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Dear Dwight,

I was surprised and happy to receive your monograph yesterday and began reading it immediately. When I reached the part where you say that most of the time you flew co-pilot to Bob Miller that gave me a bit of a jolt, so I fast forwarded to the part where you recounted your recollections of the October 24th Rabaul mission. I wondered where you were on that mission because I was on that one with Bill Webster and remembered Miller's loss. You and I have something in common. By some strange and fortuitous set of circumstances we both missed being shot down on Rabaul missions; you by having been detached to the 89th and I by being with Bill Webster rather than Maj Wilkins on Nov 2nd.. When I arrived in Dobo, about the 30th of August I was apparently a problem. I had two strikes against me; first, I was already a 1st Lt with 7 months seniority, and second I was, (horrors) a West Pointer. The 13th, 89th, and 90th Sqs would not accept me at all, but Maj Wilkins did. Perhaps because he had grown up in the Army Air Corps. I think his father had been a Sergeant. When I went to the 8th, Maj Wilkins invited me to his shack for a little chat. He said, 'I think you will agree it might not be appropriate to make you a flight leader immediately with flight officers and 2nd Lts with 35 or 40 missions as your wingmen.' I couldn't argue with that, and he went on saying, 'I will do my best to have you get the necessary experience as soon as possible so that you can take your proper place in the squadron.' With that in mind he had me designated as his normal co-pilot. When that situation became known most of the olders boys thought that was hilarious as everyone knew that Wilkins always led the hairiest missions. I flew the first Rabaul mission with him. My recollection of that one is much like yours, a great and highly success mission. Interesting thing happened as we left the strip and were over the water. Off to or left there was a small sail boat. Wilkins tried to get onto it by making a steep side slip toward it. It seemed to me we would couldn't make that without hitting the water. Without thinking I grabbed the control column and pulled it out. Maj Wilkins later told me that was probably a good idea and didn't complain at all. When the Oct 24th mission came along Wilkins was down at Rockhampton on leave visiting his fiancée Bill Webster took me along as co-pilot. When the Simpson Harbour was scheduled Maj Wilkins had not returned so I was scheduled again with Bill Webster. I understood that Maj Wilkins heard the mission was on and hurried back to New Guinea. When he returned we had already spent two mornings on the strip with engines turning waiting for a favorable weather report. Of course Maj Wilkins replaced Bill Webster in the squadron lead but did not change the crew assignments. He picked poor Murphy as co-pilot and took my navigator, Howard Bunce, along because he had done a good job bringing the squadron down over a solid undercast after the Oct 15 mission was aborted. I think that was called running a sun line. When I arrived at Dobo in late August I, and my crew, moved into the tent with Bob Miller. Two months and a few days later I was the only one left.

The Cape Gloucester destroyers were, in fact, sunk. In one of the publications I have there is a picture of one of them lying on its side with a number of crewmen lying on it trying to survive. Never heard whether anyone finished them off with the forward firing '50s. That would have been like shooting fish in a barrel. I remember the USO show with Gary Cooper. I remember it was not the greatest. He gave his Lou Gehrig retirement speech in Yankee Stadium bit. That's all I remember. I wonder who the genius was who invented 'tropical' butter. I remember the specs said the melting point was 120 deg. No wonder it would not melt in the human body. Might have made a good substitute for axle grease. Understood well your view on the aborted 15 Oct Rabaul raid. There seemed to be a standard pattern every time we hit a big, new target where we achieved great surprise. The first mission was led by the big wigs, group commanders, etc but the day after follow-up one was graciously turned over to the lower ranking ops officers and flight leaders. You noted that Bob Miller's last mission was his 60th. I can't argue about that as I didn't really know. The story I heard was that it was his 51st, because he wanted to get the DFC, and as most people got the Air Medal at 25 which didn't count toward the 50 necessary for the DFC. We heard lots of stories, rumours, gossip, etc but I have long discounted most of them. The only things I am really sure of are the things I actually saw and heard personally.

