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~~DECLASSIFIED~~c/o Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, Calif.,
1 January 1945.HISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

Patrol Bombing Squadron 139 was originally commissioned as Bombing Squadron 139 on 1 April 1943 under the Command of Lieutenant Commander George H. Hughes. On 8 July 1943 he was relieved of his command because of illness, and Lieutenant William R. Stevens of Salem, Oregon, was appointed Commanding Officer. He in turn was temporarily relieved on 22 July 1943 when Lieutenant P. W. Gill, the Executive Officer, assumed command. Lieutenant Commander William R. Stevens was reinstated as Commanding Officer on 22 August 1943.

Commissioning ceremonies took place at Ault Field, Naval Air Station, Whidbey Island, Washington on 1 April 1943. It was here that the squadron was stationed as a training unit under the command of Fleet Air Wing SIX. On 22 July 1943 the squadron, under the command of Lieutenant P. W. Gill, was transferred to Naval Air Station, Alameda, California, where new instrument panels were installed on the airplanes assigned to the squadron, the PV-1's. The Squadron returned to Whidbey Island, Ault Field, on 15 August 1943 where it undertook the completion of a new instrument syllabus, the importance of which cannot be overemphasized.

On 1 October 1943 the squadron was detached from Fleet Air Wing SIX and ordered to report to Fleet Air Wing FOUR, based at Adak, Aleutian Islands. It departed Ault Field for the Aleutians in three five-plane divisions. Enroute bad weather was encountered in addition to mechanical difficulties. Two divisions, plus two planes of the third division,

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

arrived at Amchitka on 7 October 1943. Patrol missions were flown the following day. The remaining portion of the squadron arrived at Amchitka on 10 October 1943.

From here the squadron operated as one complete unit running routine searches until 1 November 1943 when three crews were ordered to Adak for patrol duty and special training. On 8 December 1943 three more crews were sent to Adak relieving the first three crews which continued to Attu. Lieutenant R. A. MacGregor, Lieutenant T. R. McKelvey and Lieutenant (jg) D. M. Birdsall, were in charge of the second crew section, replacing the crews at Adak. Particular mention of them is made at this point because they not only formed the nucleus of a tactical offensive, but also because, through a thorough understanding of the Ventura's capabilities and limitations, they were able to demonstrate the feasibility of using the Ventura as a long range medium reconnaissance bomber to strike at the Japanese defense installations on Paramushiro and Shimushu.

During the interval between 7 October and 10 December 1943 the squadron operated from Amchitka as a patrol unit. Missions were characteristically uneventful. The weather, however, constituted a serious hazard, delaying operations at times and often seriously impairing sustained flight and a safe return.

Living conditions on Amchitka were favorable. Four Quonset Huts were assigned to the officers; the Captain, the Executive and Operations Officers occupying one hut, the remaining three being occupied by the 34 remaining officers. The number of huts appropriated was later increased to six with

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

each hut having been furnished with the following: an oil heater, chairs, and lockers. Sofas, shelves and tables were made by the officers. Facilities for doing one's own laundry were also provided. Aside from these huts there was another, centrally located, which was used as a recreational "parlor". It contained a radio phonograph, card tables, writing desks and overstuffed furniture.

The enlisted men occupied three Quonset Huts with their mess hall being adjacent to the officers' and equi-distant from the runway and their living quarters. They in addition had the use of a small "rec" hall which was also used for conducting church services.

The "Sea Otter" Theater was located on the north side of the island, approximately 10 miles from the base itself. It was operated by the Navy for both Navy and Army personnel. This was the extent of all recreational facilities.

On 10 December 1943 the entire squadron, with the exception of the 3 crews stationed at Adak, was moved to Attu, replacing Squadron VP-136.

Living conditions at Attu were eventually more favorable than those existing at Amchitka. There were six officers to a hut, each having his own room. Additional recreational facilities were enjoyed. Bar privileges were extended to all officers and guests of Fleet Air Wing FOUR, and the Commodore Theater served as a gym for both officers and enlisted men at designated hours. The theater was thus used until Gehres Point was commissioned. Here a large theater was built where movies were shown every night, excepting on various occasions when church services, a basketball

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

game, or boxing matches necessitated a change.

