

Mission to Kavieng

By CARROLL R. ANDERSON

To recreate the combat activities of the bomber squadrons in the Southwest Pacific Area during World War II, it is essential to understand the unique and improvised low-level bombing techniques devised by General George C. Kenney to fight the specialized type of warfare dictated by the theatre of combat. It was in the Southwest Pacific that low-level bombing was brought to maximum efficiency.

Prior to General Kenney's assumption of command of the Fifth Air Force, our bombardment efforts were almost all high-level missions. As the victorious Japanese swept past the Philippine Islands, through Java to Timor, along the Northern Coast of New Guinea, and down into Guadalcanal, the United States Army Air Force, in joint action with the Dutch and the Australians, fought with the remnants of what it had. (1)

By the time the final evacuation of Java had occurred, U. S. aircraft consisted of Boeing B-17s, Curtiss P-40s, 16 fragile dive bombers stationed at Batchelor Field and various odds and ends of aircraft salvaged at the last moment. The Flying Fortresses, battered and weary from the mauling they had taken during the final, savage battles over Java, were never-the-less, sent out on missions against the enemy as soon as fields were made available for them at Marreba, Horn Island, Longreach, Conclurry, Darwin, Port Moresby and other hurriedly constructed air bases.

Although figures vary, by 14 February 1942 the entire USAAF in Australia consisted of B-17s of the 40th Reconnaissance Squadron based at Townsville, 17 B-17s, three LB-30s and three B-17Ds flown out of Java ahead of the onrushing Japanese. The recently-arrived 49th Fighter Group, later to become the highest scoring group in the Southwest Pacific, was in training in Australia and controlled the 36 P-40s available. They remained in Australia because the route into Java was now closed.

It is sufficient to say that when General Kenney assumed command of the Fifth Air Force in August 1942 the situation with respect to the total number of aircraft available for combat, while not good, was better than it had been in February. (2) Still, of 32 Boeing B-17s based at Mareeba, 18 were out of commission. On one occasion at Port Moresby, the 35th Fighter Group was able to scramble only 10 out of 40 Bell P-39s for an intercept mission. The Commanding Officer of the 35th believed this to be an excellent effort. General Kenney did not! Then Kenney discovered that the rest of the Bell Airacobras could not fly because essential replacement parts were lacking. This story of shortages of parts, planes and supplies was to be repeated over and over again throughout the early stages of the war.

General Kenney operated with a shoestring air force, it was not until much later that a relative abundance of North American B-25 Mitchell bombers, Consolidated B-24 Liberators and Douglas A-20s appeared in the theatre. Until then, the lonely bomber paths to Rabaul, Wewak, Lae and other major Japanese targets, were flown chiefly by unescorted B-17s and Martin B-26 Marauders.

Our story deals primarily with the North American B-25 Mitchells. It had been apparent to General Kenney that in addition to high-level precision bombing, some new means of attacking the Japanese bases and shipping had to be devised which would literally overwhelm the targets with bombs and bullets. Kenney directed the fabulous Lt. Col. Paul I. "Pappy" Gunn to modify the conventional B-25s into low-level strafers. (3) Gunn, a fantastic character who operated almost as a separate

air force unto himself, went to work with a will. Within a few weeks he had produced a Mitchell equipped with eight forward-firing .50 caliber machine guns. This adaptation, following closely upon his efforts in converting the Douglas A-20s into strafers, gave General Kenney his "commerce destroyers" which became a flying nightmare to the Japanese.

While strafing or bombing, the Mitchells would fly at 100 feet or less. (4) There were problems! When the safety factor of several thousands of feet of altitude was sacrificed for the 100-ft level, the intensity and accuracy of Japanese flak multiplied immeasurably. At this level, both the living and the about-to-die saw the machines and guns performing their grim tasks of death. This entrance into a daily inferno was the cross the men of the B-25s and A-20s were to bear to the end of the war. That the men who flew the commerce destroyers were a special breed of men, there is no question. That the Japanese troops hated them, there is no question!

Almost constant companions to the men of the commerce destroyers were other smaller groups of men and planes, in particular the men and planes of Naval Patrol Squadron 34. They were the unsung heroes of the Southwest Pacific area. Long before the Mitchells and A-20s started for the target, a rescue Consolidated PBY would be lumbering along into the target area. Long after the target was left in shattered debris and flames, the PBY would be plodding homeward as often as not carrying the wounded from a ditched Mitchell bomber.

This story is dedicated to all of the men who flew the B-25s, Douglas A-20s and the Consolidated PBYs; in particular, to the men of the 345th Bomb Group, the 38th Bomb Group, the 3rd Bomb Group and to the men of Patrol Squadron 34. It is their story.

FRED ARNETT OF GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY

Fred Arnett, radio operator for B-25-D-1 41-0042 piloted by Lt. Edgar Cavin, walked into the headquarters building of the 498th Bomb Squadron where briefing for the mission of the day was to occur. The place was Dobo-dura, New Guinea; the date, 15 February 1944. At that moment, Fred Arnett was beginning another combat mission in the usual manner of the bomber crewmen of the Air Apaches of the 345th Bomb Group (medium). He talked a short time with his fellow crewmen then became quiet when the briefing officer stepped to the front of the room.

As the briefing officer pointed out and described in detail the various heavy flak emplacements at the target, an undercurrent of protest came from the men of the 498th! They reminded him that they were not interested in the heavy flak positions. The pilots and gunners wanted to know the locations of the light anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. With this knowledge, a wave of Mitchells could conceivably strafe the gun emplacements and silence them, thereby cutting down losses to their aircraft.

Apologetically, the briefing officer explained his predicament.

"I don't know the location of the light flak and machine gun emplacements. All the pictures we have of this target were taken by the 13th Air Force from 17,000 feet!" (5)

A feeling of apprehension swept through the room. This was to be a major, low-level mission to Kavieng,

New Ireland. It would follow three other major high-level missions to the same target, but this attack was to be the final, massive effort which would eliminate Kavieng as an effective enemy base.

(On 11 February 1944, 50 Consolidated B-24s, primarily from the 90th Bomb Group, escorted by fighters from the 433rd Fighter Squadron, had blasted the runways of the fighter and bomber strip and destroyed many airplanes and much equipment. Admiral Halsey had sent a congratulatory radiogram to General George Kenney. On 13 February a return visit had been paid to Kavieng by 35 B-24 Liberators, again accompanied by the Lockheed fighters of the 433rd. And on the 14th, 42 Liberators returned to the Japanese base and destroyed the last two remaining aircraft and ignited a large fuel tank. Two heavy flak emplacements had been knocked out.)

Strategically, this final strike was to accomplish two results. (6) By joint agreement between SWPA and SOPAC, Admiral Halsey's forces were to land on Green Island, which was located approximately 100 miles below Rabaul. His air forces were to hit Rabaul, while the Fifth Air Force was to smash Kavieng. The joint actions were to occur on the same day, 15 February 1944.

Fifth Air Force Intelligence at General Ennis Whitehead's 5th Bomber Command had been watching Kavieng for weeks. The entire area in and around the township of Kavieng was saturated with food supplies, fuel dumps, ammunition dumps and crated Japanese aircraft not yet assembled. (7) The time to strike was now before these instruments of war could be barged or flown to Rabaul and later brought to bear against Admiral Halsey's ground forces at Green Island. In addition, this final blow would protect the right flank of General Douglas MacArthur's troops who were soon to land in the Admiralty Islands. (8)

At the flight line all was quiet. The B-25s sat silently after a thorough pre-flighting. Their bellies were filled with 500-lb. demolition bombs. The forward firing .50 caliber machine guns were armed and ready. There was little for the ground crews to do but wait.

When the briefing was concluded, the men of the 345th were hurried to the strip in GI trucks. The flyers drew their parachutes and filed out to the waiting planes. Considering the normal heat of a New Guinea day, this morning was surprisingly cool.

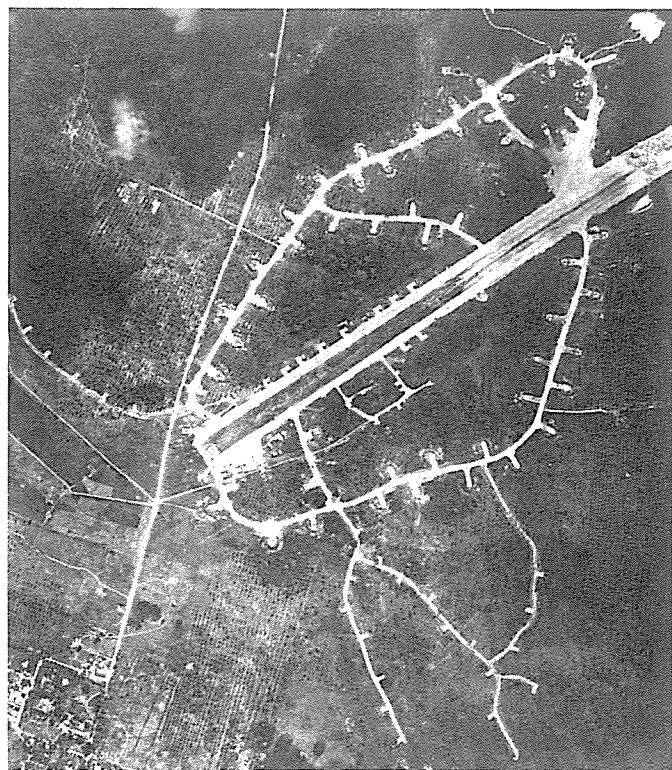
As Fred Arnett took his position near the waist guns, he spotted the squadron adjutant, Captain R. G. Huff, in the forward section of the plane. Lt. Cavin, co-pilot Lt. E. J. Kirkland and engineer Sgt. L. B. Herbst entered the aircraft, and S/Sgt. D. B. MacCready also climbed in. The B-25 GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY was ready to go.

Up and down the flight line, the staccato bark of Wright engines was heard as the 345th prepared for flight. For Lt. E. J. Kirkland, this was just another mission. He would survive this one, but in May he and his crew were to die on Biak Island near the strip where his squadron would eventually operate.

With the B-25s rolling down the runway and joining up overhead, the feeling of apprehension experienced in the briefing room was momentarily dispelled. However, the takeoff was not made without incident, for Mitchell 41-30317 from the 499th Bomb Squadron experienced engine failure after becoming airborne. (9) Although the pilot, 1st Lt. John D. Wilson and the co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Joseph E. Koch fought a desperate battle to hold the overlaid B-25 in the air on one engine, the plane faltered over the jungle and plunged to its doom in a blinding explosion. Wilson, Koch, S/Sgt Oscar Oakes, T/Sgt Clarence C. Fliebig and S/Sgt Andrew T. Chesaneck perished in the flaming fireball.

