detailed for close cover for the bombers. In our flight, Lt. Joe Miller was flying on my wing. Lindbergh was leading the element, and flying with him was Lt. Bill Richmond. Behind us three more flights of four made up the squadron. Above us were two squadrons comprising the medium cover, and above them were two more as top cover. We were taking plenty of power, for when striking a target for the first time we could never be sure what sort of opposition we would run into. Intelligence reports gave the Japanese strength at Halmahera as between seventy-five and a hundred single-engine fighters.

The Mountain Was a Volcano

Soon, out of the blue and hazy horizon, the indistinct mass of Halmahera rose. The B-25s swung to the right over the low hill on the coast and then along the slope of the high inland mountain. We weren't previously aware that this mountain was an active volcano, and unfortunately for us it was erupting. As we flew over the green slopes, the acrid fumes filled the cockpits of our planes. The wind was blowing the smoke over the target area, cutting our visibility to a minimum. We flew over Galela airdrome with the leading wave of the bombers, and then circled as the succeeding waves scooted by underneath.

The target boiled, as the bombers unleashed the tremendous fire power of their forward guns and the strings of white parachutes, each holding a fragmentation bomb, hit the earth.

As the third squadron went by, we covered it out to sea and got into very thick smoke. By the time we turned our squadron back toward the airdrome the unlucky Jap airplanes which attempted interception had already been shot down, and because of the poor visibility Lindbergh still hadn't seen a Jap airplane in the air.

After supper that evening, Lindbergh strapped on his .45 and began putting on his jungle boots. His insatiable curiosity kept him moving continuously on explorations of the area. Half the time when we were not flying he was out with the infantry or walking alone in the jungle.

A Man of Insatiable Curiosity

Most of us were worn down to the point where when not flying or working on official business we would hit the sack. But Lindbergh's energy never seemed to flag. You never saw a guy with so much energy and so much curiosity. This evening he persuaded Smitty and me to go with him to one of the caves in the steep coral cliff overlooking the American airfield.

We climbed up the narrow path, passing on the way spoiled and rotting Jap supplies, until we reached the mouth of the particular cave Lindbergh was interested in. The dark, yawning opening was built up with logs which supported a Jap field piece. Tied to an upright pole at the very entrance, was the headless body of a Jap soldier. The stench was terrific. We found out later that this fellow had been killed by the other Japs when he attempted to surrender to the surrounding Americans.

We passed the cave and climbed over the hill to a deep coral pit, down the side of which hung a makeshift rope ladder. In order to prove his theory that the cave we had just passed led into the pit, Lindbergh and Smitty retraced their steps to come through the cave.

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I climbed down the side on the Jap ladder, using the narrow, slippery footholds which the Japs had hacked out of the hard limestone. Every few feet along the bottom were the remains of the warriors of Nippon. Most of them had been killed by flame-throwers, consequently there was little flesh left on the whitening bones.

Lindbergh was the only one with forethought enough to have brought a flashlight, so we followed him in a line as we entered

one of the caves which ran farther back into the hill. The floor was strewn with the belongings of the Jap soldiers—mess kits, papers, rice dishes, wooden shoes (which made very good shower slippers if they were not too small), and the bones of the people who had once used them. Stacked against the walls were boxes of ammunition, most of it made to fit the very small caliber army rifle. However, there were boxes of larger shells which did not seem the right size for any of the firing pieces which they had been able to bring to this last-ditch stronghold. One could see tins strategically placed to catch the water dripping from the damp, slimy roof.

It was the same sorry picture throughout the intricacies of the cave, and I was relieved when we turned back toward the pit. As we went through the entrance cave, Lindbergh and Smitty stopped to examine a small offshoot which seemed full of equipment and food. I continued through the opening and down to the jeep.

It was dark when they came down the narrow path. They climbed into the jeep and we started toward camp. We had gone about a hundred yards over the uneven ground when a hoarse cry, "Halt!" brought us to a stop. Seeing nothing, I was about to start up again when a soldier with his rifle at ready stepped from behind a leafy bush. "You're lucky I didn't shoot." he said. "Don't you know there are Japs up there?"

I could afford to smile, now. "They're all dead, believe me."

The Targets Were on Amboina

The next day we were scheduled to again cover B-25s. This time they were to bomb and strafe targets of opportunity on Amboina, a little island off the southwest coast of Ceram in the Dutch East Indies, and a busy and valuable possession of the Japanese.

