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17 May 1987

Maj. Gen. E. L. Eubanks USAF(Ret)
4917 Ravenswood Dr., Apt. 555
San Antonio, TX 78227

Dear Sir,

This is in regard to the mission on which General Walker was shot down. I was the navigator of the #2 B-17 on that mission. From my diary of that time, I copied the following account. All times are local (Australian).

* * *

Monday, 4 January 1943

Tomorrow is to be a big day. We are sending out six B-17's to run a daylight raid on Rabaul. It will be the first time in three months to the day. Fifteen B-24's are going also, six from here (New Guinea) and nine from Iron Range (Australia), so it will be the largest daylight raid also.

Major Bleasdale is to lead with Captain Daniels' crew. Major Lindberg (64 Sq.CO) and General Walker (5th AFBomb.Com.) are going as observers. Our crew made the first team and I can see all kinds of A/A and zeros. Here's hoping for the best. This will be my number 24 mission.

Tuesday, 5 January 1943

I'm back to write about it. We were up at 0530 for a 0900 take off. Actually we got off at 0845 and assembled over Hood Point at 0930.

The nine B-24's from Iron Range didn't show so six 17's and six 24's started out. Joe Howard, our regular bombardier, had a bad eye, so Sgt. Vasalie was our substitute bombardier. We were to bomb shipping in Rabaul Harbor. The formation was echelon right with each plane 500 feet higher than the one on the left at about one quarter mile spread.

The trip up was uneventful. Our assigned altitude was 9000 (this would put Gen. Walker's plane at 8500) as second plane in formation. (The B-24's were to follow same pattern at slightly higher altitudes and wider spacing about 1 min. later.)

We had a good bomb run through heavy A/A and scored hits on two ships tied together. We learned later that one was a repair ship and the only one the Japs had in the area. It will probably have to go to Truk for repairs. After the run we got out of the harbor area as quickly as we could.

One of our crew reported seeing a B-17 losing altitude with an engine smoking. (This was the lead plane.) So while we were #2 in we were #1 out and the other four B-17's formed on us plus one of the B-24's that had an engine out.

There seemed to be a lot of activity at Vunakanau. It appeared that some bombers were holding up the take off of zeros. We were well clear of the harbor before any made a pass at us and then it was only half-hearted. Perhaps the 403rd, who went in with frag-bombs earlier, put a lot of their planes out of commission.

We circled once looking for the general's plane but could not locate it. We could see a solid black cloud over the harbor where the A/A puffs had merged. Except for the hit(s) on the lead plane it did not appear too accurate but the volume was terrific.

Mission time 7:15.


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Some weeks later a recon plane found a B-17 crashed on the shore of New Britain some miles south of Rabaul Harbor. In addition to the crew members I named on the general's plane, the navigator was Lt. Hand a classmate of mine at navigation school.

I joined the 19th Group at Mareeba, Queensland and transferred to the 43rd Gp, 64th Sq. when the 19th went back to the states. So most of my missions were flown with the 64th.

I hope this information is of interest to The Order of Daedalians.

Sincerely,


Francis G. Sickinger