38th BOMB GROUP: 71st, 405th AND 823rd SQUADRONS

Older in battle seniority than the 345th, it was the job of the 38th Bomb Group to lead the two groups of B-25s into the forthcoming combat. The 71st, followed



The Airfield at Kavieng, New Ireland with Old Chinatown at the lower left. In the revetments are 16 Japanese fighters and 28 bombers. (Photo - USAF 23457A.C.)

in order by the 405th and the 823rd Squadrons, began its takeoff roll at 0747 from Horanda airdrome at Dobodura. The 71st and the 405th were to put eight and nine planes into the air and the 823rd was to fly off ten planes from the dirt strip.

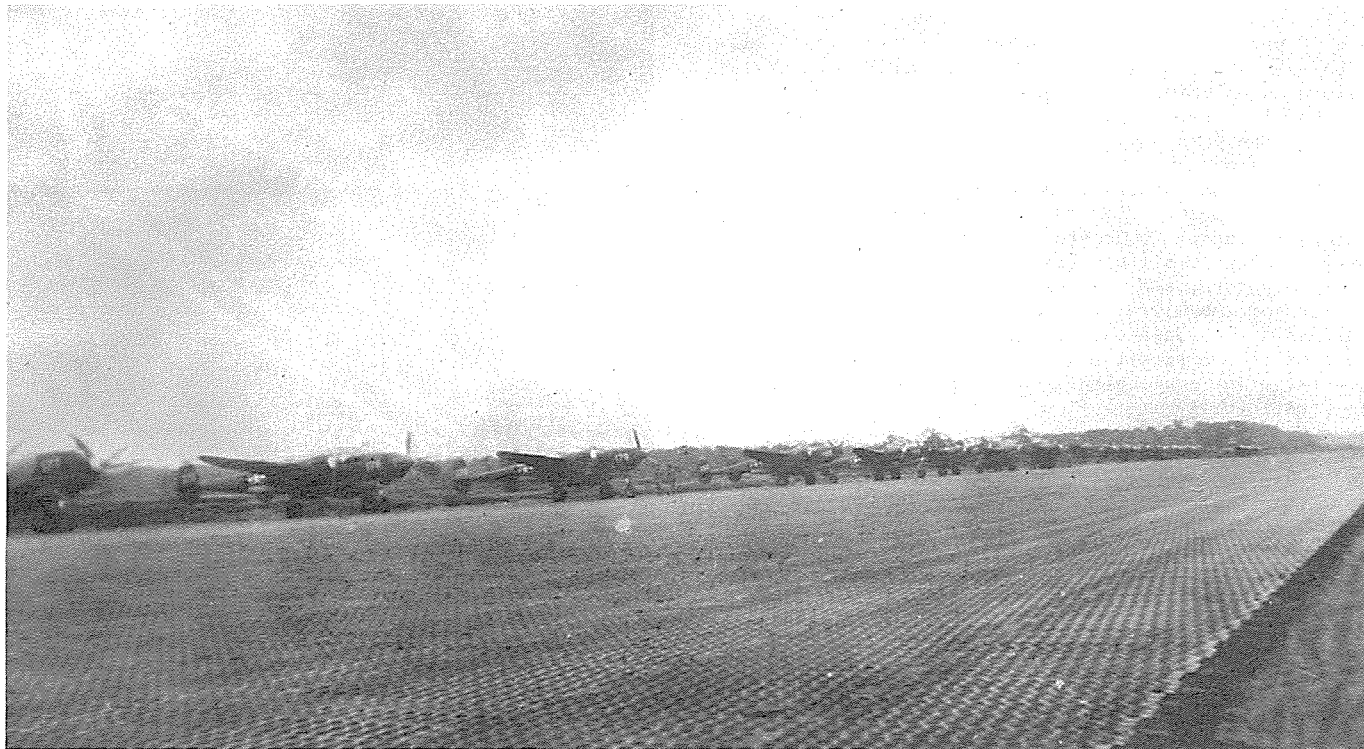
At 0800 the 71st turned to a course of 350 degrees and led the two groups up the coast as observant members of the 38th Bomb Group saw the fatal crash of Lt. Wilson and his crew. Fifty-three minutes later, the Allied base at Finschafen was passed on the port, with Cape Gloucester on the starboard. The 71st changed heading to 25 degrees for the fighter rendezvous at Sand Island. Tolokina Island slipped past at 0919. At 0945 the Lockheed Lightnings of the 433rd Fighter Squadron slipped into a fighter weave over the low-flying B-25s.

The entire mass of planes was on a course of 55 degrees by 1007, less one aircraft from the 823rd and one from the 405th, which had turned back because of mechanical trouble.

CARROLL R. ANDERSON, 433rd FIGHTER SQUADRON

Captain Warren R. Lewis, commanding officer of the 433rd Fighter Squadron, 475th Fighter Group, listed the names of the 16 pilots, plus the spare, who were to fly cover for the bombers of the 38th and 345th Groups. This was 2nd Lt Carroll R. Anderson's 18th combat mission, and he noted with considerable irony that once again he was flying the "tail-end Charlie" position in the squadron.

The Intelligence officer for the "Fighting Blue Devils" was Lt Reginald Hawley. He quickly and deftly briefed the assembled pilots on what would occur at the target. Forty Liberator bombers, mostly from the 90th Bomb Group, the "Jolly Rogers", were to strike the Japanese airdrome and anti-aircraft gun positions just prior to the attack on the township of Kavieng by the B-25s of the 38th and the 345th. After the seven squadrons had completed their strafing runs, the massive attack against



Lockheed P-38 Lightnings of the 433rd Fighter Squadron lined up at Dobodura's mat strip. (Photo - USAF 23457A.C.)

Kavieng was to be concluded with the appearance of the "Grim Reapers" of the 3rd Bomb Group (Light). The Grim Reapers would put 20 Douglas A-20 Havocs over the target at treetop level. In particular, they were to give consideration to shipping, but they also were to bomb anything of importance on the shore or in the bay.

As Lt Hawley ticked off the data for the fighter pilots, neither he nor the flyers assembled were aware of the manner in which much of the information had been obtained. At Fifth Air Force Bomber Command, even Col. Merian C. Cooper was unaware of one of the most important methods used to obtain the intelligence information required to plan this mission and the many others which had gone before.

Gen. Ennis C. Whitehead, Fifth Air Force bomber commander, was one of the few people in all the armed forces entrusted with the knowledge of the breaking of the Japanese radio code. He had received special intercept intelligence from radio messages passed between the various Japanese commands. This information proved to be vital in the planning of the Kavieng mission, just as it had proved to be invaluable in the previous Battle of the Bismarck Sea. In that particular engagement, which cost the enemy 8 transports, 3000 trucks and 4 destroyers, almost all of Gen. Whitehead's planning had been based on "fragile intelligence", intercepted Japanese radio messages. (10)

If the intercepted Japanese radio messages had established a criterion of destruction for the enemy in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, the same could be said for the Mission to Kavieng.

As missions went in the Southwest Pacific area, Kavieng Mission was to be a big one. Approximately 124 planes would participate, while one lone Consolidated PBV Catalina rescue plane, under cover of four Republic P-47s from the 348th Fighter Group, would enter the target area to pick up any ditched bomber crews. The Catalina was to be flown by Lt Nathan G. Gordon of Patrol Squadron 34.

It was time to go. Anderson picked up his primitive coded grid map. It wasn't much of a map, but in the event of a sudden exit from his P-38H it could be the

difference between life and death. With luck the rescue PBV might hear his Mayday call and pick him up. He drew his parachute and climbed onto the hood of the nearest jeep. Sadly overloaded because of the excessive number of pilots aboard, the jeep groaned down the lineup of P-38s, dropping off flyers.

Lt Anderson slipped off the hood of the jeep in front of the VIRGINIA MARIE. Crew Chief T/Sgt Bill Howell, a lanky Oklahoman, was waiting on the wing. Anderson snapped the aluminum ladder into the bottom of the cockpit nacelle and slid into the pilot's seat.

Howell volunteered, "The oil coolant flaps are on manual today, Lutenant." This bit of information was nothing new. The P-38 was growing old in time of service, and in a not-too-ladylike manner. With several hundred combat hours logged, VIRGINIA MARIE had begun to develop certain eccentricities which defied remedy. For example, she flew sideways! No amount of rigging could correct this disturbing facet of her personality. With the passage of time Anderson had grown immune to the snide remarks volunteered by the other pilots who had flown her.

With the sound of inertia starters carrying down the lineup of planes, Anderson quickly moved through the cockpit procedure which would turn over the Allison engines. When the engines came alive, he carefully watched the gauges come to normal. The old plane was ready for flight.

In two-plane elements, the Lightnings of the 433rd Fighter Squadron sped down the mat and became airborne. By twos, they lifted into the air and banked sharply to form into a cohesive unit.

Once in the air, Anderson quickly retracted the hydraulically-operated landing gear and milked up the flaps. Overhead Captain Lewis had just completed a 360 degree circle and was heading out, on course. Led by his element leader, Lt Anderson dropped into the tail-end Charlie slot, throttled back to cruise speed, and switched to the belly tanks. He flipped the crossfeed button and turned off the fuel booster pumps. With retarded RPM's and manifold pressure he held position easily. Anderson loosened his shoulder harness.

Only at the conclusion of five hours and five minutes of flying time, (11) would Anderson realize he had witnessed one of the outstanding bomber attacks in the Southwest Pacific area.

CAPTAIN R. G. HUFF, 498th SQUADRON ADJUTANT

For the squadron adjutant of the 498th, Captain R. G. Huff, this was the big day. After several conversations with Lt Ed Cavin, Cavin agreed to let Huff make the flight to Kavieng, New Ireland aboard his GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY. Since Huff's flight with Cavin's crew would be unauthorized, it was felt that Huff should say nothing to the squadron commander, Chester A. Coltharp.

In the pre-dawn of the 15th, Huff quickly dressed and left the tent in which he bunked with Coltharp. He immediately headed for the flight strip under the pretext of checking out the planes to make sure there were enough sandwiches, fruit juices, and coffee aboard for the long flight. Actually this is precisely what he did.

With the arrival of Lt Cavin and his crew at the flight line, Huff entered the plane and eased himself into the navigator's compartment. Cavin, co-pilot Kirkland and engineer Herbst settled into their seats.

