

Hit the Deck

Robert Dugdale

THE United States destroyer *Henderson*, DD645, was steaming toward Wonsan Harbor, which is located on the East coast of Korea. It was returning for more bombardment duty from a routine patrol at Hungnam, where it sank a North Korean *san pan* attempting to lay mines.

I, Bill Wilson, quartermaster third class of the United States Navy, had the visual communication watch on the bridge, along with quartermaster striker, Tom Anderson.

It was 5:30 a. m., and although we had been on watch for an hour and a half, neither of us was quite awake. "You hold a sweepdown and I'll put on a pot of mud," I said, as I started for the ladder.

The sea was calm, but the sky was overcast, and the barometer had been dropping—a good sign of a storm.

"Where are we going to hit first when we get back in port?" Tom asked, as he dried out the swab.

"Oh, I don't care. After forty days at sea I'll be able to have a good time anywhere," I replied.

"Sure is good coffee you make," marveled Tom. "How come you never drink the stuff?"

"It's one of the few bad habits I haven't gotten into yet," I told him.

"Tell the Officer of the Deck it's a half an hour before sunrise," I reminded Tom. With only fifteen minutes before dawn alert, I wanted everyone to be prepared.

"Combat reports an unidentified plane, bearing zero six zero degree true, distance fifty miles," Tom said, as he hurried out of the wheelhouse. "The skipper told the OOD to sound general quarters so it looks like trouble."

The alarm sounded and within seconds the ship became alive with men running to their battle stations. "What's the trouble?" asked first class quartermaster, Don Taylor, as he headed for the wheelhouse to take the helm.

"An unidentified boogie," I answered, as I put on my life jacket and helmet.

"All stations manned and ready," came the report over the phone circuit. Phone talker, Jack Peterson, informed the captain along with a report from combat that the plane's bearing was remaining constant, but the distance had closed to ten miles.

"Attention all hands," came a report from the loud speaker. "This is the captain. Combat reports an unidentified plane. The relative bearing is about three hundred and thirty degrees, distance ten miles. I don't have to tell you to keep a sharp lookout. Make all reports to air defense."

"Think it's a Red?" Tom asked, as he scanned the starboard bow. "It must be," I replied. "Or he would have identified himself by now. I'm sure glad we've got that blanket up there," referring to the overcast. "He'll have to come in low, and these gunners aren't the type that miss. Not when the chips are down."

Then from mount one came, "Plane three hundred and fifty degrees relative, position angle ten, closing fast." Mounts one and two opened fire, and we watched the flack getting closer, but none hit. The plane commenced strafing, and as it pulled out of its dive, let go its bomb.

"Hit the deck," I yelled, as I knocked Tom over with a flying tackle. "Sightseeing will get you nowhere in this league," I warned him. Then came an explosion that shook the ship, but luck was with us, and the bomb hit about twenty-five yards off starboard beam.

We looked up just in time to see mounts three, four, and five open fire. Flack was bursting all around the plane, and for a couple of seconds it looked as if he might get away, but after months of training, the gunners weren't going to let their first bird get away. What followed looked like the Fourth of July. The next instant the plane burst into flames and plunged into the sea.

"We got him," yelled Tom, as he jumped to his feet. "Yes, but he came too close to please me," I answered. "If it never happens again, it'll be too soon."

"All hands, secure from general quarters," came a report over the loud speaker. "Let's get some chow and hit the sack," I said to Tom. "We've got the twelve to four watch this afternoon."

"That's all right with me," he replied. "I can use a little relaxation."

"Relaxation," I thought. "How can you relax when up ahead lies Wonsan and there lies the enemy?"

It's for the Birds

Nanci Golten

I DON'T like birds.

The professional ornithologist is hard enough to understand, although I do give him his due credit. But I don't comprehend the amateur or the true bird lover—the tree climber.

I appreciate the people who put food out of doors in snowy weather so that through the long bleak winter the air may be filled with the melodious songs of their grateful friends. I know many an invalid's day is cheered watching the hungry guests at a window suet tray. I have been told that young children learn not to mistreat pets because at even more tender ages they have been instructed in the system of attracting birds to rustic feeding stations, purchased through courtesy of House Beautiful Mail Order Service, at the incredibly low price of twenty-nine ninety-five.