

pilots, realizing we were near desperate having gone beyond our normal range. Others were dribbling in and finally we three were in position to come aboard; Gus would be the first of us. Gus' engine cut out in the arresting gear and his plane had to be pushed forward—he was out of gas. I came in second, caught a wire, and taxied forward—they told me my SBD had less than 5 gallons in the last tank. Ray, who was to land after me, approached the carrier to land and his engine quit short of the Hornet; he went in the drink and was pulled out by the guard destroyer. It was a close call!

MIDWAY—JUNE 6TH

On the morning of the third Midway day—June 6th, our task force with our two carriers was still pursuing the fleeing Japanese force. The Enterprise had the search duty and between 7 and 8 in the AM, they located a group of ships including two Mogami class cruisers. We on the Hornet immediately put an attack group of 15 SBDs together to be led by our Group commander. Our VS-8 skipper's plane was down and Widhelm led us. We climbed to about 14,000 feet (the climb the first day to 19,000 on oxygen was a disaster) where we would not need oxygen and readied ourselves for an attack. We had no VF with us but didn't feel we needed them. We got to a point of intercept with the enemy ships and they started putting up AA that was not very close. It looked like quick-blooming black popcorn; it was blossoming over their ships when Widhelm called to the group commander and alerted him to the ships cutting white wakes below. No answer came from the group commander out ahead of us, nor did he initiate any attack. Gus called again describing the ships below and still nothing happened. The stupid AGC, without looking outside to see the AA or the ships down below called "Authenticate—Authenticate!" We had a very cumbersome authentication system that would have taken minutes, so Gus quickly initiated our attack dive without further permission, saying, "I'm taking my squadron in!" He didn't need anything more than what he saw, to go after the Japanese force below before it was too late. (The AGC never did make his dive although he had a 1000-pound bomb aboard.) A young ensign, Don Griswold, was flying in number 3 position with Gus and me, and as we pushed over I looked across at him and watched his 1000 pounder drift away. He had inadvertently pickled his bomb away in his nervousness. (He was not aware of this and made his dive into the AA as if he were carrying a bomb.)

My dive went well on the large battle cruiser and my gunner reported that I got a hit. The Mogami class ship was hit a number of times and seemed to be in a bad way when we left for home. Back at the ship there was a degree of elation and jubilation as today—the 6th—we had done our job. Back at the ship, I mentioned the premature release of Griswold's bomb to him so it would not happen the next time and he broke into tears. I was almost sorry I had. Without much of a wait, we SBDs on the Hornet got ready to mount a second attack on the cruiser force; the Enterprise was out putting in its SBD attack, sandwiching their attack in between our two hops. The makeup of this second wave of ours was much the same as the first and again Griswold and I would fly on the exec—Gus. As we left the ready room for the planes Gus on the QT came to me and said "Kirk; I know you want to make this hop, but I'm pretty sure the skipper will "down" his plane, and we have to get him a medal. If your plane is OK, I'm going to send word to the skipper to use your plane—Sorry and Thanks". Sure enough the skipper's plane was reported by him "down", (he had seven kids at home) and he had to take my "good" plane that I had already checked. The second flight went off about noon, but I was not with it, but our skipper was. Also with that second flight was Griswold, but he did not return. I have often wondered that if he were so intent on making up for the premature release at altitude in the morning flight, that he tried too hard on the later flight. After the war, Griswold's family wanted to communicate with me about Don. It seemed to be their intent to write a book about "Griswold, the WW II hero"—but I couldn't help much. No book was ever written.

With the battle seemingly over, the mood was lightened even though we had two of our squadrons missing—both VT and VF. We on the Hornet had not done well, but thank God, the other outfits did. Perhaps we were being reserved for something later. The skipper was written up for a DFC (as was I) for our efforts on the third day; The Air Group Commander had never made a dive in the three days; he either jettisoned his bomb (2x) or brought his bomb back