

hour from base. Kelley was escorted home by Lt. Thayne, the 370th mission leader. This was the first time the men in Kelley's plane had flown together as a crew.<sup>387</sup>

On July 10th it was back to Yap. There was fighter opposition, phosphorous bombs and flak. A 20mm shell exploded above the right waist window in the plane flown by Lt. Tom Harris(372nd). S/Sgt. James Kendall, radio operator and right waist gunner, was hit twice by shrapnel. These hits could have been fatal except for unusual circumstances. Kendall and George Westlund, both waist gunners on the crew, thought that flak helmets would be a good thing to have. Since the 307th had not received such helmets, the two spent several days pounding their regular G.I. helmet bending it in such a way that it would fit over the earphones. The helmets were tough but after much pounding they were able to bend them enough to get them on, albeit uncomfortable. While heading for Yap, Westlund put on his helmet, but Jim thought it was too much trouble. He kept hitting Kendall on the back and pointing to his head until finally Jim put the helmet on. Before he could snap the strap under his chin and while looking down at Yap to see if a new air strip had any planes on it, the world disappeared in a red swirl of smoke. The 20mm shell had gone through the left side of the plane, through the other waist window door(which was snapped up to the top of the plane) and exploded in the center of Kendall's door which was also snapped to the top. The door was shattered and there were fragments in Jim's right arm and left shoulder, but the flak suit and helmet had stopped most of it. There were twenty-two holes in the plane, most large enough to put a hand through. Kendall was unconscious for about twenty minutes. When he came to he was on the floor and his arm was numb; he was afraid to touch it. He got up, still groggy, snapped what was left of the door to the top of the plane and saw a Zero flash by. He grabbed his gun and let fly, following the Zero until he noticed several flashes in his own plane's wing tip. He stopped firing and called the pilot and asked if he might be washed out for such action. Lt. Harris allowed as how he doubted it at this stage of the game and turned the damage in as flak damage. A day or so later, the crew chief stalked into the pilot's tent and threw a couple of bent .50 caliber slugs on the bunk and snarled a few well chosen words and walked out.<sup>388</sup>

\* On July 13th the mission was to Yap Town. About fifteen fighters came up for the attack five minutes before the bomb run and continued the attack for forty minutes. The A/A fire was heavy, slight and accurate. Phosphorous bombs were dropped accurately when the formation was on the bomb run and several planes were forced to fly through the streamers. One 372nd plane was slightly damaged in the nose and pilot's window. S/Sgt. Clifford Biggerstaff, nose gunner on Capt. Dixon's(372nd) crew got a fighter as did Sgt. Martin L. Hinchey on Lt. Dryer's(372nd) crew. S/Sgt. Illingsworth, top turret gunner on Lt. Dufur's(372nd) crew and S/Sgt. Zeltman, top turret gunner on Lt. Ball's(370th) crew each got credit for a kill.

A few minutes after the bombs were dropped, Lt. Ball's (370th) plane was hit in the #4 engine, and the prop began to windmill. The #1 engine received a direct hit from a 20mm shell and was badly damaged. It was cut off and the prop was feathered. Five interceptors made a series of lazy eights over the crippled plane, closing in from both front, rear and high. These attacks continued until the #2 engine was shot out by 20mm fragments, after which the #2 prop ran away. In the meantime a 20mm shell hit to the left of the flight deck and knocked out the electrical communications system and a considerable amount of gasoline ran into the bomb bay and caught fire. By this time the plane was losing one thousand feet of altitude per minute with an indicated airspeed of 97MPH. The fact that the plane was going into the water was obvious. The copilot instructed the nose gunner to go to the waist and inform the crew members there to prepare for ditching. The plane struck the water while in an almost horizontal flight attitude with the nose slightly high and the wings level. It was estimated that the plane stopped within one hundred fifty feet.

Crewmen occupied with fighting off interceptors did not have sufficient time to prepare for ditching. At the time of impact the navigator was standing between the pilot and copilot taking off his flak suit and harness. The engineer was sitting with his back braced to the armor plate behind the pilot. Six men were in the waist; the tail gunner was not aware that they were going to ditch and remained in the tail turret. At the time of ditching S/Sgt. Hawes, the radio operator, was attempting to throw out the right waist gun.