The darkness of the morning of July 28, 1944, was filled with the background roar of many powerful engines, and as the horizon lightened with the coming day, this was interspersed with the surging crescendo of the bombers taking off at spaced intervals. In the gray light of morning we sat in the alert tent of the 433d Fighter Squadron. We were waiting for the last bomber squadron to take off.

A terse "Okay, let's go" set things in motion. Jeeps loaded with pilots rushed down the taxi ways stopping at each plane. Tall, short, skinny and heavy American boys got out at each stop, hurriedly climbed into their fighters and in the complicated interiors began the mechanical ritual which gives them life and tremendous strength. Lindbergh was again leading the element in Red flight, this time with Lieutenant Joe Miller flying wing position.

The dust had hardly cleared from the last bomber's take-off as I sped down the runway

and into the air. Then, making a wide circle to allow the rest of the fighters to assemble, I could look down at the white coral strip where the Lightnings, two by two, were hurling themselves into the air, and those backed up in the taxi ways were steadily diminishing in number.

Lindbergh had by this time demonstrated to all of us that he was an aeronautical expert. We conceded that he had a tremendous fund of knowledge concerning any aspect of an airplane. Since his arrival with this fighter group, and by following his example on power settings, we were landing from our normal missions with much more gasoline left in our tanks than we ever had before.

However, no one rested on any previous laurels with this crowd of young combat pilots, and they would go to any lengths to try to catch him up. Consequently when Lindbergh was a little slow to retract his wheels after this particular take-off I was far from surprised to hear over the radio: "Lindbergh from Doakes. Get your wheels up! You're not flying the Spirit of St. Louis."

When the last fighter was airborne we made one more circle of the field and then started on course. Low clouds gave us only brief glimpses of the ocean beneath as we flew on toward our rendezvous with the bombers; across the narrow neck of the peninsula at Amboear and out into McCluer Gulf. We passed the fetid swamp holes of Babo, Sagan and Kokas. The weather kept getting worse as we proceeded. Clouds and rain were interfering with the low-flying bombers making a rendezvous.

In a few minutes the bombers radioed that they would have to turn back because of bad weather. The fighters went on over the top of the weather at fifteen thousand feet, across the Ceram Sea, and as we approached Ceram the weather patched up until through the breaks in the clouds below we could see the oil fields at Boela.

We flew down the south coast of Ceram. At Amahai, "Captive" squadron split up into flights of four to search the area. Our flight weaved through the black puffs of ack-ack over Amahai and proceeded toward Amboina. We circled Amboina and turned north to the Japanese airfield at Kairato. Suddenly over the radio we heard that one of the flights had found some Nips in the air. Apparently there were only a few Japs airborne, and the flight which had found them was reluctant to give us their position. They didn't need any help, and they didn't want any other planes horning in on their private show.

We searched feverishly over and under the broken and overcast clouds, trying to find the fight. In a few minutes the tone of the conversation between the members of the lucky flight which had found the Jap planes began to change.

We could hear one pilot say, "Damn! I'm out of ammunition."

A few minutes later we heard another pilot, "This louse is making monkeys out of us. I'm out of ammunition too."

The remarks increased in rage and disappointment as we banked around a mountainous white cloud and saw the air above Amahai strip black with antiaircraft bursts of heavy caliber. Two P-38s were attacking a Sonia type Jap plane.

We jettisoned our drop tanks, switched on our guns, and nosed down. The Sonia pilot was using his amazing maneuverability to great advantage, successfully eluding the attacks of the two P-38s. He didn't see us as we dove down. I was almost in range when he began a violent turn to the left. I pulled through, firing. Major Danny Miller, behind me, couldn't get a good shot. By this time the Jap had completed his turn and was flying head on at Lindbergh, who was in position behind us.

This was Lindbergh's first sight of a Jap plane in the air, and there he was, closing head on, with their combined speeds close to six hundred miles per hour! As I continued my own steep bank, I could see the Jap in a slight climb and Lindbergh in a slight dive, the distance between them lessening rapidly; their guns spitting bullets so fast the muzzles resembled so many acetylene torches.