The organization of the squadron was streamlined, consisting of 36 flying officers, a Personnel Officer, an ACI Officer, later detached to Fleet Air Wing FOUR, 72 flying air crewmen, 2 chiefs, and a yeoman. The personnel officer was responsible for all records, fitness reports, and general supervision over the administrative department. The chiefs kept the planes in good condition and saw to it they were properly loaded for each flight. A note of praise at this point seem apropos for those chiefs and men of the maintenance department, for it was they who were responsible for the good performance of the PV-1's under unfavorable conditions, to say the least. All planes were parked in revetments, where most maintenance was carried on. Despite the adverse weather conditions under which they worked they managed to have the Ventura ready for all operational missions.

Following the squadron's arrival at Attu on December 10, it was engaged in routine searches until January 19, 1944. Reveille was sounded 2 hours before take-off time. Briefing took place immediately after breakfast. Shortly thereafter everything was in readiness for the take-offs, which usually occurred at sunrise or at twilight. All searches ran from 350 to 550 miles, the extent being determined by prevailing weather conditions and available weather information. Sector searches rotated in the squadron. Usually each pilot flew one day and had the following two off. In case of

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

adverse weather two sections alternated until each had flown a complete sector. On or about 1 May 1944 a Fleet Air Wing FOUR Order was issued stating that a minimum ceiling of 400 feet was required before any sector could be flown.

Although the squadron, after the 19th of January still ran occasional patrols, its primary functions became reconnaissance and bombing missions over the Japanese held Islands of Paramushiro or Shimushu, northernmost of the Kuril Islands. Herewith is included the text of a typical mission taken verbatim from the Squadron War Diary:

"Pilot took-off 1156, G.C.T., climbing directly to cruising level, using 2350 RPM and 37" Hg. Cloud cover was topped at 8,500 whereupon the pilot went to cruising settings of 1800 RPM and 32" MP for 150 kts calibrated air speed. At 1520 he obtained radar landfall on Kamchatka, south of Cape Lopatka; at 1533 he passed over the Cape and crossed the northeastern shore of Shimushu to run over Kashiwabara. This area had a cloud cover; so the pilot took a westerly heading until out over the sea, then turning southwest until a radar fix was obtained on Shimushu To. Then the course was changed to 190 MAG. for a run over Kakumabetsu. The target was 8-10ths covered at 10,000 feet, but he dropped the photo-flash bombs through a hole and obtained a clear picture of the shoreline north of Kakumabetsu. The drop was from 13,000, air speed 142 kts calibrated. No enemy activity was observed in this area and the pilot continued on toward Karabu Zaki. At 1600 on a northsouth pass over Karabu, he dropped all remaining bombs through the

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

overcast. The incendiaries were seen to explode on land. Altitude and air speed the same as the Kakumabetsu drop. He took departure from Karabu Zaki, without observing enemy activity, at 1605 G.C.T. with 720 gallons of fuel aboard. It had been necessary to fly through frontal conditions going to the target. On the way back the air speed indicator froze. Moderate to severe icing conditions were encountered until an hour from the base. He landed at 2024 G.C.T. with 260 gallons of fuel left".

On some of the raids, however, heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered; this usually being very inaccurate with the result that there was no casualties due to enemy fire.

Raids such as the one just described involved tactical problems, the solutions of which, although the best possible, certainly left no margin for error. One such problem being: "How could the Ventura, a medium range patrol bomber, be made to do the job of a heavy bomber?" This was accomplished by installing a bomb-bay tank leaving room for 1500 lbs of high explosives. In addition twenty 20-pound fragmentation bombs were carried, plus five 50-pound photo flash bombs stowed in the aft end and released by the plane captain through a specially cut hatch over the tunnel guns. The oxygen system used proved inadequate and cumbersome. Later, rebreather kits were installed and were shared by crew members as needed.

Aside from the raids on the Kurils, the squadron was engaged in occasional operations against enemy picket-boats. On one such engagement, one of our planes was damaged and the co-pilot killed. Planned shipping attacks, however, never materialized due to weather.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

Throughout these operations, the squadron functioned independent of any other unit. Its sole contact with Army units based on Attu consisted of assistance in the instruction of their navigators.

