

EXACT COPY

Sunday June 6, 1942

Reporting Pilot - Wilhelm George Esders, CAP, U. S. Navy
Plane - TBD-1 Position in Squadron - #2 First Section
Radioman - R. B. Brazier, ARM2c U. S. Navy

At approximately 1040, June 4, 1942, Torpedo Squadron Three departed USS YORKTOWN to attack Japanese ships. Carriers being our first objective. The squadron rendezvous was made and we proceeded to our objective in company of Bombing Squadron Three. We started climbing as soon as the squadron completed the rendezvous, climbing to 1500 feet which was the base of the scattered clouds. At about 1105, six fighters from Fighting Squadron Three joined us.

At 1133 we sighted three dense columns of smoke to our northwestward, distance about 20 to 25 miles, at which time we changed course in that direction. We also started to climb again as we were out of the clouds.

The squadron commander lead the squadron to the northern side of the enemy force. We were at an altitude of 2600 feet. When about 14-18 miles from the enemy carriers, 2 Jap fighters commenced attacking us. The squadron remained in combat formation throughout our approach. After the first attack, the squadron leader started maneuvering considerably loosing and gaining altitude slightly and increasing speed. When approximately 10 miles out, 2 more Jap fighters joined in the fight. At this time I was very engrossed in watching the squadron leader due to our maneuvering and was unable to observe the ships and their movements very well. We proceeded to loose altitude and increased our speed until we were about 1500 above the water. Several more Jap fighters joined in the engagement. Six to eight Jap fighters continually made attacks during our approach. We were forced to get low before we desired to start our initial approach, therefore being at a handicap due to the lack of speed. When approximately one mile from the carrier our leader apparently expected to attack, his plane was hit and it crashed into the sea in flames. At the same time he was hit I had to maneuver very violently to avoid tracer bullets from a Jap plane. We made our final turn of our approach and I saw another plane of our formation crash in flames. In the final stages of our attack, I saw only five planes drop their torpedoes. We completed our attack a few minutes after 1200, including my own. Throughout our approach over the screen we were under heavy AA fire, which appeared to be very ineffective, most of it bursting approximately 800 to 1000 feet beyond the formation. In the early stages of our approach, my plane was hit by gunfire from a Jap fighter causing the CO2 fire bottle just forward of my knees to explode. In making our torpedo drops we were under constant

automatic gun fire from the carrier, which appeared to be ineffective. We dropped our torpedoes between six and eight hundred yards from the target. At this time my radioman called me over the interphone and said he was hit and would be of no further use to ward off fighter attacks. Immediately after dropping my torpedo, I turned to my right to clear the ship by several hundred yards. The other four planes crossed directly ahead of the bow of the carrier, one of them crashing into the sea, fighters were still making continuous attacks on us. Due to continuous fighter attacks I was unable to observe the torpedo tracks or if we scored any hits.

In making my retreat I was attacked by two fighters immediately after I started my turn to the right. They each made two or three passes at me, then two otherfighters came in from ahead, one from the bow and other from dead ahead. At that time I was approximately 10 to 12 miles from the carrier we attacked. Two more Jap fighters started making passes at us, one from the port and the other from ahead. They continued to make passes at us until we were about 20 miles from our objective, the fighters then retired toward the Jap fleet. I noticed another TBD-1 approaching me from the stern. It was T-3. He signaled his radio was out of commission. The fuselage of his plane was covered with oil and his engine apparently pumping oil badly. He joined on me and we proceeded on our return. At this time I became aware of the fact that my port fuel tank had been pierced, there was also a leaking fuel line inside the cockpit. On checking I had only 10 gallons of fuel left in the port tank. I immediately switched to my port tank, using fuel from the port tank until it was empty. I had lost about 55 gallons of fuel. the engine performed very satisfactory throughout the operation. During the approach and retirement, I was using full throttle, turning up 2050 RPM at 36 to 37 inches Mercury. Realizing I had about 30 to 35 gallons of fuel, I leaned my mixture to the minimum and throttled back to 23 inches of Mercury, speed about 85 knots indicated. My aileron tab control was inoperative.