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Jap Suicide Urge a Problem

Of all the attacks it is possible to make on a Japanese plane, the one liked least is the head-on pass, for here you and the enemy approach with tremendous speed, each with guns blazing. There is always a good chance for collision, even though both try to avoid it, and against a Japanese one could never be sure to what lengths his suicidal tendencies would push him.

For moments which seemed like years, the antagonists came at each other. Lindbergh's cannon and machine-gun bullets jolted into the Jap. A collision seemed unavoidable. Something had to be done, and quickly. His slight advantage in height prompted him to try to go over the Jap. He pulled back the stick with all his strength. The badly hit enemy tried for a crash. As Lindbergh's plane started up, the Jap, too, pulled up violently. He was too late. Lindbergh's plane caught the shock of air as the two missed by a narrow margin. The Sonia, its mottled green camouflage contrasting with the bright red of the Rising Sun insignia, rolled over like a broken toy and began a long dive that ended in the sea.

The concluding article about Lindbergh will appear next week. It will describe what happened after the Jap plane fell into the sea, and his narrow escape in another encounter with Jap interceptors.

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LINDBERGH IN BATTLE

BY COLONEL CHARLES MAC DONALD

In the concluding installment of Lindbergh's adventures during the war the Lone Eagle takes part in a mission to the Palaus and narrowly escapes getting shot down

IT WAS not long after we landed that the news spread rapidly through the camp. "Lindbergh got a Jap." The tropical sun was making a hurried exit below the horizon as Lindbergh, Smith and I walked toward Captain Eliott Summer's tent. We could hear Captain Robert (Pappy) Cline's quartet, with ukulele accompaniment, lustily giving out with a favorite song:

Take me off the alert,
I don't want to get hurt;
Oh, my, I'm too young to die,
I want to go home.

We began on the twelfth verse of this endless ditty. Lindbergh was one of the boys. We sat on cots, the coffeepot simmered in the middle of the tent and the "bull" went the rounds.

It was always a surprise to me that despite his age, Lindbergh's excellent physical condition made him seem a logical companion to any group of young pilots. It was a compliment to him that none of them paid him more deference than they did one another.

Remembering the excitement of their own

first victories, they were interested to know how Lindbergh felt about his. During the congratulations and the talk, the inner elation from his victory was apparent in his quick smile. However, his face had a more serious expression than usual, and it was noticeable that the nervous tension from the fight had not yet worn off.

"How'd you get him?" he was asked.

"We were shooting at each other and I hit him first," Lindbergh replied matter-of-factly.

"From my position behind you, I could see his guns firing," Joe Miller said. "Boy, that was close!"

"How close did that Jap come to you?" asked Captain Johnny Loisel.

"Too close." Lindbergh's face tightened. "Must have been less than ten feet. I felt a hard bump when he passed my tail."

Talking about it relaxed him. Later he might have joined in the singing—had he known the words.

By the time we started back to our shack the moon was up. "We can expect another air raid tonight," I said. "That's a Jap bomber's moon. And, incidentally, I think we're kind of silly to keep that box of TNT in our tent."

"If a bomb hits close enough to set off our TNT we wouldn't have to worry anyway," someone said.

Fresh Fish for the Camp

I didn't much care to have a box of TNT for a roommate, but consoled myself with the thought that judiciously used, it would account for many pounds of fresh fish. Our chief afternoon sport was throwing TNT from a rubber life raft into schools of fish and then, with the aid of a glass faceplate, diving and recovering the casualties.

Lindbergh had got us interested in this sport many weeks before. It was while we were still in our temporary camp off the end of Mokmer airstrip. I was sitting on a camp stool in the tent; the sun radiating off the white coral made the air dance. I thought the tent was hot enough to broil a steak, but, lacking the steak, couldn't prove it. I was lost in a dream of an ice-cold Coke. It was a pleasure to consider whether, if I had one in my hand, I would gulp it down without stopping to breathe, or just sip it to make it last as long as possible. Interrupting this pleasant reverie, Lindbergh walked in with a heavy cardboard box labeled "TNT." Then he went out to the jeep and came back with a wooden box labeled "Hand Grenades."

I looked at him with a jaundiced eye.

"Does that mean I can't smoke in here?"

"Oh, no," he replied, "you can't set of TNT with fire. It needs a percussion wave."

"Well, what's it for?"

"I thought you'd like to go fishing." He started wrapping a half-pound block of TNT to a hand grenade with adhesive tape, explaining, "I couldn't get any blasting caps but I think the hand grenades will set the TNT off. It should make a good enough explosion to stun the fish."