Only a few weeks before, the 498th and the rest of the group had been shuttling in and out of the staging strip at Dobodura. The numerous flights over the Owen Stanley Mountains from Port Moresby had been strenuous, since the Dobo area retained only enough supplies for a few days operation. Now the 498th, 499th, 500th and 501st were comfortably encamped in the former quarters of the 22nd Bomb Group at Dobodura, and the missions to Wewak, Madang and Hansa Bay were therefore considerably shorter.

GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY moved off the taxi strip and laboriously started its run down the strip. Cavin eased back on the yoke as the Wright engines strove mightily to lift the heavily laden plane into the aid. Huff observed the takeoff and the precise manner in which the

345th formed up. On course past Cape Ward Hunt droned the Mitchells.

The Wright engines, always noisy, quickly deafened Huff, but he was greatly interested in the casual manner in which Lt Cavin and Lt Kirkland handled the B-25 in formation, and he soon became accustomed to the loud roar. The minutes ticked away as the bombers droned across the Huon Gulf.

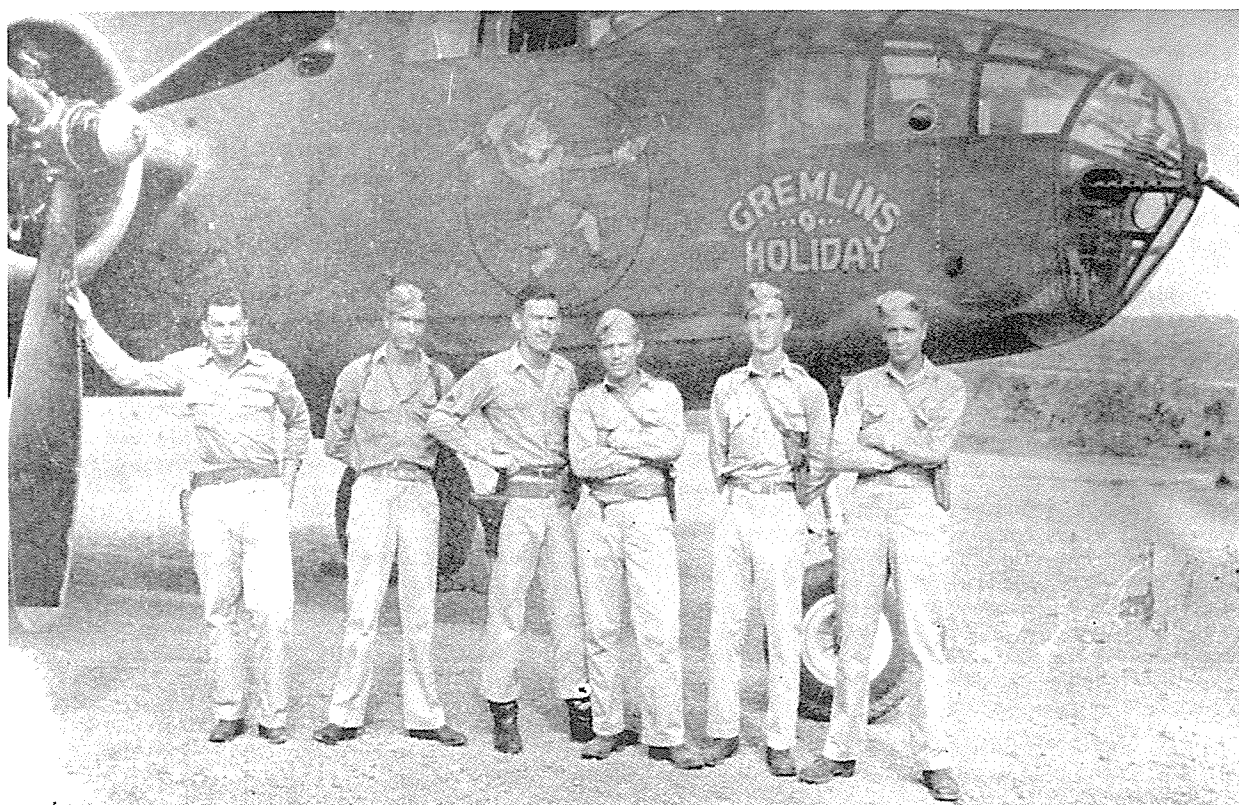
Well past New Britain, Huff saw the P-38s of the 433rd Fighter Squadron drop down to bomber level. The swift Lightnings immediately began a fighter weave over the group. The mass of planes moved steadily toward the target.

Gradually the shape of land appeared, low on the horizon. To obtain a better view of what was ahead, Captain Huff climbed into the navigator's stirrups and peered out of the astrodome. B-25s were all around GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY. To the ground officer, it was an impressive sight.

The group of 48 planes began to split into loose elements of six each. Captain Huff clearly could see the waist gunners and the top turret gunners swinging their guns. The other planes were so close he could also distinguish the faces of the pilots and co-pilots. In the group were such planes as OLD BALDY, NEAR MISS, THE WOLF PACK, SANDBLASTER, SATAN'S ANGEL, HIT AND MISS, RITA'S WAGON and the PATIENT VIRGIN. (12)

The coral-ribbed coastline flashed below GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY and Cavin brought the aircraft around to a heading which would bring it up the narrow peninsula, across Old Chinatown in Kavieng, and out over the bay. Here the group would assemble for the long trip home. The jungle was flashing by just beneath the belly of the plane.

Cavin and Kirkland increased power to stay in formation, and the old D-1 responded. With the throttles against the stops and the props at full RPM, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY slowly accelerated. Bomb bay doors swung open. The bombs, fused for an 8 to 12 second delay, vibrated



The North American B-25D-1, 41-0042, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY, with S/Sgt D. B. MacCready at far left, Fred Arnett second from the left, and the pilot Lt Edgar Cavin at the far right.

on their shackles, fat and deadly.

The flak started. All at once it came from machine guns and from small cannon. Tracers streaked the sky, searching for the speeding B-25s. The barrage of shells began to find its mark among the planes of the 498th.

As the bomb run began, Lt Cavin touched off the forward machine guns. They cut a wide swath through the supply dumps ahead. Flak emplacements began to flick by. The waist gunners fired at them.

In a matter of seconds, they were racing into explosions and erupting fuel drums ignited by the first waves of planes from the 38th which were sending huge masses of smoke and flame into the air just ahead of the second wave. (13) Lt Cavin was unable to continue at treetop level. Visibility was nil, and with another supply dump coming up, he triggered out his demolition bombs then eased back on the control yoke to get above the fiery holocaust.

At this moment, Captain R. G. Huff sensed rather than felt a solid thump somewhere in the airplane. Without his knowing it, Huff's flight aboard GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY was to be terminated abruptly.

CAPTAIN ANTHONY CHIAPPE, 498th BOMB SQUADRON

Tony Chiappe, the operations officer of the 498th Bomb Squadron, was flying immediately to the starboard of Lt Ed Cavin's aircraft. He saw the first death throes of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY in the form of a trail of black smoke. As he watched, the stream of smoke turned into a blazing storm of fire which flowed back from the right engine. Unknown to Chiappe, another fire was raging in the interior of the fuselage. The right landing gear flopped down. Huge chunks of flaming tire broke loose and dropped away into the smoke and fire of the target.

While Chiappe watched, unable to help, the starboard engine on GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY slowed to a stop. Lts Cavin and Kirkland feathered the prop. The shoreline flashed past as GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY fled from the target. Captain Chiappe's B-25 hurtled out of the raging inferno and explosions in time to see Cavin's plane skip once, then momentarily disappear in a huge welter of spray.

Roughly 30 seconds had passed since the start of the bombing run. During this short time, Cavin and Kirkland had been allowed just enough time to throttle back, feather the burning engine, kill off the speed of the fatally wounded plane, then ditch in the high rolling swells of the bay. In spite of the fire, the pilot and co-pilot had dropped their bombs and expended all of their ammunition.

Captain Chiappe immediately led his flight into a circle over the precariously floating plane. Since other aircraft were also over the downed plane, Chiappe turned his B-25 out to sea and raced to meet the incoming PBY Catalina rescue plane. Chiappe stated in his narrative report of the raid:

"I could not establish radio contact with them (PBY) so decided to fly where they were supposed to be located and bring them to the scene of the crash. I located the Catalina about 100 miles from Kavieng. I tried to contact them, but was unable to do so. I buzzed them, and then started towards Kavieng hoping they would follow me. They did not, so I returned and flew alongside of them and motioned for them to follow me. I was able to make them understand me and they came along. Just before we got to Kavieng Harbor, the Cat circled while I went ahead to locate the crew."

Chiappe once again found his aircraft subjected to coastal gunfire as he flew over the downed crew of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY.

FRED ARNETT, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY

The exploding barrels of fuel, ignited by the planes

immediately ahead of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY, were bursting into the sky like Roman candles. Cavin had no choice but to pull up. At this precise instant, Fred Arnett saw the two Japanese machine gun emplacements that had mortally wounded his plane. At an altitude of approximately 150 feet, an abnormally high altitude for a strafing, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY made a fine target. Arnett spotted the enemy machine guns as the bullets struck home. Later, Arnett said:

"I had two .30 caliber machine guns mounted in the windows aft of the armor plate door into the radio compartment and was manning them when I heard an explosion. I looked back expecting to see the bombs exploding in the air, when about that time the gunner (MacCready) came out of the radio compartment, where his turret was located, dragging his parachute. The compartment was a raging inferno. What had happened was that the flight of B-25s ahead of us had hit a gasoline dump and the drums blowing up had caused us to pull up to an altitude of about 150 feet, getting us high enough so that machine gun fire on the ground could swing on us. We caught incendiary bullets in the 150 gallon tank mounted in the radio compartment. About the same time, we caught incendiary bullets in the right wing tank."

Arnett started to reach for his parachute when he remembered it was atop the burning fuel tank. MacCready was hanging onto his chute grimly. With the right landing gear down and the tire breaking away in burning chunks, and with the added fire in the fuselage, their plight was desperate.

Arnett said later, "I told Mac I didn't think we would ever get high enough to use the chute, but if we did, he was going to have a passenger on the way down." As events turned out, neither MacCready or Arnett jumped.

In the remaining few seconds before the crash, Arnett and MacCready tried to brace themselves for the inevitable. They were unable to place their backs against the armor plate at the rear of the radio compartment because it was red hot. Arnett tried to anchor himself behind the belly camera hatch while facing forward. MacCready, whose hands were badly burned, grasped the camera hatch.