The following is a condensed summary of the activities of VB-139 from 19 January to June 30, 1944 as given by Commander Fleet Air Wing FOUR. "The officers and enlisted men of Bombing Squadron 139 demonstrated outstanding courage, skill and determination in successfully executing 78 of 100 attempted night photographic and bombing missions over enemy positions in the northern Kuril Islands, Japan. These night attacks were made from an advanced Aleutian base, at night in sub-arctic winter with its attendant hazards of ice-covered runways, ice-laden storms to a target 700 miles distant across the North Pacific Ocean. In medium land plane bombers, these officers and enlisted men faced the ever present danger of fuel exhaustion as well as having to face the possibility of finding their home base closed by fog or storm upon return. This squadron not only inflicted damage on the enemy and obtained valuable photographic intelligence of new enemy installations and airfields, but demonstrated by their courageous example that offensive air actions from the Aleutians was possible in spite of North Pacific winter weather. In so doing, they also demonstrated that their aircraft were capable of performing missions hitherto considered possible only by large multi-engine bombers. The courage and determination displayed in these operations were of an inspiring order, and in keeping

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIEDHISTORICAL SURVEY OF PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service." It has been recommended for the Presidential Unit Citation.

On June 30, 1944 the squadron was detached from Fleet Air Wing FOUR and ordered to report to Commander Fleet Air, Seattle, Washington for further assignment. The squadron was re-commissioned on 1 August 1944 under the Command of Lieutenant Commander Glenn A. David, (A1), USNR. Since then, it has been engaged in the completion of a training syllabus at Ault Field, Whidbey Island, Washington with twenty per cent of its former officer complement being retained, thus furnishing a background of experience upon which new members can draw.

On October 1, 1944 the designation of the squadron was changed from Bombing Squadron 139 to Patrol Bombing Squadron 139.

A complete history of the squadron is not possible, inasmuch as most records have either been filed with those retained by Fleet Air Wing FOUR or have been destroyed. All citations awarded enlisted men have been omitted for that reason.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDAPPENDICIES
STATISTICAL DATA

19 January 1944 to 30 June 1944 Squadron 139 made 100 sorties on armed photo reconnaissance missions to the Kurils. 78 sorties were completed - total of 797 hours flown on these missions alone. In addition to this special assignment, this squadron between 8 October 1943 and 30 June 1944 made a total of 801 routine patrol flights totaling 3,360 hours; a total of 43 special searches for missing planes and personnel, enemy submarines, and distant patrols against enemy aircraft for a total of 140 hours. 248 in other categories were made, totaling 439 hours. The grand total of all flights of the squadron's service in the North Pacific was 470 - the total hours flown 4,736. The squadron had one pilot killed in an action with an enemy surface vessel, six officers and men of one Ventura missing in action after a night attack on the Kurils, and 4 other officers and men killed in the only fatal crash sustained by the squadron. In addition, three other planes were lost in operational crashes, with three more damaged, two of which were repaired and returned to service and one salvaged.

The D.F.C. was awarded to the following officers:

Lieutenant Robert A. MacGregor, USNR.

Lieutenant Douglas M. Birdsall, USNR.

Lieutenant Thomas H. MacKeley, USNR.

for the first successful attacks in the PV-1 on Japanese installations in the Kurils. Lieutenant Commander William R. Stevens, Lieutenant Quentin E. Norem and Lieutenant Ralph J. Lowe, received the D.F.C. for the successful completion of various missions.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDAPPENDICIES
STATISTICAL DATA

Air Medals were awarded to the following officers:

Lieutenant Robert A. MacGregor, USNR.

Lieutenant Douglas M. Birdsall, USNR.

Lieutenant Thomas H. McKelvey, USNR.

They received them in conjunction with the D.F.C. for the completion of the first successful sorties over Paramushiro. Lieutenant Quentin E. Norem, USNR and Lieutenant Ralph J. Lowe for "outstanding performance against the enemy in a particular mission". Lieutenant (jg) Al F. Daniel, USNR, Lieutenant (jg) Lawrence Bradbury, USNR and Lieutenant (jg) R. A. Watson, USNR for the completion of the first sorties over Paramushiro.

Air Medals were also awarded the following officers for taking part in the raids on the Kurils:

Lieutenant James H. Moore.

Ensign Phillip I Brady.

Lieutenant Robert T. Lampshire.

Ensign Charles R. Burbach.

Lieutenant Ralph J. Lowe.

Ensign Al F. Daniel.

Lieutenant (jg) Lorenzo K. Baker.

Ensign Robert E. Janson.

Lieutenant (jg) Ernest T. Brigham.

Ensign James A. Bauma.

Lieutenant (jg) Edward M. Watson.