The fish got off easy that first afternoon. The hand grenades wouldn't set the TNT off. But the next day we got a good supply of blasting caps and fuses, and from then on it was too bad for the fish.

We were catching it regularly these nights red alerts were frequent. A little after midnight three sharp explosions from our AA guns warned us that enemy planes were approaching. It was the usual nightly show searchlights frantically weaving back and forth in an attempt to pick up the enemy, AA bursts all over the sky making a terrific din, shrapnel from our own shells falling with the peculiar whistling noise similar to that of a bomb. The high-pitched drone of the Jap planes was occasionally heard through the gunfire, and the "whump, whump, whump" of the bombs.

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By this time, Lindbergh had adopted the "It can't happen to me" philosophy which most of the more experienced persons had. We would lie in bed until the main concentration of ack-ack began bursting directly overhead, before jumping up to run outside, empty the soapy water out of a tin hat (we used them for washbasins), and then look for the nearest foxhole. If the raid occurred early in the evening, we would stand outside and watch the show.

Our missions to Halmahera through the 31st of July met with no aerial interception; so we used our ammunition strafing barges and small ships through the islands off western New Guinea. The comparative dullness of these missions was the main reason why we set out the next day on the mission which came nearest to ending Lindbergh's career.

A Jungle Airstrip on Biak

The western end of New Guinea draws itself out to resemble the curved neck and head of a prehistoric pelican. In the northern reaches of the great bay formed by the curving neck lie the Schouten Islands, of which Biak is the largest. Here the American forces had pushed back the Japs and cleared out the jungle enough so that now in the darkness the lights on the new airstrip and in the camps could be seen.

In one of the lighted shacks four of us were whiling away the early part of the night. Lindbergh and I were playing checkers. Smitty was throwing cards into a hat, and Major Sam Fernandez was boiling water for coffee.

I could never concentrate on checkers the night before a raid. Lindbergh won the first game and we started another; he had a good advantage in a short time. Then the field phone gave that protesting grunt peculiar to that damned but dependable instrument. I picked it up.

"MacDonald, here."

"This is Danny, Colonel. About the mission for tomorrow, the B-25s are to bomb and strafe shipping and shore installations on Amboina. If the weather's bad, the target will be Boela oil fields on Ceram. Our group will fly fighter cover for them. Our flight will lead the 433d Squadron, and Lindbergh, Smitty and I will fly with you. The B-25s start taking off at dawn, and we'll rendezvous with them at 0730 at Pisang Island. If I get any more on the mission I'll call you later."

"Okay, Danny, drop over. Fernandez is fixing 'smoke.' "

As I turned from the phone my eye fell on the map which hung on the wall of the shack. Ever since we had moved into Biak, a little group of islands about six hundred miles to the north of us had seemed to hang there like a ripe and tempting plum. Again I contemplated with a thrill the possibilities of a raid or fighter sweep against it. The name of the group was Palau.

I turned back to Lindbergh. "You know, Colonel, with what you've taught us about fuel economy, we could go to Palau and stay at least an hour."

Lindbergh was as eager as a second lieutenant. "I'd certainly like to go if you can arrange it."

Smitty was getting his nightly exercise chinning himself on a rafter. He grinned. "You might as well forget Palau. We've got a mission for tomorrow, remember? Besides, these bombers hitting Amboina should stir up all the Nip interceptors in this part of the Dutch East Indies."

We agreed. "The trouble is, they don't have many left. Well, the B-25 boys always put on a good show."

We forgot about Palau. By this time Sam had the water boiling on one of those one-burner gasoline stoves which were a godsend to our troops in the Pacific. We dropped powdered coffee into our cups, poured the hot water in, and had a very good brew. The practice of having coffee at odd hours of

the day or night we called "smoke," a term borrowed from our hard-fighting allies, the Australians.

Danny Miller, the group operations officer, came in, slumped in a chair, and announced in further detail the general plan and arrangements for the morrow.

I stumbled to the field phone the next morning, August 1, 1944. It was the night-shift operator. "Colonel, it's 0500."

"Thanks. Is there a red alert on?"

"No, sir. I'll turn the lights on."