With both engines now feathered, the plane gently brushed the water, lifted, then settled for the last time. Amid flying spray, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY suddenly submarined completely under the water. When it popped to the surface, the fire was extinguished. With the impact of the crash, MacCready's foot became entangled in the camera hatch, and he sustained a compound fracture of the ankle. Arnett smashed forward, splitting open his head, front and rear. In addition, his back was seriously gashed.

The plane began to settle low in the water directly after the ditching. Arnett remembered nothing of the actual crash. His first knowledge of having escaped the doomed plane was when he found himself swimming furiously in the water.

In the chaos of going into the sea, everyone lost accurate count of the time the plane floated, but approximately four and a half minutes after it struck the water, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY plunged to her watery grave 400 yards offshore from the fire-blackened target.

Another ordeal lay ahead of the downed crew.

DAVID B. MACCREADY, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY

It was about 11:30 A.M. when David MacCready saw Japanese gun emplacements firing point blank at GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY as the plane roared past. There were several ships in the harbor, as well as a number of "Rufe" and "Sonia" float planes. MacCready brought his guns to bear on one of the ships and witnessed his bullets striking home. He was not surprised to see gun crews on the ship returning his fire.



Kavieng, New Ireland under attack by the 345th Bomb Group at 1125 hours on 15 February 1944. (Photo - USAAF)

Through his headset, MacCready heard Lt Ed Cavin call, "Bombs away!" Since it was MacCready's duty to turn on the Fairchild still camera in the belly of the plane, he swung his turret so he could reach the switch. As he extended his arm he felt an explosion and the white-hot breath of fire on his back, arms, hands and throat. All hell broke loose! The plexiglass turret dome suddenly blew off and along with it, went MacCready's headset, his sun glasses and his cap and throat mike. With the dome gone, MacCready was slapped and buffeted by the slipstream. Somehow he managed to swing the turret far enough to escape the howling wind.

When MacCready ducked back down into the fuselage he was met by the flames from the so-called "Tokyo Tank" and Flight Engineer L. B. Herbst, who was in the crawlway between the cockpit and the radio compartment furiously pumping a fire extinguisher at the empty tank. For what it was worth, it was fortunate that only a residue of fuel and fumes were burning. Had the tank been completely filled, both Herbst and MacCready would have been charred. As it was, MacCready was badly scorched about the face and throat, and the flesh on his wrists and hands was hanging in blackened shreds.

He staggered out of the flaming radio compartment in time to see Arnett blazing away at the Japanese gun emplacements. It didn't take any superior knowledge to see that the plane was doomed. MacCready witnessed Lt Cavin's bank to the port to get out of the target area and over the bay, where they all might have a chance for survival. The next moments were a kaleidoscope of hurried preparations for the anticipated ditching. Although the door to the radio compartment was closed, this was no insurance that the fire, temporarily confined there, would not break through the wall at any moment.

The plane slowed imperceptibly and settled. MacCready felt the hurtling B-25 touch the water. The second

time it struck, he experienced the unusual sensation of getting the seat of his pants wet as water sprayed up through the Fairchild camera housing in the bottom of the plane. Then oblivion!

There was almost complete silence in the smashed B-25 when MacCready regained consciousness, face down in the water inside the fuselage. Except for the quiet slapping of water, he heard no other sound. When he tried to stand, he discovered that his right ankle was badly broken. Where he had been sitting there now was a jagged hole in the bottom of the fuselage. Fred Arnett was nowhere to be seen.

With the plane settling rapidly, MacCready had to escape. The only way out was through the hole in the bottom of the plane. When he was halfway through; his web belt containing a .45 automatic, knife and canteen became entangled in the torn metal. Try as he might, he could not twist loose. Under water, he desperately tugged and pulled, but to no avail. Finally, his badly damaged fingers unsnapped the belt, and he rose to the surface. The rest of the crew was on the wing of the plane.

"Arnett is still in the plane," he gasped as he hauled himself onto the wing.

L. B. HERBST, GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY

Squadron Adjutant Huff and Flight Engineer Herbst simultaneously discovered the raging fire in the bomb bay. Reacting with considerable calm under the circumstances, Huff turned to advise Herbst of the fire. Herbst was moving into action. Without hesitation, he grasped a fire extinguisher and crawled toward the rear of the plane.

Only a few moments before he had checked the bomb bay to make sure that the bombs were gone and the bomb

bay doors closed. Assured that none of the bombs was hung up, he had passed on this information to pilot Ed Cavin. No sooner had he crawled back into the navigator's compartment, however, than he felt the searing heat of the fire.

Twice Herbst tried to enter the blazing crawlway, but each time he was rebuffed by the fire. Finally, he turned on the fire extinguisher and pushed it ahead of him as he tried to reach the heart of the flames.

It was like trying to put out a three-alarm fire with a teaspoon of water. Everything was white-hot. Gasoline fumes combined with the odor of burning rubber, aluminum, paint and electrical wiring, created an overwhelming, suffocating atmosphere within the close confines of the crawlway. The extinguisher did its work reasonably well, but suddenly the flames engulfed Herbst burning off his eyebrows and singeing his hair. As Herbst later told it:

"As soon as I got back to the pilot, I told him we would have to go down. I had no idea where, but I was afraid the plane would start to disintegrate because we had a real good fire going. When I told Lt Cavin that the auxilliary tank was on fire, he wanted to know if I had used the fire extinguisher, and Lt Kirkland, the co-pilot, came back to see if there was anything he could do. After seeing that there was nothing to be done, he got back into his seat. I told Lt Cavin three or four times to put down, but he was trying to put as much distance as possible between us and the Japanese. I didn't know whether the plane would hold together or not."

Seconds later, as Cavin cut away from the formation and prepared to ditch, Herbst was hunched down behind Cavin's seat waiting for the crash landing. It was anyone's guess as to whether or not a successful landing in the water could be negotiated before the plane exploded.

Flight Engineer Herbst couldn't swim! MacCready had tried to teach him the fun of swimming in the beautiful jungle stream which wended its way through the 498th campsite at Dobodura, but to no avail. Herbst just couldn't get the hang of it.

GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY crashed through the water. The nose section remained solid for a fraction of a second, then collapsed into a tangled mess of torn metal, trapping Lt Cavin. The force of the impact jerked the pilot's and co-pilot's seats completely loose from their mounts. Somehow, in this nightmare of rushing water and smashed nose section Herbst found the escape hatch and dragged himself free.

Lts Cavin and Kirkland were approximately 30 feet away from the plane. MacCready was swimming to the wing of the aircraft. Arnett was nowhere to be found, and Captain Huff's whereabouts was unknown. Cavin and Kirkland swam to the wing and dragged themselves onto it. Upon hearing MacCready's gasped remark that Arnett was still in the plane, Herbst climbed the entire length of the fuselage to peer inside from the rear gun turret. It was a futile search.

Arnett had disappeared. Just as the plane went down, Arnett floundered through the hole in the bottom of the aircraft, clutching in his hand a first aid kit which was inconveniently smashed flat.

As the life rafts rained down from the planes of the 498th, Kirkland charged off through the heavy swells to retrieve them with Herbst following along.

MacCready was amazed at this demonstration of swimming ability exhibited by an extremely inept pupil and yelled, "Hey, Herbst! You can't swim!" It was somewhere near this point that Herbst discovered the accuracy of MacCready's shouted remarks, and he began to struggle in the water. Lt Kirkland came back to give him some urgently needed support.

In the rafts, the men of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY were a sad-looking crew. Arnett was slashed above and below one eye, which was completely closed. His other eye

was black. His back was gashed open and the rear of his scalp was split. Adjutant Huff was in a state of shock from a severe back injury, plus a deep gouge below his knee. Lt Cavin was suffering from minor wounds and submersion. MacCready's face, throat and wrists were flash-burned, and his hands were covered with third degree burns. Sgt Herbst, the man who couldn't swim, was suffering from minor injuries. Kirkland seemed to be the least injured of all.

Arnett dived over the side of the raft and tried to tow them farther out into the bay.

CAPTAIN R. G. HUFF, ADJUTANT, 498th BOMB SQUADRON

"It seems as solid as the day it was built." This was the thought which flashed through the mind of Captain R. G. Huff as he stood in the navigator's dome with only his head above the water. During the tremendous impact of the crash, he had the impression of being tossed over and over again by the force of the water.

At almost the same instant in which he regained consciousness and saw the faint white light above his head, he realized that he was on the bottom of the fuselage, under water. Swimming upward to the light, he suddenly popped into the navigator's plexiglass dome. Outside he could see Herbst, Cavin, Kirkland and MacCready. Lt Cavin pointed urgently to the pilot's escape hatch. Provided it was not now blocked, it was the only way out for Huff. He dived back under water, found the hatch and groped his way almost through the opening.

Like MacCready, he was to suffer the agony of half drowning before rising to the surface. Half above the surface of the water and half under, his feet became entangled in an obstruction.

Fortunately, Cavin, Kirkland and Herbst had foreseen this possibility and were waiting by the escape hatch. By tugging and hauling, they were able to drag Huff free, but not before he had lost his pants, both shoes and one sock.

Huff recalled afterward, "This is humorous now, but it wasn't then because we were exposed for a considerable length of time in the hot tropical sun."

Having reached the comparative safety of the wing of the sinking plane, Huff began to experience severe pain from a badly wrenched back and a gaping wound below the right knee. Whatever thoughts he had were interrupted when Lt Cavin commanded everyone to stand and dive from the wing. Since the aircraft was obviously sinking fast, there was no point in remaining aboard. Huff later said:

"I was unable to stand up, but was able to get to my knees and dive off the wing. We all started swimming, and the next time I looked back, the plane was gone. The other planes of the 498th apparently were immediately aware of our plight. They each flew over our group (crew) and dropped various equipment to us since we were unable to salvage any emergency equipment from our own plane. They dropped a six-man life raft and a two-man raft along with emergency rations, medical kits, radio, etc. We succeeded in pulling all this equipment together, and getting into the rafts started paddling away from shore."

In typical GI style, the first comment was from Lt Edgar Cavin, "Damn it, Huff, if I had known this was going to happen, I wouldn't have invited you along today!" Huff replied that he wouldn't have come along if he had known what was going to happen.

THE 38th BOMB GROUP

There was little time for Captain Huff to contemplate the many and varied reasons for the sudden demise of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY, but had he been in an aircraft of the preceding group, he would have understood why his plane had been shot down and why the following waves of the 345th Group were going to be so badly battered.



