



With the Colors

10/20/44

The original "Black Cat" squadron, the first Navy group to fly Catalina flying boats painted pitch black, has returned to the United States after its second tour of duty in the Pacific with an enviable record in night spotting for artillery and in rescue and anti-submarine work.

Night spotting for artillery by the lumbering "Black Cats" one of the unsung exploits of these versatile old flying boats, consisting of hovering over the enemy's territory, and radioing information on the location of troop concentrations, gun emplacements and military installations.

VP-12, as the original "Black Cats" are designated by the Navy, did its best spotting at Torokina on Bougainville in the Solomons last March, when the starving Japanese tried desperately to breach our lines there. Two of VP-12's planes were nicked, but not one was knocked down.

The squadron, commanded by Commander Francis R. Drake of Coronado, California, did rescue work for the month of March, also, and picked up seventeen drowned Navy, Army and Marine Corps aviators in open sea landings.

Lieutenant (junior grade) Lawrence E. Lewis, USNR, 1545 Murcia avenue, Coral Gables, Florida, commanded a "Black Cat" which landed under intense shore artillery fire and picked up a downed fighter pilot 2,000 yards of Tawui Point, New Britain. Lieutenant (junior grade) Lewis was awarded the Silver Star medal for this feat.

Members of his crew were also decorated. Ensign Wallace E. Derryberry, USNR, of Bergman, Arkansas, received the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the following received Air medals:

Lieutenant (junior grade) Ralph W. Keener, USNR, Gordon, Texas.

Marvin L. Flournoy, aviation machinist's mate second class of McAllen, Texas.

Albion Smith Jr., aviation machinist's mate second class, of South Norwalk, Connecticut.

John Franklin Kralemann, aviation radioman first class, of San Diego, California.

Evan James Kern, aviation radioman second class, of Delaware, Ohio.

Lieutenant Clem C. Kilkes, USNR, 2353 Magnolia avenue, Knoxville, Tennessee, piloted a "Black Cat" which landed in St. George's channel off New Britain, under heavy fire from shore batteries, rescued an injured fighter pilot, and took off in darkness. Dewey Ross Connor, aviation machinist's mate first class, of Newton was a member of the crew of this flying boat.

The "Black Cats" did months of day and night search for Jap vessels trying to sneak supplies to isolated troops on South Pacific islands.

In addition to spotting for artillery and doing rescue and anti-submarine work, these jack-of-all-trades flying boats carried out a daylight raid on an enemy-held island in the Solomons, dropping eighty-four 625 pound bombs and then expending all their ammunition in low-level strafing attacks.

Other missions during their successive stays at Midway, Guadalcanal, New Georgia, Emirau and Espiritu Santo included coordinated attacks with PT boats on Jap barges, convoy coverage and anti-submarine training. The squadron flew a total of 6,118 hours from February 1, to July 31, an average of 322 hours per pilot.

During its first tour in the Pacific, in late 1942 and 1943, VP-12 was based at Guadalcanal. It numbered among its missions night bombing raids on Munda, Vila, Kahili and Buka in the Solomons, torpedo attacks on Japanese vessels, spotting for artillery, and search and rescue missions.

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Private First Class Gordon Hunt has been awarded the Good Conduct medal for "exemplary behavior, efficiency and fidelity," according to a letter received by his mother, Mrs. Myrtle Hunt of Newton.

Gordon was a physical therapist at Manteno state hospital before he entered the Army and has been receiving training in this line ever since. He is in a headquarters company of the Transportation and Medical Corps in England.

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