Ensign Lawrence Bradbury, Jr.

Ensign William I. Plassey, A-V(S)

Ensign Raymond E. Rozuk, A-V

Lieutenant Walter S. Whitman, USNR, Lieutenant (jg) Walter W. Hanlon, USNR, Donald G. Lewallen, Clarence G. Fridley, James S. Palko and Samuel L. Crown, were awarded the Purple Heart posthumously. Lieutenant Quentin E. Norem, USNR received the Purple Heart because of wounds received in action against a Japanese Picket-boat.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIEDAPPENDICIES
STATISTICAL DATA

The following officer was killed in action:

Lieutenant (jg) Clifford Thumbs.

The following men were killed in a crash on take off from the base:

C. F. Hackendorn, ARM2c.

V. O. Mog, AOM2c.

The following is a list of the men missing in action:

Lieutenant W. S. Whitman.

Lieutenant W. W. Hanlon.

S. L. Crown, Jr., ARM3c.

C. G. Fridley, AMM2c.

D. G. Lewallen, AM2c.

J. S. Palko, AOM3c.

D. L. Staats died in the line of duty.

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

2nd Tower
VPB 139
ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY

On 1 January 1945, Squadron 139 was still at Ault Field, Whidbey Island, Washington, engaged in the completion of a training syllabus supervised by Fleet Air Wing SIX under whose jurisdiction the squadron remained until 1 March 1945. That portion of the syllabus remaining consisted of rocket firing and a few instrument hops in which the SCS-51 gear and G.C.A. were combined to instill confidence in the pilots ability to let down to visual contact under low ceiling conditions.

The PV-1 syllabus was officially completed on 1 February 1945. A few days later, the squadron began a new syllabus designed primarily to acquaint the pilots with the plane that they would be the first to flight test in actual combat, the PV-2, commonly known as the Harpoon.

After a few hops, various malfunctions were discovered: drag struts were faulty, which necessitated their being changed, out-board wing tanks had to be sealed, to mention but a few.

During the month of February, the squadron began to make preparations for its forth-coming tour of duty, which was to be in the Aleutians Islands. On February 25 Headquarters Squadron, Fleet Air Wing SIX succeeded in having six planes in commission, and on the following day, a portion of the squadron was detached from Fleet Air Wing SIX to Fleet Air Wing FOUR.

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY (Con't)

Lieutenant Commander Glenn A. David, Commanding Officer of the squadron, departed Ault Field, Whidbey Island, Washington with a six plane section; another section of three departed 1 March and on 3 March the remaining six planes proceeded to Attu.

Enroute, poor weather plus mechanical difficulties delayed somewhat the squadron's arrival at Attu. All planes, however, with one exception, were on the island by 12 March, at which time the squadron relieved Patrol Bombing Squadron 136. Three crews, proceeding by Naval Air Transport Service, arrived somewhat later.

All planes, upon their arrival, were temporarily grounded for checks and general repair. Maintenance progress was slow, as a result with the aid of forty borrowed mechanics, the squadron took the added responsibility of doing its own maintenance work. Results are somewhat more satisfactory.

On 14 March the squadron began flying searches in conjunction with Squadron 131. Four days later the squadron was assigned the duty of task force coverage. From then and up until the 28th, sector searches were flown exclusively. On the 28th, a section of the squadron was to fly its first mission over Paramushiru. Weather, however, intervened, which resulted in the cancellation of the mission.

Since March Squadron VPB-139 has been operating in conjunction with VPB-131 under the command of Fleet Air Wing FOUR. During the latter part of March sector searches were flown, which were dis-

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY (Con't)

continued in April when the squadron was assigned the task of long range reconnaissance over the Northern Kurils. On 6 April four Harpoons of VFB-139 attacked Kokutan Zaki on their first Kuril mission.

Pursuant to Fleet Air Wing FOUR Operations Order 5-44, the primary target of all Kurils strikes was enemy shipping. Lightly defended land installations were secondary targets. The armament consisted of rockets and machine guns. This practice was continued until 6 May when the Bureau of Aeronautics restricted the Harpoons to normal flight as defined by T. O. 84-42 pending proposed reinforcement of wings and stabilizers. Thereafter operational use of the Harpoon was confined to patrol, Kurils reconnaissance under weather conditions permitting a ready escape from enemy fighters, and attacks on picket and fishing vessels. Rockets were subsequently at a later date substituted by three 250 lb. G.P. bombs which were supplemented by machine guns.

