

Sharon Edwards
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Douglas Busath

Dear MS. Edwards,

I saw your request in the 307th Group Newsletter. I can give you some information on the circumstances surrounding your father's death, but I am not sure that you would want to hear them.

I flew on that mission as a Navigator in McKenzie's crew, which was a 424th crew. I was a member of the 370th Squadron, but I was flying with McKinzie because my crew had gone home and I was serving as a sort of roving Navigator.

To understand the circumstances, you have to know what the Yap missions were like. Yap was a very long mission and to preserve gas, we used to go in single ships to a little island named Sorrel Island. The reason we went in individual ships was because to fly formation all that distance would burn too much fuel. Formation flying always burned more fuel because every ship except the lead ship had continually to advance and retard throttle settings in order not to lose formation. (You probably have noticed this on the Freeway where driving is a constant process of speeding and slowing in order to maintain the same distance from the car ahead of you.) The procedure was, when you got to Sorrel, which was about one thousand miles from Los Negros, you formed a formation of six ships. This formation was a set of two "Vees" with the second Vee behind and a little below the forward one. At Sorrel, we didn't fool around. We just formed up with the first six ships we found there, and this again was because of fuel conservation. McKenzie had us in the lead ship of the second Vee and to the left of us were Diedrick and Saylor. I don't know which ship was ahead and which behind. The lead ship was piloted by a man whose name I don't want to tell you and the reason for his will come out later.

The Japanese pilots at Yap were good. Possibly the best I saw in the whole of my tour. As we came off the target, the lead ship started a gentle turn to the left in order to get us headed back for Los Negros, but at the same time he put the nose down slightly and we picked up speed—better than fifty miles above cruising speed. At the same time, a Japanese fighter plane came around on a pass from in front of the formation and hit the plane to the right of the formation leader. This started a fire in the number-

one engine, which is the outside engine on the left. It was the biggest fire I have ever seen in an airplane in flight. The flames went back and burned the de-icer boots on the left rudder. The pilot feathered that engine and the fire went out immediately. (I am guessing, but I am sure that the fuel line from the fuel pump to the carburetor had been cut--hence the lack of fire when the engine was feathered.) At the same time, the number three engine on the same ship had been hit, but it was still running but it was losing oil.

The Pilot of the plane that was hit got on the radio and pleaded with the lead ship to slow down as he was on three engines and might lose another engine soon. Here is where the lead Pilot did something incredibly stupid, and this is why I don't want to tell you his name. He must have reached over and pulled back all four throttles and immediately began to lose speed rapidly.

When you lead a formation, the cardinal rule is to do nothing quickly or suddenly, at least without notifying the rest of the formation of what you intend to do. This is because in formation flying, you only know what the ship ahead of you is going to do when you see it happen and sometimes that doesn't give you enough time to take the correct action.

McKenzie saw what was happening and he pulled our throttles back immediately, but we were still overtaking the lead ship and he yelled for the Co-pilot to lower the landing gear which slowed us up sufficiently to avoid the lead ship which was just ahead of us.

Here is where I cannot help you because I don't know whether Diedrick or Sylor was in the forward position. Whoever was, also retarded his throttles and the ship behind was unable to slow enough to avoid contact. The Pilot, whoever he was, pulled back on the stick and tried to avoid the collision by flying above the forward plane, but he, probably, had retarded his throttles and the plane stalled out over the forward plane and the two of them collided and exploded. I am presuming that your father was not a ball gunner, or I would not tell you that the collision popped the ball turret out of the upper plane and the turret fell to the ocean. Other than that, I cannot give you further details as to how the rest of the nineteen men met their deaths.

This story has two endings:

The crew of the plane which was hit had to shut down the second engine because of falling oil pressure. I will never forget the way that Pilot handled the situation. He

got on the radio and in a perfectly calm vice said, "I'm losing oil pressure on number three. When it gets down to fifteen I'm going to feather the SOB. Someone suggested he not wait that long as the oil used to feather the prop came from the engine oil supply and there might not be enough to feather the engine. The Pilot agreed and shut the engine down when the oil pressure got down to twenty-five. The crew then chopped out everything not necessary to make the plane fly, including the ball turret, (and in the process, ruined the plane,) found some engine and flap settings which allowed them to maintain altitude at 112 miles per hour and flew the ship over six hundred miles to a strip which was being built in the forward area. Though the strip was not finished, they landed safely. Of course, the plane never flew again.