Upon hitting the water, the nose wheel was thrown through the bomb bay. The glass was broken out of the pilot's windshield, and the plane broke in half at the partition just back of the bomb bay and forward of the ball turret, which had been raised. Fortunately the Martin turret did not come down. The tail section sank quickly, but the forward half of the plane, even though full of water, nosed down with the trailing edges of the wings even with the ocean's surface. The plywood jungle kit and the Gibson Girl floated among the debris but could not be retrieved by the survivors. The nose wheel also floated free.

Following the crash the copilot, Lt. Vaughn, left the plane through the top hatch, and the navigator, Lt. Merrill, was thrown through the pilot's windshield. Cpl. Clendennen, the ball turret gunner, was cut badly around the head. He was seen to come to the surface, cry for help, grasp the tail section for a moment and then go down with the plane as it sank. Neither S/Sgt. Morrison, the tail gunner, nor S/Sgt. Hawes, the right waist gunner knew how he left the plane. Both reached a partially inflated and damaged raft. It contained a repair kit and a rubber bucket. The navigator clung to the floating nose wheel for about an hour and then struck out for the raft, reaching it shortly before nightfall. The copilot spotted a five-man raft dropped by another plane and headed for it, but because it had been dropped down wind it took him two and a half hours to reach it. The raft contained pockets. When he opened the pockets he found that the food, water, dye marker and all

equipment except one oar and a small tarp were missing. It took him another hour to blow up the raft because the cylinder had been damaged. The two rafts soon became separated. Nothing was known about the other crew members.

Lt. Vaughn had mild lacerations under the right eye and in the left scapular region. He kept his clothing damp throughout the day and at night took them off and laid under the tarp, drying his body. He did not suffer from thirst and kept fairly warm at night. Lt. Merrill had mild lacerations on several areas of his body. S/Sgt. Hawes had multiple lacerations all over his body. There was some water in their raft. They kept their clothes saturated, but there was little relief that night because the raft was leaking, requiring occasional blowing up as well as almost constant bailing of water. They suffered from chills during the night and were painfully sun burned about their feet and the back of their hands. The next day, July 14th, the four were rescued by a friendly submarine.

Lt. Ball was superstitious about being photographed and refused to have his official crew picture taken. He was ordered to do so and had to comply just before the mission. I shared the same superstition and was not ordered to be photographed with my crew.<sup>389</sup>

Weather hindered the rendezvous on the July 15th Yap mission. Just as the planes broke out of the front there was the target and fifteen to twenty enemy fighters. There was not sufficient time to form the assigned squadron formations and the pilots joined the nearest position. Air craft #085, which was straggling on the left of the 372nd, kept trying to break into flights already formed thus endangering the formation. The plane came within a few feet of Lt. May's(372nd) plane and shortly pulled off and headed for home.

The enemy fighters struck about two minutes before the bomb run and continued the attack for twenty-five to thirty minutes. They appeared to be eager, attacking from high and around the clock and were reported to be seldom out of range. Pvt. Brubaker, nose gunner on Lt. Gage's(370th) crew got one. S/Sgt. Woodrow Bissell(372nd) damaged one and S/Sgts. Orbin Houchin(372nd) and Robert J. McNally(372nd) each flamed one. Sgt. David De Busman(372nd), a tail gunner was wounded. Another 372nd plane was hit in the left rudder by a shell that apparently did not explode. Lt. Dooley's(371st) plane received a 20mm shell in the #2 engine which cut an oil line, causing him to cut the engine and feather the prop. The #3 engine throttle control was cut by enemy fire, but he made it back to base. Cpl. Ligon and Sgt. Testa on Lt. Dooley's crew each got a fighter. Lt. Lester's(370th) plane lost an engine over the target, caused by a 20mm shell that hit the #2 engine. The formation leader, Lt. Gage(370th), was informed by his gunners that Lt. Lester was in trouble and needed help. The formation slowed down to cover him until interception ceased, but in spite of this the #4 engine was hit several times by 7.7mm fire. The oil gradually leaked out, and the engine had to be cut off and the prop feathered. Lt. Gage instructed Lt. Habben(370th) to escort Lester, who by now had just two engines working, to Wakde. Lt. Gage selected Wakde in an attempt to avoid having Lt. Lester fly through the extremely