Later, as we bumped along the coral road in our jeep, the faint awakening of the day began to take the sharp edges off the headlight beams. In the revetment area, where the parked planes loomed like unfriendly specters on all sides, a dull roar filled the air from the planes the crews had shaken awake for their preflight inspections.

It's a special kind of thrill to be on a combat airdrome before dawn. The roar of engines, men loading bombs in the open bellies of the big bombers, the red glow of exhausts and turbosuperchargers on the P-38s, in the fighter area, charge the air with excitement. As we drove down the taxiway other jeeps were scurrying from the alert tent to the airplanes and back. The squadron pilots were taking out their parachutes and equipment, and trying to read the numbers of their particular airplanes in the dim light.

As we gathered around the map in the alert shack, the intelligence officer gave us the last-minute dope on the mission; then we waited.

To a casual observer watching these young men lying about disinterestedly thumbing through magazines or standing chatting, there would appear no evidence of tension, or even preoccupation with the events to occur within the next few hours. There were some jokes and low laughter, and many appeared just plain sleepy. Lindbergh's long, nervous frame and the quick motions he habitually made with his hands made him appear the most alert of the group, yet his ready smile and undisguised eagerness were obviously reassuring to the younger pilots, some of whom were little more than boys.

The phone gave a loud buzz. The hitherto studiously concealed nervousness was uncovered. There was a great deal of jumping up, strapping on of shoulder holsters and checking of equipment as I took the message from the operations clerk:

"The 'recco' (weather reconnaissance plane) reports bad weather over the target area, and the strike has been postponed for an hour."

There were loud groans all around. Most pilots hate to prepare for a strike and undergo the nervous tension which is part of the pretake-off period only to have it postponed. However, there was nothing that could be done but wait for a later take-off order.

It was easier to relax after the message. Checkerboards came out. Some men actually dozed off. Others went out to recheck in daylight the planes and equipment which had been set up in the dark. A half hour later we were informed that the strike was called off for the day; the weather to the southwest was extremely poor and likely to remain so for some time.

I released all the pilots, and going back to the phone called for a local weather forecast. The weather was to remain good in the local area. To the north, there was little information, but the meteorologist explained in some detail that there were normally three equatorial fronts to pass through to get to Palau. Today there appeared to be only one which had much bad weather in it. I recalled hearing a story a few days before of two "Photo Joes" being lost because of weather while returning from reconnaissance missions to the north.

Lindbergh, Smitty and Danny were waiting. As I rejoined them I knew very well

Lindbergh in Battle

their first question would be: "What are we going to do?"

Anticipating this, I said half jokingly, "Do you want to go to Palau?" They did; and all three were so eager that they easily overcame my protestations that the mission would be dangerous and that we could expect to run into some bad weather. Smitty said, "If the weather's too bad we can always turn around; and it's getting late so if we're going we'll have to take off now and not waste any more time."

Without waiting to argue any more, I said, "Follow me off," and started toward my airplane.

I'm sure the latest Intelligence report ran through the mind of each of us: "One hundred and fifty-four Jap fighter planes defend Palau."

The Crew Chief Was Ready

As I drove up Sergeant Solly, the crew chief, grinned and said, "Where to?" He had everything ready, although he knew that the regular mission had been called off. Throughout the long, hard pull through New Guinea it had been a favorite pastime for some of us to take a four-ship flight and make a surprise attack on an unsuspecting Jap stronghold.

In a few minutes our P-38s were heading north. Through broken clouds below we could see the dark, lush jungle of the interior of Biak Island. I climbed to eight thousand feet, set the course, and opened the formation up. The four sleek fighters knifed their way through the air toward a rendezvous with the unknown. I sat back, relaxed, and lighted a cigarette, using just enough control to keep the P-38 on course. Fifteen minutes of this, and the clouds began to get larger and darker, and off in the distance ahead there was a solid black wall which reached from the ocean to a seemingly infinite height.

I checked the time and turned west. We flew along the face of this forbidding wall of weather, looking for an opening. In order to strike a target so far away, we could not afford to burn gasoline dodging weather, and I had about decided to turn back when I saw a portion of the wall not so wet and thick. We turned into it. It was not as light as I had expected, and I immediately went on instruments. Danny tucked his plane in very close to my own as we plowed through. In two minutes I was on the other side of the main wall of rain. Soon Lindbergh and Smitty popped out. We were in a big valley formed by great, gray cumulus clouds. We flew a devious course through the threatening weather until the clouds began to diminish in size, and an hour later they were just big white puffballs over the blue Pacific.