Rocket strikes were successfully completed on 6, 10, 15, 28, and 29 April and on 10, 12, 14, 18, and 20 May, and on 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 26 June. Bombs as well rockets were carried on the missions of 18 and 20 May, and on 26 May planes armed only with bombs made a successful attack. Land targets were involved in all missions except those of 14 and 26 May when trawlers and open fishing boats were attacked.

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY (Con't)

Tactics employed during this period generally consisted of "high speed" low approaches. The planes usually descended to deck level 100 to 150 miles from the target, maintaining radio silence to avoid radar detection.

Most missions received heavy to light anti-aircraft fire, the damage being slight except for the 10 May attack on Minami Zaki, Shimushu, where five of the eight attacking planes were hit by anti-aircraft fire, causing major damage to three. Two crew members were injured, neither required hospitalization. Two others had bullet holes in their sleeves and trousers - neither however, were injured.

As the weather improved, missions increased, which found a corresponding increase in enemy defense activity. Fighter opposition was encountered, which were not aggressive, giving the impression of being satisfied to ward off the attacking bombers.

The Mariupol, Russian merchantman grounded on Kokomari Zaki, Shimushu held increased interest during the later part of May. Photographs taken showed possible new construction on one of the masts. It was suspected that the enemy might be using the ship as a lookout station for the early warning system.

In order to determine the presence of enemy supply in the northern Kurils the Harpoons were dispatched in May along the eastern and western coastlines of Shimushu and Paramushiro and also into the Sea of Okhotsk. Information concerning enemy

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY (Con't)

shipping was relayed to base and there in turn it was passed on to the 11th Air Force, which maintained a shipping alert with B-24's and B-25's.

One Harpoon failed to return from a search of sector 5 on 22 April. Special searches were organized on the two days following, all of which, however, returned with negative results.

During the month of June more operational missions had been flown than at any previous month, consequently maintenance became more of a problem, largely because of the structural weaknesses of the Harpoon, which at this writing are still pending structural reinforcements and major overhauls. It was then decided that as soon as the task force returned the missions for our squadron were to be discontinued. This was completed and made into an order on 27 June. Since then the squadron has been flying shorter sectors according to Item Plane with a corresponding decrease in gas load & a decrease in armament.

The squadron is to break up on 18 July at which time six planes and nine crews are to depart for Amchitka. There that detachment is to fly three sectors according to Jig Plan.

Unfavorable weather conditions prevented the Amchitka detachment from leaving Attu until 24 July. Operations were commenced on the 26th and continued until the squadron was detached from Fleet Air Wing FOUR on the 20th of August.

The portion of the squadron remaining at Attu continued to operate from Casco off the east-west runway. The north-south

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY (Con't)

runway was being surfaced. The squadron continued to operate under this arrangement until the 20th of August at which time they were relieved by VPB-135 and directed to report to Fleet Air Wing SIX, at Seattle for further assignment to duty.

The Attu detachment proceeded from Attu on the date scheduled, 20 August, and arrived in Seattle on 22 August. Those from Amchitka were delayed one day because of weather conditions. This detachment was able to leave on 21 August. All planes with one exception were in Seattle by 23 August, one plane was delayed at Kokiak for a week because of mechanical failure.

Upon arrival at Whidbey, all planes were turned in to Headquarters Squadron, Fleet Air Wing SIX for ferry to Lockheed at Burbank, California, where they are scheduled, beginning 27 August for wing rework at the rate of four (4) planes per day. Our Officers and men traveled to Seattle by bus; the enlisted men were transferred immediately to ComFairSeattle, F.F.A. while all officers waited the usual period of 36 hours before receiving despatch orders to their next assignments. By 31 August, all officers and enlisted men were detached and transferred, with the exception of the Acting C.O. and two yeomen who await the arrival of our files from Attu for the decommissioning of the Squadron.

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
PATROL BOMBING SQUADRON 139

ENCLOSURE (A)

HISTORICAL SURVEY (Con't)

On 11 September 1945, the files of the squadron finally arrived from Attu. During the period 10 September to 13 September 1945 the squadron was in the process of decommissioning

Patrol Bombing Squadron ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-NINE is officially decommissioned as of 13 September 1945, at the Naval Air Station, Seattle, Washington.