A B-25 Mitchell of the 499th Bomb Squadron, 345th Group, unloads its bombs at Kavieng, 1129 hours. (Photo - USAAF)

The 71st Squadron slipped around Dyaul Island in an attempt to get under the two radar sets at Kavieng. As the 71st led the groups across Balgai Bay, it turned to a course of 350 degrees to begin its bombing and strafing runs in two waves of four aircraft abreast.

Just south of the township and just before the strafing run began, crewmen of the 71st spotted a slightly damaged Betty bomber and gunned it with unobserved results. Officially the attack portion of the mission commenced at 1113 hours. Four minutes later the two waves of the 71st had completed their part in the raid. This four minutes established the pattern of death and destruction for Americans and Japanese alike. No quarter was asked and none was given by either side.

As the first flight passed over the warehouses at the main wharf, a terrific explosion and flash of fire spouted to an altitude of 200 to 300 feet, followed by a pall of dense smoke. Elsewhere, other fires were starting and this, combined with dirt and debris, obscured the target area.

Aircraft 306, piloted by 1st Lt E. E. Benson with co-pilot 2nd Lt W. J. Smith, 1st Lt. H. H. Rushing, T/Sgt J. C. Healan and Sgt H. J. Gross, took a burst of flak in its port engine. Almost immediately the engine burst into flames. When this happened, the singular failure of all B-25s also occurred, with the loss of hydraulic pressure, the port landing gear flopped out of its nacelle. The navigator pulled the Lux system which momentarily doused the fire in the engine, but since the tire was a molten chunk of rubber, it re-ignited the engine. 306 lost altitude and speed while Benson and Smith fought the stricken aircraft out to sea and away from the chaos at the target. Within seconds the fire had spread to the bomb bay, and now the entire length of the fuselage from the bomb bay to the tail was a flaming torch which trapped the radio man. The gunner

came forward just before Benson and Smith eased the plane down onto the water three miles west of North Cape. Lt Rushing managed to open the escape hatch and pull himself clear. With his assistance, Smith and Benson clambered free of the sinking plane. The gunner was either dead or so badly hurt that he could not free himself.

Benson struggled to break loose a life raft, but it was impossible because of the fire and continuing explosions. The three survivors slipped into the water and started to swim away from the plane.

Unknown to the survivors, the radio man had bailed out about one-half mile west of North Cape. His parachute miraculously opened 10 feet above the water, and crewmen in a following 405th Mitchell saw him wave as the aircraft circled his position. Gunner H. J. Gross went down with 306, but it was not until sometime later that Lt Benson learned that Radioman J. C. Healan was not found by the rescue PBY Catalina.

Benson, Smith and Rushing's troubles had just begun, for now they were subjected to the final inadvertent humiliation. Out of the smoke and debris of Kavieng, plunged a following wave of North American bombers. Seeing the blazing remnants of the now unidentifiable B-25, and assuming that the three swimming crewmen were the survivors of a small, sinking Japanese boat, the friendly Mitchells opened fire. Benson, Smith and Rushing hurriedly dived under the water to escape the bullets which splattered the water about them. Fortunately, the following flights of strafers left them alone. It would be two hours before they would be picked up by Nathan Gordon's Consolidated PBY.

The 71st's losses were relatively light with the downing of one plane, 306, and with two planes receiving minor flak damage over the target, but the beginning of the raid had stirred up a hornet's nest among the Japanese.

For its part, the squadron had dropped a total of 40 500-lb. demolition bombs and later, in strafing native villages on the islands of Vuttz, Nanavau and Kulaunis, had expended 18,000 rounds of .50 and .30 caliber ammunition.

THE 405th BOMB SQUADRON, 38th BOMB GROUP

The 405th started its strafing run in two waves abreast. Six planes were in the first wave and three B-25s from the 823rd joined the second wave. It took exactly two minutes to complete the attack and during this short interval the 405th dropped 40 500-lb. bombs and fired 21,350 rounds of .50 caliber and .30 caliber ammunition.

As the men manning the Mitchells of the 405th approached the target at minimum altitude on a heading of 360 degrees, some of them saw the P-38s of the 433rd Fighter Squadron go in over the target at 3,000 feet. They saw a heavy box barrage pock the sky in and around the weaving fighters, and perhaps some of them may have heard the acid comment offered by one of the fighter pilots, as he called over the radio, "Let's get the hell out of here, Louie" (Captain Lewis, 433rd C.O.), whereupon the 433rd Fighter Squadron did indeed move some distance away from the site of the hostilities.

The B-25s of the 405th entered the smoke, fire and fury of the target area at 1115, and within seconds had dumped its bombs through the Northern half of the township of Kavieng, through Chinatown and along the northern shoreline from Government Wharf to Chinatown. Flying debris, obscured vision caused by boiling black smoke and flames which reached above the speeding planes, and intense and accurate ack-ack along the coastline, created a flying nightmare. The 405th was also being battered by machine gun fire from the edge of the air strip and from Chinatown. Four planes were hit by machine gun fire but none were heavily damaged.

The 405th was fortunate. As it came out of the fire and flame of Kavieng, it was intact. In the strait between Eruk and Globio Islands, an area of supposed safety, the crews of the 405th suddenly found themselves under attack by a Japanese destroyer. The enemy vessel was settling in the water with its stern awash, but ever faithful to the Mikado, its deck crews were firing six gun salvos at the Mitchells as they sped by a thousand yards away. It was a futile effort on the part of the destroyer, but it was a reminder to the men of the 405th of the tenacity of the Japanese to fight to the bitter end.

THE 823rd BOMB SQUADRON, 38th BOMB GROUP

In the official combat report of the 71st Bomb Squadron under heading (C), there is listed the beginning time and the ending time of the attack of the squadron, as well as the altitude at which the strike was made. The altitude varied from 75 feet to 150 feet. The 405th apparently felt it somewhat expedient to fly lower; its combat report gives a 50 foot to 100 foot attack altitude. As the 823rd Bomb Squadron made its run, there apparently was no question about the advisability of flying as low as possible in spite of the debris spewing up from below. The official combat report of the 823rd is specific. Under heading (C), there are two words: 50 feet!

Precisely five minutes after the 71st had started its run, the 823rd flashed into the turmoil ahead. During the strafing attacks, the pilots of the bombers toggled out 45 500-lb demolition bombs on a heading of 20 degrees on the township of Kavieng, starting at the Main Wharf and extending north to Mongol Village. Just east of Chinatown, through a momentary clearing of fire and smoke, the 823rd observed a violent explosion followed by bright red flashes. Someone had bagged an ammunition dump.

One of the speeding B-25s laid five eggs directly

across the Japanese airplane repair depot. Near the main jetty on the coast, still another B-25 fired a stack of from 25 to 30 fuel drums. The following 345th Bomb Group crewmen would remember that fuel dump for many years.

If the 405th had escaped virtually unscathed, the same could not be said for the 823rd. One of its planes received a single machine gun bullet in its bomb bay, but plane 873 was posted Missing in Action at 1125. For one brief moment it was seen through the smoke and fire, pulling up abruptly to 150 feet altitude, the belly of the plane a mass of streaming, orange flame! As the crewmen of the other bombers watched helplessly, both main landing gears sagged out, indicating a loss of hydraulic pressure. The dying aircraft disappeared momentarily, then was seen crashing between the shoreline and Chinatown. A puff of white smoke rose from the area where the plane crashed. Missing in action were 1st Lt H. H. Difillipe, 2nd Lt L. B. Kefer, 2nd Lt C. S. Heyen, T/Sgt W. H. Fulp and S/Sgt G. Basha.

As the final elements of the 38th came off the target, the 823rd followed the lead of the 71st and established a heading of 250 degrees to Finschafen, hence a heading of 160 degrees was taken for the final leg to Dobodura.

2ND LT CARROLL R. ANDERSON, 433rd FIGHTER SQUADRON

The rendezvous between the bombers of the 38th and the 345th and Lt Anderson's squadron, under Captain Lewis, had occurred right on schedule near Sand Island. Shortly after passing over the island, Anderson picked up the outline of the mass of bombers flying at wavetop height, and within minutes the Lightnings of the "Blue Devils" were weaving back and forth over the olive-drab Mitchells.

The sun was shining brightly. There were a few scattered clouds in the sky. At the low level at which all the planes were flying, it was extremely hot. Ahead, Lt Anderson spotted the landfall which meant the target was at hand. With a gentle turn away from the bombers, Captain Lewis led the fighters to a higher altitude. The bombers moved inland to begin the bombing run. Almost immediately, the coconut grove and the township erupted into flames, smoke and the flying debris of demolished buildings, trees and supplies. Radio silence, so zealously guarded during the entire flight to the target, broke completely as the pilots of the Mitchells shouted obscenities back and forth to each other. Added to the din in Anderson's headset were the pungent words of encouragement from the members of his squadron.

Anderson was appalled to see an olive-drab B-25 start to burn. Even as the starboard wing of the airplane became enveloped in flames, the pilot continued to toggle out his bomb load which walked a deadly pattern through the Chinatown area, throwing up dirt, parts of coconut trees, pieces of shacks and broken equipment. Smoke poured back from firing machine guns of the burning aircraft, and then it pulled away from the target in a gradual bank and headed toward North Cape and the bay where the fire-gutted Mitchell ditched in the water. (This was GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY.)

Before any of the pilots of the 433rd could mentally adjust to the tragedy they had just witnessed, in rapid succession another B-25 pulled up abruptly then disappeared near the coastline (873 of the 823rd Squadron). While they watched the macabre flight of death and destruction, still another B-25 hurtled off the target and plunged into the high swells of the bay. Somewhere within the melange of death the pilots saw two more Mitchells crash, one in the water and another directly into the target as a flaming fireball. It seemed as if the strafers would never stop crashing. Still another limped away from the target.

In the confusion of the moment, Lt Anderson lost track of the last damaged B-25 to leave the target. (14) It would be some time before he would learn the story of this B-25, piloted by Capt. Michael P. Hochella.

1ST LT THANE C. HECOX, 345th BOMB GROUP

In the official combat report of the 500th Bomb Squadron, 345th Bomb Group for the month of February 1944, there appears under Section 9 the following comments:

- a) Strafing and bombing Kavieng, New Ireland
- b) Captain Sylvester A. Hoffman
1st Lt Thane C. Hecox
1st Lt John J. Howard
2nd Lt James W. DuBose
S/Sgt Joseph H. Peyton
S/Sgt Oliver O. Miller
T/Sgt James L. Davis
- c) Killed. Airplane shot down by enemy A/A.

1st Lt John J. Howard died in another aircraft than that of Thane Hecox (the B-25 of Capt. Hochella), but his death was just as final. The only difference was that Lt Howard lived a few minutes longer.