I got a kick out of your comments on our lack of flight manual, etc. I remember when we were to check out in the A-20 we had three hours of instruction; one hour with the dash-one (the squadron had only one), one hour briefing down on the line in the ops shack, and a one hour cockpit check. Then off to shoot landings. My Form 5 shows 5 training flights. I think two of them were transition, touch and goes and the others were strafing and practice skip bombing followed by a couple of formation flying sessions; and then right into regular missions. As you remember the early ones were not particularly rigorous, mostly ground support and coconut tree bashing. I remember one that had the potential for being somewhat interesting. One day we were scheduled for Cape Gloucester in support of the marine landing there. I was the spare on that one. No one dropped out, but I tagged along anyway. Seemed to be a waste of time to take off and not do the mission. When we arrived at our designated target area the squadron broke into a single file circular pattern and made, I think, three circuits before leaving. Because I wasn't supposed to be there, they didn't let me in the pattern. After they left I made my circuits. I remember coming off one of them and finding a single seat fighter in front of me I pulled up and let a few rounds go at him. I recognized it as a P-39 but let the rounds go anyway. He broke off and went somewhere. Daresay he didn't have any more business there than I did. About then things became interesting. There was a lot of chatter on the radio about a lot of Japanese airplanes coming down from Rabaul. I gave a few moments thought of going to see the fun, but as I had little ammunition left and only two guns firing, discretion took the better part of valor. I headed back to Dobo. I remember I put the power up to the climb settings, 2100 rpm and 30 inches I think, and began a slow descent toward the water. By the time I reached the coast of New Britain I was indicating 325 mph. Even so I never caught up with the squadron. I remember there were some B-25's there from the 38th Gp directly in support of the marines. Their commander, a Lt Col Tanberg, thought he was a fighter pilot and tried to chase a Japanese fixed gear type.

Unfortunately he made his pass over the marine landing area, and the marines shot him down. Fortunately he survived by ditching at sea. I did a later spare flight and carried on to Wewak. As I didn't have a proper spot in the formation I hung on at the left side of the formation. That put me right over the hospital up on the hill overlooking the airfield. I wondered if it were really a hospital or not because there was a machine gun pit underneath it from which I could see two or three guns firing at me. Don't know whether I hit anyone there but at least scared them pretty much.

You were lucky on the 'Black Sunday' mission, logging only 6 hours and 20 minutes. My time was an even 7 hours. Sometime ago, 1995 I think, I made a three day stop in Bangkok on a special UAL circle tour which allowed 5 stop-overs and cost about the same as a round trip from the US to Japan and back. Claringbould was with the Australian embassy at that time. We didn't exactly hit it off for a variety of reasons. I observed to him that it seemed that every new group that arrived, regardless of their training, dedication, and all that seemed to initially have a spell of bad luck. Seemed they had to be 'blooded' a bit before they settled down. Claringbould seemed to have a sentimental attachment to the 312th as had come to the states and met a lot of their people while he was doing the research on his book. I provided him with a lot of corrections to the thing as we saw it. Don't think he appreciated it, but the later editions of the book are a little better.

September 25

Finally found a picture of one of the Gloucester destroyers. It was on the back cover of one of the 5th AF series called 'Impact.' Took it to a reproduction place, and they did the best they could with it. I think I once had a print of that picture, but it has disappeared along with a lot of other stuff. My past files are completely mixed up and scattered around all over the place. Have meant to get all that stuff straightened up but will probably never get around to it. I've enclosed the best copy I have.

Seems to me I've run on long enough. Don't know whether you will make next months Las Vegas trip or not. The only ones I know of our vintage are Ed Shook, Ed Ransier, Martin Radnik, and Ben Rogala. That one may be the last one I hit. I'm beginning to creak a little bit and am finding it harder to get around. Thanks again for your New Guinea year book. I kept a diary from Dobo through Nadzab but much more after that. If I don't see you in Las Vegas

Take care,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Andy".