

NAVAL PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 23
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

8 March 1945

F. H. Comm Mamer
VPB-13

MEMORANDUM TO: Group Intelligence.

From: Lieutenant Commander Fred H. Mamer,
USNR.

Subject: Rescue of First Lieutenant Walter F.
Brown, VMF-121, statement of.

My crew was assigned the dumbo mission with the third strike on Koror Town, Koror Island, Palau Group on 4 March, 1945. We took off in squadron side number B64, a PBV-5A, Bureau number 46598, at 1335, following the corsair striking group.

We circled the field once and then started north over the outer western reef of the Palau Group. Our orbiting point was over the reef directly west of the target area, but when we reached that point the attack had not yet begun. I feared that the presence of a dumbo plane orbiting over the reef just off Koror Town would give away the strike so I continued north along the reef until the flak appeared over the target area. Evidently there was no element of surprise during this third strike for the anti-aircraft bursts appeared while the first wave was in its approach. At this time we turned back toward Koror Town inside of the reef to better observe any plane that might ditch.

Over VHF we heard someone call "WALDO" (Major Myer, Commanding Officer of VMF-121) telling him that someone bailed out over the target. Just then we saw a parachute open and float down to the water just off the beach in the center of the harborfront. I remember saying to Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Landers, my first pilot, over the interphone, "There is one who is a goner, For sure".

We were heading toward the area just off Arakabesan when the corsair came out calling us over VHF. "Dumbo, did you see the man go in just off the beach?"

I answered that I did, wondering at the time if they expected me to go into a place like that to pick him up. Just then "WALDO" came up again on VHF, saying, "HELLO DUMBO". All fighters will form a Lufbury circle over you and cover you with strafing during rescue".

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"Waldo from Dumbo. How about going in and sizing up that small calibre flak from the beach. When we're on the water, we'll be in easy range of it."

So the fighter went in and took a look, calling back that they thought we could get away with it. I was sure that we wouldn't have a damned chance to get in there and out again. And what about the wife and daughter, mine and a couple of my crew's? These thoughts went through my mind as I circled trying to make my decision and planning my approach if I should go in. Landers said over the interphone,

"Aren't we the lucky ones? What a position to have a guy go down!"

And I knew what he meant. I had to make a decision whether to risk the lives of nine men in order to save one. After what seemed hours, I finally called up "WALDO" saying,

This is dumbo, Okay, I'm going in. Do your damndest to keep them busy."

Just then directly ahead of us broke a black burst of flak and just over Brown's (Second Lieutenant W. F. BROWN, USMCR, VMF-121, the man in the water) position a white phosphorous burst broke. That first anti-aircraft fire gave me quite a start as the concussion thumped the side of the plane, and I remember looking over at Landers and seeing considerable sweat standing out on his face. I probably had some, too. About then I asked Waldo if he thought I had any chance at all of getting in and out again. I still wasn't convinced that I had any chance at all. The only answer that came back was the continual insistent urging.

So I circled, put the floats down, and with the fighters doing a beautiful job of covering the beach with strafing, started in on my approach. I was at about three hundred feet, paralleling the northwest side of Arakabesan, about three to four hundred yards off the beach. Tracer fire from twenty and forty millimeter anti-aircraft was going all around us. I remember shouting over VHF.

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"This is dumbo. Stop that stuff on Arakabesan."

And they did, for it dropped off. About then we took a burst of flak below and just ahead and another directly under the hull. It sounded as if someone thumped the hull and threw large rocks at the bottom. I was sure that we were holed so I pulled out, Signalled the flight engineer, Heffner, to put up the floats, and got out of there. I told the fighters to hold their ammunition while we checked the hull for holes. My crew looked over the bottom and unbelievably found no sign of damage so I circled to get in position for another approach. When all stations reported ready, I told the fighters to start in, and began my second approach.

This time the corsairs were really on the job and the small calibre fire from the beach was much lighter. But the flak from the heavy positions on Battery Hill and the top of Arakabesan was very intense and breaking all around us. I guess that I was too busy to worry much about it. My approach was about ninety degrees to my landing course to keep from going directly over anti-aircraft positions. I made a flipper turn at three hundred feet, cut my engines and headed for the water. My "Wind Line" was about forty-five degrees out of the wind due to Brown's position on the water in relation to the reefs. The surface conditions were normal harbor conditions with a choppy sea which allowed me to choose most any type of landing. I commenced a normal landing but realizing that I was just a little too far back from Brown, I let her bounce and pulled up into a full stall, dropping her in about fifty yards from him. She settled nicely and I could start taxiing immediately. Brown was in sight directly ahead, just west of the dye marker he had released in the water. He was in his Mae West on his back splashing as hard as he could. I taxied up to him, keeping him on my port side so I could see him. As we went by, the crew in after station, Burrough, Meinken, and Garbiras, threw a life ring on the end of a line. Brown caught it but due to his weakened condition, he had a difficult time holding on. Because of his position in relation to the beach reef, I couldn't taxi to him directly into the wind. After we had him on the end of the line, I couldn't prevent the plane from weathercocking into the fifteen to twenty knot wind. I couldn't use sea anchors for fear of fowling Brown in them and dragging him under the water. The weathercocking effect of the wind

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pulled the tail to the plane across Brown so that he was on the starboard side with the line to him going under the hull. He finally had to let go the line.

Shells were hitting just short of us and just beyond us from the installations on Battery Hill and Arakabesan. One threw water over the starboard wing. But I decided that as long as we had stuck our necks out that far, we might as well make another try at getting Brown. So I turned to port, taxiing directly through a patch on the water where a shell had exploded a moment before. I could see the traces on the water and could smell the black powder smoke. We made another good run on Brown but the same situation developed as on the first try. Brown finally let go again as he went under the stern. Evidently he was just too weak to hang on.

About this time Landers asked me if I wanted him to go back to after station to see if he could help. I gave him the okay and he left the cockpit. On the way back he told Ensign Russell, our second pilot, to hop up into the cockpit.

So I said to myself, "GODDAMMIT, I've got to get him this next time or we'll have to get out of here." It was just getting too hot to stay any longer. One shell exploded so close that a sheet of water hit my starboard engine and I thought for a moment it was going to conk out, but Heffner in the flight engineer's station in the tower did a good job of keeping her running. Having failed on two attempts using a line, I decided to turn to starboard toward the beach reef and come to Brown so close aboard my port side that the men in the blister could grab him by hand. This involved some danger to Brown because the port prop would pass directly over him, but I figured we had to take that chance. I knew if I misjudged and hit the reef, that it would slice our hull and sink us in a second. But we made it. As soon as the plane was past the down wind line, I cut back my engines and let her weathercock slowly into the wind, bringing us alongside Brown at the slowest speed possible with both engines running. I brought the plane so close to him that he was bumping it as we moved by. He had the presence of mind to duck underwater as the prop passed over him, coming up again right at the blister. Landers, who is two hundred pounds of man, caught him by the life jacket and he and