It was all over within a fraction of a second. Somewhere within the target area, a sharp-eyed Japanese gunner or perhaps several sharp-eyed Japanese gunners saw Hecox' plane. They shot it down. One moment the Mitchell was a flying, fighting aircraft; the next moment it was thousands of flaming, shattered parts scattered throughout the coconut grove.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM J. CAVOLI, 345th BOMB GROUP

Captain William J. Cavoli had felt the presence of death on many occasions over Rabaul, Wewak, Alexishafen, Gasmata and Madang, but the hot breath of death at Kavieng was near, vivid, real and imminent. Cavoli, flying North American B-25 41-30531, was leading the fourth flight over the target and on the right of the third flight led by Lt Thane C. Hecox. Whatever anguish Cavoli felt when he saw Hecox' plane smear through the target was suppressed with the beginning of his own troubles. In his report of 17 February 1944, following the mission to Kavieng, Cavoli stated:

"After strafing at treetop level, I pulled up to about 100 feet for bombing. Due to the thick, black smoke over Chinatown, I was FORCED TO GO ON INSTRUMENT FLYING WHILE CROSSING THE TARGET (capitals are the author's). It was at this point that I felt that my right engine had been hit. I glanced at the manifold pressure; it had dropped to zero. I immediately tried to feather the right prop, and when it was almost feathered, it started up all over again. I gave the good engine full power. Slipping the plane in a vain attempt to put out the terrific fire that had started, I again attempted to feather the prop, but to no avail. The plane was losing altitude all the time and the fire had already melted away half the right engine nacelle, the right flap and the whole right side of the fuselage. The right wheel had dropped out of the nacelle and caught fire, and I was unable to close the bomb bay doors or drop any flaps because of hydraulic failure. The airspeed indicator went out also, probably due to the heat. A crash landing was inevitable, so I prepared for it."

At 1130 the right wheel of the B-25 struck the water offshore from Kavieng, snapped away and smashed off the right vertical stabilizer and rudder. The fire-gutted plane, under the skillful handling of Captain Cavoli and co-pilot, Lt George H. Braun, skipped across the water twice, then plunged headlong under the water.

The wrecked B-25 was sinking rapidly as Flight Engineer S/Sgt Eisler pulled the escape hatch and the life raft release. Braun, Cavoli, Eisler and the navigator, 1st Lt Robert Lewis, struggled through the escape hatch and clambered onto the starboard wing. Gunner S/Sgt John A. Murphy was swimming on the port side of the

plane. In answer to the shouts of the crew he swam to the wing and dragged himself aboard.

Captain Cavoli was the first to hear the cries of the radioman, S/Sgt Thomas B. Freeman. In the 12 March 1944 request for the Distinguished Flying Cross for Cavoli, Lt George Braun wrote the following:

"... he (Cavoli) and the engineer paddled the raft over to the waist window to find the radioman pinned in near the escape hatch with a broken right forearm. The plane threatened to sink any second, but Captain Cavoli and the engineer managed to extricate him and pull him into the life raft. The whole crew then boarded the raft, and we rowed away just as the plane sank. Captain Cavoli remained calm, cheerful and alert to the welfare of his crew. He gave them encouragement, administered first aid and comfort--there was no morphine--to his men. Only about a half mile from shore, well within sight of the enemy, who started to fire at us in the raft with their coastal guns, we rowed about three-quarters of a mile further from shore. I am confident that if it had not been for the coolness and superb flying ability of Captain Cavoli, none of us would be alive today."

There was no respite for Cavoli and his crew. With coastal guns firing at their life raft as it breasted each high swell, there was nothing for it but to row.

It was a black day for the 500th. Hecox and his crew were dead, and Cavoli and his crew, although temporarily spared, were in danger of death or capture by the Japanese. All told, the 500th had three planes down. Captain Michael P. Hochella's Mitchell had been ditched near an island away from Kavieng. Thanks to the efforts of Keith Daugherty, also of the 500th, its possible crash site had been surmised. (1st Lt John J. Howard died in the crash of Hochella's B-25.)

LT CARROLL R. ANDERSON, 433rd FIGHTER SQUADRON

The last of the strafers were flashing off the target and forming up for the long flight home. Some would stagger to Finschhafen and make emergency landings. Others would successfully make the flight back to Dobodura. While Lt Anderson watched, one B-25 pulled away from the rest and headed on course by itself. The plane was piloted by Anthony Chiappe of the 498th.

Still another lone Mitchell established a circular pattern and remained at low level over the bay. Anderson wondered about this, since to remain at Kavieng unprotected was to invite disaster. Yet, if an airplane seemed nonchalant in flight and appeared unafraid of danger, this airplane gave that appearance. It was flown by Chester A. Coltharp, the commanding officer of the 498th Bomb Squadron.

Anderson adjusted the RPMs and throttle settings on the Allison engines for the slow flight back to Dobodura. He was fascinated by the sight of the burning target. The entire end of the peninsula which constituted Kavieng township was a raging fountain of flames and smoke which reached thousands of feet in the air. The 345th Bomb Group had expended 85,570 rounds of machine gun ammunition and had dropped 281 demolition bombs. Eighteen 500-lb bombs had been jettisoned, only six demos were being returned home. In addition to the "Sugar Charlie" sunk by Keith Daugherty of the 500th, eight or ten float planes had been damaged.

With little other than the smoke from the target visible in the sky, Anderson heard the cryptic radio chatter of the 3rd Bomb Group as it flew through the fire and smoke. The battle between the Fifth Air Force and the Japanese raged anew. Shouts and curses filled the air. If the Japanese had expected a respite after the 345th struck, they were being rather rudely shocked at the moment.

Colonel Richard H. Ellis, later Brigadier General, brought 20 of the "Grim Reapers" into the flak-laden

sky over Kavieng. His Douglas A-20 took a heavy battering and suffered severe damage. Eventually he was to land at the newly-captured airfield at Cape Gloucester.

A single boil of smoke was all that could be seen by Lt Anderson, when the plaintive requests for assistance crackled through his headset. Two A-20s were badly shot up. He glanced at his grid map and noted the positions of the riddled airplanes. They seemed to be farther away from the target than the Mitchells which had been shot down.

Some time later, Lt Anderson happened to glance down. An ugly duckling PBY, under the escort of four Republic P-47s from the 348th Fighter Group, was steadily droning towards Kavieng.

THE STRANDED CREW OF GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY

The Douglas A-20s of the 3rd Bomb Group came flashing through the smoke and fire of what was left of Kavieng. On the water below, Cavin, Kirkland and the rest of the crew of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY paid them little heed, since they were motivated only by a will to survive and put as much distance as possible between themselves and the shoreline.

Fortunately, they were all aboard life rafts, but this was small consolation. As the rafts gently raised to the tops of the heavy swells, the Japanese fired at them. Only moments before their airplane had slipped beneath the water leaving everyone paddling furiously in the bay. Arnett recalled:

"The plan for our squadron was to begin to circle over the harbor with the first flight making a large circle and the next, a little shorter, each flight tacking on as they went. It just so happened that their flight path brought almost every plane over the spot where we were down, and you would have thought they had found another enemy target in the harbor the way they were dropping rafts, flotation kits, first aid kits, etc. on us. One radio operator even got so excited that he pulled the release on the 5-man raft mounted on the top of the fuselage over the radio compartment. It is a wonder it didn't take off the vertical stabilizers when it blew out. We gathered up three 2-man rafts, two flotation food kits and one first aid kit."

Now, with the A-20s gone, only one aircraft remained in the area. Chester A. Coltharp, the 498th CO, chose to remain behind with the downed crews. His Mitchell flew lazily overhead, just out of reach of the Japanese guns. It was providential for Squadron Adjutant Huff, the unauthorized passenger, that the man who chose to remain overhead was the same man who would have said a firm, "No," to his request to fly the mission. Huff reported these moments:

"After dropping the equipment, all but one of the planes took off for home. This one stayed over us for cover. We continued to paddle slowly away from shore. The Japanese stood on the shore and shot at us, but their aim was poor. They did splash a light spray on us a time or two, but nothing came dangerously close. At one point they started out to pick us up in a small boat, but it was promptly strafed and sunk by the plane which remained over us for cover. This apparently discouraged them completely, because they didn't attempt another effort.

"We, of course, had all agreed that if we were captured by the Japanese we would give only our names, ranks and serial numbers. I am glad we did not have to become involved in carrying out this agreement. It made me feel good to be a part of a crew such as ours. In spite of the pain that several of the boys must have been in, they all seemed more concerned about the other men than about their own injuries, and there was a rapid fire of humorous comment going on constantly."

How much time had passed since the ditching, no one was able to recall, but it was MacCready who first spotted the silhouette of the single-engined fighter high on the horizon. "Here comes the Japs!" he yelled; and the entire crew splashed back into the water in case the Jap strafed them. While they warily eyed the fast-approaching fighter, they noticed low on the horizon the squat, ugly profile of the PBY. The fighter had been a Thunderbolt. Rescue was at hand.

CAPTAIN KEITH DOUGHERTY, 500th BOMB SQUADRON

The takeoff from dirt strip no. 3 at Dobodura had long since passed when Keith Dougherty decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and he gently but firmly exerted his authority and took over the controls of the B-25 from Lt Bill Ames. Captain Dougherty had decided to check out Lt Ames as a first pilot on the mission to Kavieng, but the sudden appearance of a flaming oil drum which gracefully arched over the starboard wing of the Mitchell decided Dougherty. He took over from Ames, and it is apparent Ames did not see fit to argue the point.

Dougherty looked back just once. Lt Hecox' plane took a direct hit and cartwheeled into the target from an altitude of about 50 feet. With all guns chattering and with the 500-lb bombs tumbling away from the bomb bay, Dougherty guided the B-25 to the comparative safety of the bay. Here, he brought his plane into formation to begin the long flight home. Six hours, 30 minutes later, Dougherty wearily set down at strip no. 3. Then, in Dougherty's words:

"At interrogation we could account for everyone except Captain Hochella who was 'C' Flight Leader. By checking closely where he had last been seen, I had a very good idea of where he could be found, if still alive. There was a string of low islands not far from the coast of New Ireland and Kavieng, and I knew that if he could, he would make one of those islands."