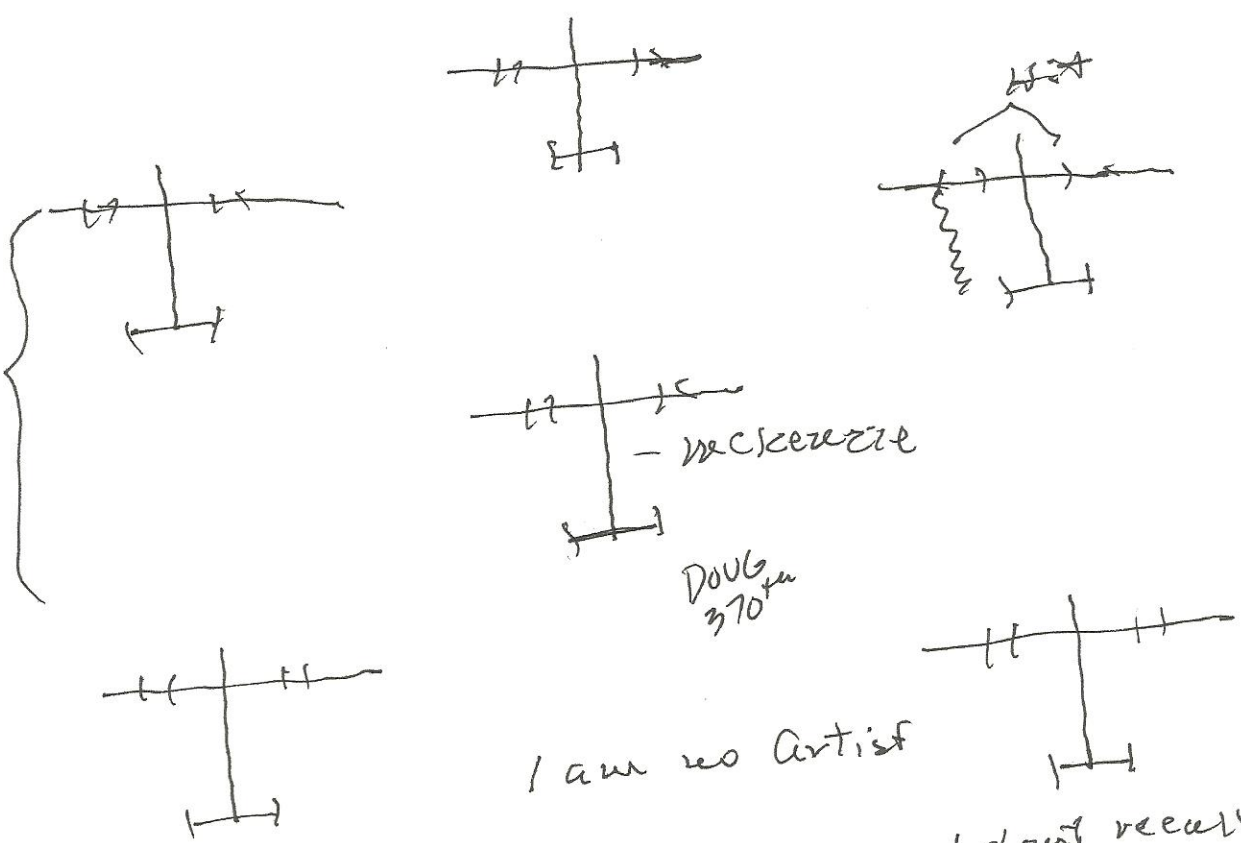
The Pilot who led the formation was killed in one of the Balikpapan raids.

I have drawn a little diagram showing the formation.

Yours very truly,

Douglas C. Busath
DOUGLAS C. BUSATH

Syloz
&
Dietrich



DOUG
370th

I am no Artist

I don't recall whose ship this one was.