Charles Lindbergh, 1946

Lindbergh in Battle

We had dodged and turned so much I was beginning to doubt that we would find the target. There was nothing but water between Biak and Palau. No check points; and all a fighter pilot navigates by is his compass and his clock. Nevertheless, I held the course I had determined upon by dead reckoning, and, sure enough, at the estimated time we saw the black shadow of the islands off ahead.

I called on the radio, "Target sighted."

We began climbing, and leveled off at fifteen thousand feet, just east of Peleliu. I could see the large Jap airdromes on the small islands of Peleliu and Ngesebus. To the north the reefs and hundreds of tiny islets gave a continuity and unity to the group, which was further enhanced by the dark masses of Eil Malk, Urukthapel, Koror, and the largest island, Babelthuap. Small boats moved in the lagoons and bays. Ships, anchored, and some moving, presented a paradoxical picture of serenity. We couldn't know that a month and a half later the bloody battle for Peleliu would begin.

Prelude to Battle Action

At such times, when one's physical perceptive faculties are working at full speed, the thinking mind seems to have time on its hands. It reminds you, "This isn't a motion picture. That's the enemy down there." And fleetingly: "What the hell am I doing, here in the middle of this?" Such thoughts run ineffectively, like a tune in the back of your head, until the action starts.

The whole eastern side of the island group was covered by a low overcast. We circled in the clear space for a few minutes, and watching the activity below decided that we were unannounced and would have to ring the doorbell. We began a long, fast glide toward Koror Town, and passed over it at an altitude of eight thousand feet. Three black puffs of ack-ack showed me that they were going to answer the ring. We continued the diving glide across the island, then swung north; about midway up we swung back east, and were now down "on the deck." We passed back over the center of Babelthuap, and there was still no sign of interception.

Beginning to feel a little disappointed, we turned down the eastern coast. As we passed Goikul Point the coast line swings more to the west, and there, looming up ahead, was a small convoy of large coastal luggers, a few miles south of Babelthuap airdrome.

We were flying so low and fast I don't believe they knew we were there until we opened fire on the leading ship. The blazing cannon and machine guns of our four P-38s set the ship on fire, and as we turned to strafe the next ship I saw two Jap planes patrolling the other end of the convoy. Almost the instant I saw them, Smitty called on the radio, "Bandits two o'clock high!"

From the dangling floats I recognized the type. They were two Jap "Rufes." I called back, "Should be easy, but heads up," as I made a fast climbing turn into the northernmost of the two planes. This fellow had seen us, and was climbing for all he was worth for the protection of the low cloud layer. The other one made a diving turn to the south, hoping, no doubt, that by splitting, one or the other of them would be saved.

Smitty went hell-bent-for-leather after the other one, which was considerably south and had dived so that he was flying just above the water. I closed on the first Nip before he could make the clouds, and a burst from my machine guns set his wing blazing. He fell, crashing into the water, and I turned back to cover Smitty and Lindbergh.

A momentary feeling of helplessness swept over me, as I saw that fate, with puckish humor, had placed not three, but four planes, there in a line low on the water. There was the "Rufe," with Smitty about to open fire; behind him, Lindbergh, and behind Lindbergh a Hamp type Zero which had appeared

out of nowhere and which could at any moment make things extremely exciting for Lindbergh.

As I looked, Smitty's fire hit the float plane. It struck the water, took one long skip like a thrown stone, and plunged under the sea.

"Zero on your tail!" I shouted, and was closing on it with full power faster than it was closing on Lindbergh. The Jap pilot saw me, and, with the remarkable performance of that type aircraft, pulled up almost to the vertical, and before I could get in range disappeared in the clouds.

With Danny still in position behind me, I made a circle to assemble the flight. The appearance of the Zero had been blunt notice that interceptors were scrambled, and many of them were probably searching the higher heavens for us intruders. I had just started the turn when a Jap dive bomber came lumbering in from the southwest on a course to pass directly over the ships. I called Smitty and Lindbergh and told them to stay high under the overcast and watch for the Zeros above. As I spoke I turned on to the tail of the dive bomber. He was passing directly over one of the ships when my machine-gun fire hit him, and almost instantly his plane became a blazing torch which hovered for a moment in an attitude of flight, then plunged into the sea.