LT NATHAN G. GORDON, NAVY PATROL SQUADRON 34

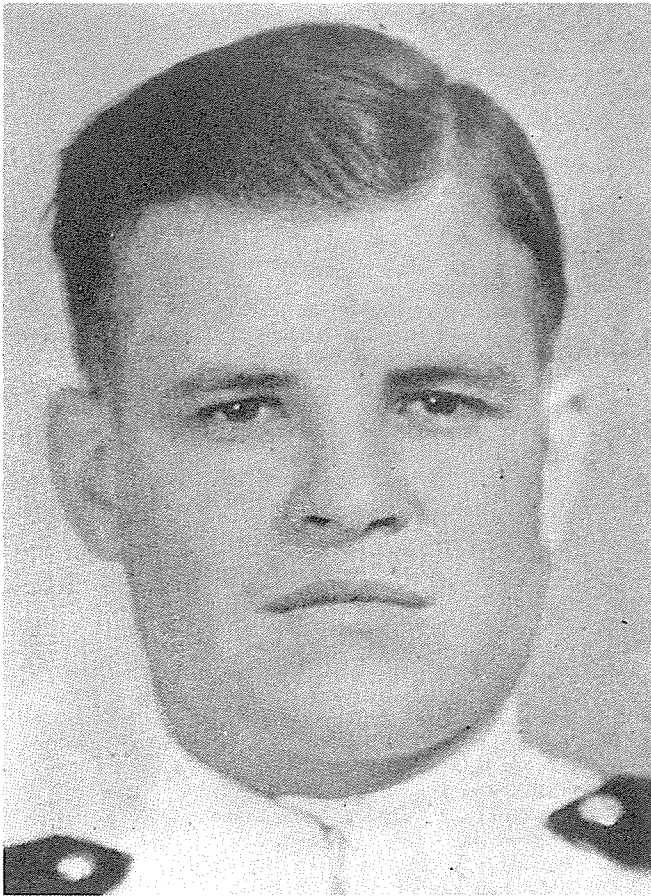
Lt Gordon and his crew began an immediate search for the survivors of downed aircraft. The cumbersome PBY droned close to the fiery holocaust that once was the strong Japanese base of Kavieng. Because of radio conversations with Chester A. Coltharp and Tony Chiappe, Lt Gordon was aware that this rescue mission would require more than one water landing on the mountainous swells of the bay, but neither Gordon nor his co-pilot Ens. Leu R. Fulmer understood the enormity of their task. Before the day was to end, Gordon, Ens Fulmer, John A. Kelly, Walter A. Patrick and crewmen Wiley R. Routon, Jr., Joseph R. Germeau, John Brately, A. G. Alexander, Robert Murch and Paul J. Wodnick would enter the house of death four times, and then as if by a miracle, be allowed to return to the world of the living.

About a mile and a half off the coast, a drifting life raft was discovered wallowing in a large expanse of dye marker. Neither Gordon nor his alert crewmen could ascertain any sign of life on or near the raft, but Gordon understood how difficult it was to see a man in the water even from as slow a plane as his faithful Dumbo. He could not ignore the seemingly abandoned raft. There might be someone beneath it.

At his command, two smoke bombs were dropped at the site of the raft. He brought the PBY down to the water where it struck with a tremendous thud. Water exploded over and around the aircraft. Water began to leak into the plane through sprung rivets in the bottom of the hull.

Lt Gordon taxied the plane closer to the shoreline and the drifting life raft, but a close examination disclosed no survivors. He and Fulmer urged the PBY back into the air.

With water streaming away from the hull and with



Lt Nathan G. Gordon of Patrol Squadron 34, U. S. Navy

the plane dangerously close to the Japanese base, Gordon's radio was filled with the chatter of the P-47 fighter pilots, Chester Coltharp and Tony Chiappe. Following radio instructions, Gordon eased the Consolidated PBY closer to the shoreline where another life raft was spotted. It contained the crew of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY. The badly burned MacCready watched the PBY as Gordon brought it in from the west. All of the crew had seen the PBY land near the first life raft, and they suffered silently as the faithful Catalina dragged itself back into the air. Now it turned straight for them. The engines idled back. Once again the PBY miraculously survived another thunderous water landing.

Another element of danger presented itself. The Japanese were now firing on the rescue plane. It fell to the lot of the badly burned MacCready to catch the rope thrown to the life raft. Since the idling PBY was steadily moving away from the drifting raft, the rope dragged through his blackened hands, but in spite of the agonizing pain, he refused to relinquish his grasp on the thin line that was the difference between capture or survival.

Lt Gordon could see that it would be impossible to haul in the life raft so long as the engines of his plane continued to pull the aircraft forward. MacCready was still hanging on grimly, but it seemed apparent that he could not retain his grip on the rope much longer.

In moments like these, terrifying decisions are made, decisions which call for more than simple courage. Nathan G. Gordon, a Naval Lieutenant from Morrilton, Arkansas, made such a decision. He switched off the engines of the PBY! Then, in MacCready's words:

"The sailor in the blister was a big, young kid. When we were alongside the aircraft, he just reached down and grabbed me by the hair on my head and thrust me into the aircraft. I recall having seen the pilot,

Gordon, stick his head and shoulders through the escape hatch and instruct the co-pilot about trying to start the number two engine which had quit." (MacCready was unaware that both engines were silent because Gordon had deliberately switched them off.)

With all the men of GREMLIN'S HOLIDAY safely aboard, Gordon and Fulmer worked through the engine start procedure. Both engines coughed into life. The crewmen of the PBY and the B-25 waited tensely as the Catalina battered its way through the rolling swells.

No sooner was the aircraft in the air than Lt Gordon received another radio call about additional downed crewmen. Once again the PBY made a tooth-rattling landing and again Gordon stopped the engines as his crewmen hauled in 1st Lt E. E. Benson, his co-pilot and his navigator. It was a day of miracles. The engines roared into life. The PBY lifted ponderously into the sky.

It was a very close thing this time because the infuriated Japanese had fired continuously at the rescue plane and had succeeded in bracketing its motionless form with several shots.

Overhead 1st Lt Theodore S. Wood and his fellow P-47 fighter pilots, Lts Maxwell, Frankfort and Overly, searched the air for any approaching Japanese fighters. None appeared.

The Catalina steadily droned away from the harbor guns and headed for Finschafen and safety. Back in the hull, Ens Kelly was administering first aid to the wounded.

Gordon had just started to relax when his radio brought him a final call from the still circling B-25 of Chester Coltharp. Coltharp had discovered a final life raft with six men aboard. This raft contained William J. Cavoli and his injured crew.

The stage was set for a final, dramatic climax to the rescue mission. Gordon did not hesitate. With 19 men packed into the PBY, he turned back to Kavieng. It was a 20 mile return flight.

He found Captain Cavoli and his crewmen approximately 600 yards offshore. The only way Gordon could land near them was to fly directly over the shoreline of Kavieng. Having thrice visited this highly inhospitable area, Lt Gordon was well aware that the day of miracles was fast coming to an end. By taking this unavoidable flight pattern, he was asking for a miracle which had been denied the survivors of the downed Mitchell bombers. He was gambling that his impossibly slow moving PBY could pass over the enemy flak positions without being shot down.

Over the beach he made his final, low approach-turn to the raft. The engines idled back. Now the PBY encountered the same murderous gunfire previously directed at the low-level bombers. It cracked and banged around the thin shell aircraft, but somehow the plane slipped through unscathed.

On the water, Cavoli found it difficult to believe that the PBY could survive the difficult landing which occurred before him, but it did!

For the last time, Lt Nathan G. Gordon stopped the engines of the plane. Cavoli's crew was dragged inside while outside Japanese shore batteries and dual-purpose guns boomed shells at the inert flying boat. The drum-fire of shells reached a frantic tempo but failed to strike the plane. Water spouts pocked the sea around the silent aircraft.

What Gordon's thoughts were at the moment that first one and then the other engine sputtered into life, is not known. Perhaps there was a silent prayer of hope, hope that now the vastly overloaded and leaking PBY could lift into the air. Failure to become airborne would mean capture by the Japanese. What would follow would not be pleasant.

Lt Gordon shoved forward on the throttles. The PBY moved forward sluggishly. The hurt and wounded were propped up or lying down in every available space and, as the lunging Catalina smashed through the waves, the

water within the hull sloshed about them.

After an interminable time, Gordon was able to nurse the PBY onto the step. The aircraft lifted into the air and turned toward Finschafen. Overhead the Thunderbolts of the 348th kept careful watch. Coltharp and Chiappe turned their B-25s for home.

While the PBY droned slowly to safety, two of its crewmen bailed with canvas buckets. This activity was to continue for some time. (15) As the flight continued, Cavoli noted:

"Lt Gordon came back and checked the welfare of his passengers, and I was delighted when ham sandwiches, oranges and icewater were passed to us. (Things we had not had since coming to New Guinea.) God bless the Navy! This proved to me once and for all that the U. S. Navy goes only one way--first class!"

Seven and four-tenths hours later, Lt Gordon dropped the PBY down onto the waters near Finschafen. The wounded were taken from the plane and hurried to the 14th Field Hospital for treatment.

While Gordon was bringing the PBY home, Chester A. Coltharp was nursing his plane into the short strip at Cape Gloucester on the island of New Britain. The fuel supply of his Mitchell was virtually non-existent.

KEITH DOUGHERTY, 500th BOMB SQUADRON

The following day Keith Dougherty returned to the Kavieng area. Specifically, the "Rough Raiders" and the "Wolf Pack" of the 345th attacked shipping at New Hanover Island, a short distance from Kavieng. The 433rd Fighter Squadron again supplied them with cover. With a huge freighter sunk and a corvette ignominiously dumped high and dry on a submerged reef by the Rough Raiders, Dougherty struck out for the low-lying islands where Captain Hochella and his crew might be hiding. Dougherty said of this mission years later:

"When the Wolf Pack joined the attack on those vessels, I left the immediate area for further search for Captain Hochella, and it was then that I found this single, large freighter. Having saved one 500 pounder, I was lucky and made a direct waterline hit. I can still remember what must have been 20mms firing at us as we came in on them. Our forward firing fifties took care of that! The freighter rolled over on her side. The stern came out of the water, and under she went."

With an unexpected prize added to the score of the 500th, Keith Dougherty brought the speeding B-25 down to water-top height and curved in toward the tiny islands 10 miles away from the devastated town of Kavieng. Midway down the islands, Dougherty's searching eyes spotted a man shoving a life raft into the water from beneath the overhanging jungle foliage. Dougherty banked the B-25, and during a second pass over the raft, he recognized the green fatigue cap the man was wearing. It was Hochella! At Dougherty's command, a crew member dropped the belly hatch and kicked through a package of emergency rations.