After careful observation of the sky for enemy planes, I started climbing for the clouds. I requested my radioman to change coils in the radio receiver so we could pickup the YE. He stated he was in a very bad condition and doubted he could do that. I replied "very well." Approximately ten minutes later he notified me he had changed the coil for me to change dial setting to 79. This I did, but did not hear the YE. T-3 continued with me for a short time and then took a course off to my starboard. After about 20 minutes I lost sight of him and did not see him again. After climbing to 5500 feet the YE came in. I was off course about 10 degrees to the Port. Leveling off at this altitude, resetting the mixture and throttle. Keeping Very close check on the fuel supply. At about 1340 my fuel gauge registered empty. Shortly thereafter I felt very enlightened by sighting our fleet. Continuing at the same altitude, I sighted 18 Jap Dive Bombers to the starboard about 4 or 5 miles. I immediately nosed over and headed for the clouds. Proceeding under the clouds for

several minutes I saw three Jap Dive Bombers planes crash into the sea. At this time the engine stopped. I immediately radioed to the YORKTOWN that I was making a water landing giving my bearing of 270 and distance 10 miles. Putting the flaps down and making a full stall landing. The plane immediately started settling nose down. I then tripped the flotation gear. It worked very satisfactory. My radioman called for assistance. I helped him out of the cockpit and noticed he was very badly injured. I proceeded to inflate the rubber life raft, at which time I noted that the hood covering over the second cockpit had numerous bullet holes in it. I got the raft out and found it had a hole in it. Upon inflating the rubber raft, I found it was sufficiently buoyant to hold my radioman. I assisted him in the raft, gave him a drink of water and made an attempt to patch the hole, which I found to be a very futile task due to the impossibility of keeping the area to be patched dry.

I noted by my wrist watch that we landed at 1403, as my watch stopped at that time. An SBD came by at that time and dropped a float light and proceeded toward the YORKTOWN. Sometime later two more SBD's came by and dropped float lights. One of them I recognized as B-1. My radioman was suffering considerable, complaining about his back. I found he had been hit in both legs between the knee and ankle, and also hit in the back. He died shortly thereafter while in the raft. While in the water a Jap Dive Bomber passed astern and turned around starting toward us. I assumed he was going to strafe us. I immediately submerged beside my plane. An F4F came out of the clouds and attacked the Jap Bomber. It retired into the clouds. We were picked up by the USS HAMMENN at 1525, after being in the water approximately one hour and twenty-five minutes. The ships crew sunk the plane by piercing the flotation bags with small caliber gun fire. At that time I noticed blood running down my forehead. Later, I assumed I apparently cut my head during my landing.

BRAZIER was buried at sea the following morning.

The Zero fighters all carried belly fuel tanks. Several jettisoned them prio to starting their attacks. While only two fighters were attacking us they made most approaches from the side over head. After more fighters joined the attack they were making attacks from ahead, astern and both sides simultaneously. They appeard to favor runs from dead ahead.

I was able to avoid considerable fighter gun fire by watching the tracer bullets, making my decision to turn toward or away from the attacking plane. My retreat was made at an altitude of about 50 to 75 feet.

After landing in the water, I noted that there was a great number of holes in the plane, from small caliber and cannon fire.

Following is a diagram of our attack track, the Jap fleet disposition as I saw it and my retirement track. There are numerous surface ships that I can not place properly as my time for observation was limited:

CARRIER ON FIRE
A SOLID SHEET OF FLAMES



ABOUT 10 to 12
MILES

T T LAST I SAW OF
SQUADRON
CARRIER APPARENTLY
NOT DAMAGED. VT-3
MADE ATTACK.



ABOUT 1
to 2 MILES

CARRIER
DENSE CLOUD
OF SMOKE ABOVE
& AROUND IT.



BB
or
CA.

DD
DD