I checked my gasoline as we assembled again, and decided that we should start for home. We had been over the islands more than thirty minutes, and had been pulling a lot of power during the fighting.

There were no clouds to the south, and to have taken a direct course for home would have meant abandoning the protection of the overcast and would have put us out in the clear at a very low altitude. Realizing that now there were probably many Zeros scrambled, I decided to take an easterly course until we were well away from the islands, and then swing south.

We started east. Our nerves, tight as stretched wire, had no chance to relax. Through a break in the overcast another Zero came diving down. Through my headphones, strained and tense, came Lindbergh's voice: "Zero at six o'clock! Diving on us."

The Nip had picked Smitty for his target. Lindbergh started a protective turn. The Jap switched his attack to Lindbergh, and with his great diving speed he soon closed to within easy range and directly behind Lindbergh. "Break right; break right!" I called as I banked my P-38 to meet his attack.

The plane groaned and buffeted under me in the tight turn. Things seemed to be in slow motion. Lindbergh was too low to half-roll out; his only alternative was to turn toward me, which he was doing, and which undoubtedly saved him, for the Jap must not have been too good a shot. I could see the fire leap from the leading edge of his wings as he shot at Lindbergh from such a short distance it seemed impossible he could miss.

It took an age for me to pull my plane around enough to get the sight on the Jap, but this wasn't good enough. It was a full deflection shot, and I had to get my sight much farther in front of him. It seemed to move so slowly, passing the Jap and on to Lindbergh's plane; then I pressed the firing button.

At this point the Jap lost his nerve, gave up a certain kill, and pulled up. As he zoomed away, Danny Miller caught him with a burst of fire which sent him down in a dive pouring out black smoke.

Our gasoline supply was so critically low, considering the weather we could expect on the way back, that we did not attempt to give chase or confirm his destruction, but swung immediately on a course for Biak. I was so sure Lindbergh had been hit I waited only long enough for him to check his damage before I asked over the radio, "Did you pick up any of that stuff?"

"Can't see any holes." His voice sounded

normal and relieved. "My instruments all read okay."

The Jap Showed Discretion

We silently watched another Jap plane at ten o'clock high. He was on a westerly course which would cause him to pass directly over us. We continued our course and our gentle climb, watching him and thinking he would be a damn' fool to come down on four P-38s. He must have thought the same thing, for he passed overhead toward Peleliu.

The day after Lindbergh's narrow escape, my orders came through for a month's leave in the States. I tried to talk him into returning with me, since now he had accomplished the purpose of his visit. He knew what the twin-engine fighters would do as well as any of us. If he stayed, there was a good chance he would stay for good.

Lindbergh replied, "No, I haven't finished yet. I was asked to visit all the fighter groups in the area to see what I could do about lengthening their combat radius." He stayed on.

It was almost a year and a half before I learned the rest of the story. From New Guinea, Lindbergh went to Kwajalein, and then to Roi Island.

The principal job of the Marine squadrons there was dive-bombing Japs on the by-passed atolls of Taroa, Maloelap and Wotje. Lindbergh's chief interest was to see how much of a bomb load an F4U could reasonably carry. He took off the first F4U on Roi Island to carry three one-thousand-pound bombs which is quite a load for a single-engine fighter. He and a young Marine lieutenant by the name of Clark developed a two-thousand-pound bomb rack.

The plane handled so well during the tests, Lindbergh decided that a maximum of four thousand pounds could be carried on the F4U.

One September afternoon on Roi Island, Lindbergh walked up to his F4U. Stooping down he examined the bomb shackles carefully. There was no more than normal nervousness apparent in his manner. The pilots and men standing about wished him "Good luck" as he climbed into the cockpit. Then they watched nervously as the throbbing roar of the little fighter's powerful engine built up in intensity and he began to roll down the runway with increasing speed. They strained their eyes watching him. One thousand feet; fifteen hundred feet. "He's not off yet." Two thousand feet. "There; he's airborne! Whew!"

The single-engine fighter plane Lindbergh had just taken off carried a two-thousand-pound bomb on the center shackle, and one one-thousand pounder hung on each wing. It was the greatest bomb load ever carried by an F4U.

"He didn't use so much runway, at that," one pilot said with relief, as he watched the little fighter climbing higher and higher.

THE END