There was jubilation in the 500th Bomb Squadron that afternoon as Dougherty made his report. Hochella was alive, and this probably meant that the rest of the crew was with him. Arrangements were made that evening for a PBY rescue mission.

GARDENIA RESCUE MISSION

Navy Catalina 08492, VP-34, slowly gained flying speed under the deft guidance of Lt O. Simonelli. The water of Langmark Bay at Finschafen slapped at the aluminum hull of the PBY in ever faster beats as Simonelli brought the flying boat onto the step. Water flushed away from the hull at 0815. PBY GARDENIA was in the

air. The date was 17 February 1944, two days after the raid at Kavieng.

The mission was to rescue Captain Michael Hochella and his crew, providing they had not been captured by the Japanese. Captain Keith Dougherty was aboard to guide Simonelli's PBY to the island chain.

At 0900 Simonelli turned the PBY into an orbiting circle offshore from Sakar Island. At 0925 he spotted his fighter escort. He rolled the PBY on course for the final destination. Trouble was to come to the mission just 30 miles from the small island where Hochella and his injured crew were waiting.

Radio silence was broken as the fighters reported low fuel supply and turned for home. The crewmen of GARDENIA wistfully watched the departing fighters. The men in the PBY had no illusions about the vulnerability of their trustworthy aircraft. It was an easy target for Japanese fighters. GARDENIA was in the backyard of the Japanese, without protection. The weather was excellent. There wasn't a single cloud into which the lumbering Catalina could duck in the event it was bounced by fighters.

Keith Dougherty was standing between Simonelli and his co-pilot as Simonelli examined the islands below. There could be no error in the landing. At 1130 GARDENIA dropped onto the water and taxied up to the waiting raft with Hochella's crew aboard.

A crewman threw a line to the raft. Since the PBY was so close to the Japanese base at Kavieng without covering fighter support, Simonelli did not dare stop the engines. In the ensuing tug of war between the sailor in the blister and the men on the raft, one of Hochella's crewmen fell from the raft and began to drift away. As the man's efforts to stay afloat weakened, ARM2c Schorer dived into the water and supported him until the rest of Captain Hochella's crew were in the PBY.

GARDENIA had been on the water for 30 minutes. If there were any Japanese troops in the vicinity they surely must have reported the rescue mission. Simonelli gunned the engines and wheeled the Catalina around to pick up Schorer and the injured man. Eager hands tugged and hauled the two men through the waist gun blister. With a bellowing roar, the PBY surged into its takeoff run.

The wounded waited restlessly. Keith Dougherty moved among them administering first aid. At 1210, GARDENIA lifted into the air for the long trip back to Finschafen.

Simonelli called for fighter cover, but there was no acknowledgment, nor did any fighters ever appear. The PBY droned on while the gunners remained alert at their stations. Nothing happened. At 1400, Lt O. Simonelli dropped GARDENIA back into Langmark Bay at Finschafen. (16)

EPILOGUE

"Mission to Kavieng" was totally and irrevocably concluded with aftermaths both good and bad. One sad consequence of the raid occurred at the now impotent base at Kavieng. In March of 1944, Japanese troops under the command of Captain Ryukichi Tamura executed all of the Australian internees. The Japanese, according to statements made during war criminal trials after the war, felt that the February raids, and subsequent naval bombardments, were the prelude to an invasion. Apparently they panicked.

The war would soon move on. Admiral Halsey's 3rd New Zealand Division stormed ashore at Green Island with complete success. MacArthur would soon land the 1st Cavalry at Lorengau and Momote Harbor in the Admiralty Islands with relatively little aerial opposition. Other major landings at Hollandia, Biak Island and Morotai Island, as well as many others, would follow--all leading back to the Philippine Islands.

Other big raids by the 345th, the 38th and the 3rd would be flown, and many rescue missions would be undertaken by Nathan Gordon and Lt Simonelli, but Kavieng, 15 February 1944, would remain in their memories as the

highlight of the war.

General Ennis C. Whitehead paid the participants of the Kavieng raid their finest tribute when he said in 1962, "After the Kavieng raid (of which you are writing) the Japs never mounted even a small raid from that base."

After the raid, the wounded were gradually rotated back to their outfits as they became physically fit. Those too seriously hurt, or eligible for rotation home, were sent back to the United States.

Many awards were given for the acts of bravery over Kavieng. Chester A. Coltharp was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. He survived the war only to die in 1947 in a Boeing B-47 crash. Captain Anthony Chiappe received the Silver Star. William Cavoli made a career of the Air Force which led to the position of Air Liaison Officer to the American Ambassador in Guatemala in 1962.

Huff returned to the insurance business, and Arnett went home to his farm in Oklahoma. Carroll Anderson re-entered the retail photography business. Nathan Gordon entered politics and became the Lt Governor of the State of Arkansas. This was a far cry from that day in New Guinea when he solemnly stood at attention and became the first naval officer in the Southwest Pacific area to receive the highest award the United States of America can give, The Congressional Medal of Honor. The award was presented by Vice-Admiral Thomas C. Kincaid, Commander of the Seventh Fleet. Gordon earned it!

FOOTNOTES:

- (1) THEY FOUGHT WITH WHAT THEY HAD, Walter D. Edmonds, Atlantic Little
- (2) GENERAL KENNEY REPORTS, General George C. Kenney, Duell, Sloan and Pierce
- (3) THE SAGA OF PAPPY GUNN, General George C. Kenney, Duell, Sloan and Pierce
- (4) COCONUT BOMBING, Lt Col. Howard S. Elmore, Air Force Magazine
- (5) Letter, Fred Arnett, 345th Bomb Group
- (6) Letters, Generals Kenney and Ennis Whitehead
- (7) CARTWHEEL: THE REDUCTION OF RABAU, Military History Department of the Army
- (8) Letter, General George C. Kenney
- (9) Letters, Generals Kenney and Ennis Whitehead
- (10) OFFICIAL 345th BOMB GROUP COMBAT REPORT, Feb. 1944
- (11) Letter, General Ennis Whitehead
- (12) From the Log Book of Carroll R. Anderson
- (13) THE FALCONS--HISTORY OF THE 498th BOMB SQUADRON
- (14) Letters, Arnett, Chiappe, Cavoli
- (15) Personal Experience, Kavieng Mission, Carroll R. Anderson
- (16) Letter, Nathan G. Gordon, Lt Governor State of Arkansas, THE DELTA, Sigma Nu Fraternity publication, Fall 1962
- (17) Letter, Keith Dougherty. Official Report by Lt Simonelli, Naval Patrol Squadron 34

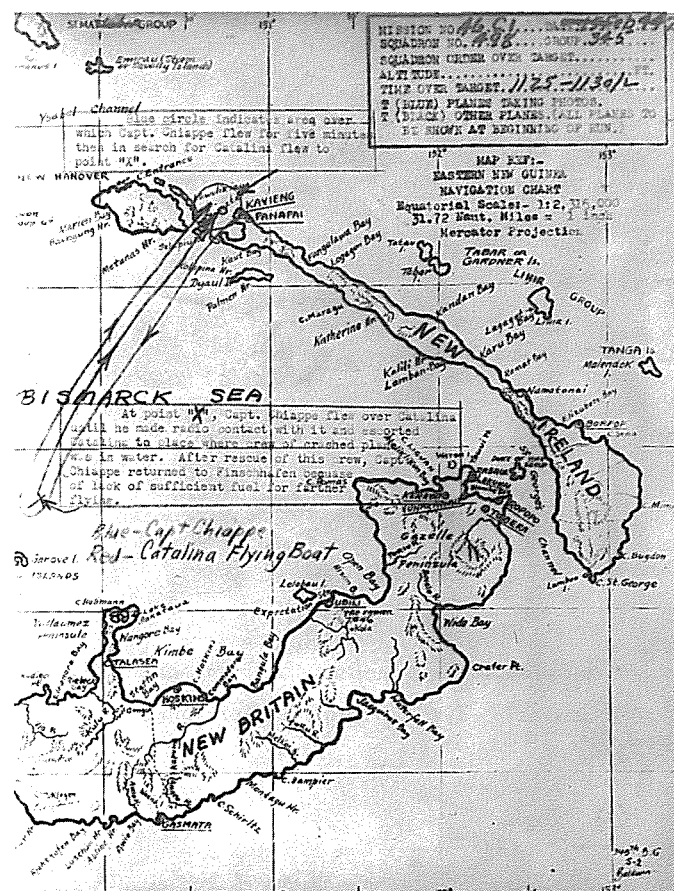
OTHER SOURCE MATERIAL:

LETTERS: Fred Arnett, R. G. Huff, L. B. Herbst, Dale Speicher, Cliff Hanna, Anthony Chiappe, Keith Dougherty, David MacCreedy, William Cavoli, Richard H. Ellis, Nathan G. Gordon, General Orvil Anderson.

AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR 1939-1945, AIR WAR AGAINST JAPAN 1943-1945, THE JAPANESE THRUST, ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE 1939-1942, HELL IN THE HEAVENS, OFFICIAL COMBAT REPORTS OF THE 345th BOMBARDMENT GROUP, 38th BOMBARDMENT GROUP, 348th FIGHTER GROUP, SHORT HISTORY 475th FIGHTER GROUP, OFFICIAL UNITED STATES BOMBING SURVEY, OFFICIAL COMBAT REPORT: 90th BOMB SQUADRON, 345th BOMB GROUP HISTORY, MACARTHUR AND THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN, THE 5th OVER THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, THE MENACE FROM MORESBY.

The author would like to express special thanks to the following for their patience, understanding and assistance:

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Map from the 498th Bomb Squadron of the 345th Bomb Group showing some of the details of the Mission to Kavieng. The Blue and Red lines referred to are the arrowed lines extending down from Kavieng--the outer lines are Blue, and the inner line is Red. Dobodura was about 500 miles south-southwest of Kavieng, well off this map.

General Orvil Anderson, Air Force Historical Foundation, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Detachment 1, Aeronautical Chart & Information Center, Washington, D. C.

Albert Gruer, Jr.

Cliff Hanna

John R. Baeta

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Carroll R. "Bob" Anderson is not new to JOURNAL readers. Many will remember his fine article, "Black Sunday", which appeared in the Summer 1960 issue and told the story of another memorable mission in the southwest Pacific. For the last several years Bob has been researching to develop and tell as much of the total story of Kavieng, 15 February 1944, as time and diligence would allow. In doing this, he emerges as one of the top writers of WW II aviation, for he brings together in his work two priceless ingredients--the painstaking eye of the historian and the knowledge of a man who was part of the things he writes about.