

Florent Schuch Has Unique Experience

June 26
1945

Navy Co-Pilot, Now Home on Leave, Had Narrow Escape During an Attack on a Jap Ship

Climaxing his tour of duty with a successful but hair-raising attack on a Jap ship, Lieutenant (junior grade) Florent J. Schuch, U. S. N. R., of Newton, is home on leave.

Co-pilot of a Navy Liberator search plane, the Illinois airman has been awarded the Air Medal and a Letter of Commendation for his accomplishments against the Japs. But his last mission was outstanding, he declares. "I died at least a dozen deaths!" he recalled.

Looking for Japanese shipping off the enemy mainland, his Liberator, piloted by Lieutenant Wayne D. Rorman, U. S. N. R., of Blue Earth, Minnesota, was escorted by three twin-engine Ventura bombers.

Several picket boats were sighted and the Venturas attacked with rockets and machine gun fire. Lieutenant Rorman swung the big Liberator into action, his gunners straffing the enemy's decks.

Heavy anti-aircraft fire streamed up from the vessel, but the Navy plane swooped in low and dropped four bombs. Three were direct hits along the deck, smashing the superstructure and apparently breaking the ship in two.

Struck by Flack

Meanwhile, the plane had taken some hits. One of the crew was wounded by the fire, the starboard horizontal stabilizer was damaged and half of the elevator knocked off.

What happened next has never been fully explained. The plane was blown 200 feet into the air, nose up. Only instinctive reaction by the pilot and Lieutenant (junior grade) Schuch prevented the aircraft from flopping over on its back.

Both pilots wrestled with the controls. Exerting every ounce of pressure, they fought the plane off on its left wing and the Liberator righted itself only 100 feet above the sea.

The plane was almost out of control and the pilots were exhausted. Ensign Richard F. Silzer, U. S. N. R., of Chicago, Illinois, the navigator; Vincent DeSouza, aviation machinist's mate first class, since promoted to chief, of Berkeley, California; and Harmon E. Price, aviation radioman third class, U. S. N. R., of Indianapolis, Indiana, came forward to help fight the controls.

Tom Colley, seaman first class, U. S. N. R., of Los Angeles, the tail gunner, said later he thought the

(Continued on Page Eight)

Florent Schuch

Has Unique

Experience

*June 26
1945*

(Continued from Page One)

plane was going to nose into the sea.

"I had just relaxed," he said, "but then I was thrown out of the turret and I began to get scared. I got on some earphones and heard the skipper say everything was okey and to prepare to bail out over Iwo Jima. I felt better than before, because I have always had confidence in Mr. Rorman."

Thrown Out of Turret

Lester R. Mumme, aviation radio-man third class, U. S. N. R., of San Antonio, Texas, had been thrown out of the top turret. He discovered a box of ammunition getting tossed about, and jettisoned it through the bomb bay, despite the danger of being thrown out of the plane. Then he found a fire caused by a short circuit and put it out with a window-cloth.

A fragment of the tail which had lodged in the elevator was causing most of the trouble. It dislodged itself, but the plane continued to roll.

De Sousa was taking pictures in the after station at one of the open hatches when the plane first shot into the air. His feet caught in control cables and saved him from being thrown out. Then he was knocked to the deck and a waist gun fell on him. Before the trip ended he was covered with black and blue marks.

Knowing that it would probably be impossible for their "skipper" and copilot to leave the plane safely, the crew immediately and unanimously chose to stay with the plane for the landing. They cheered wildly when Lieutenant Rorman brought the plane into a rudimentary air strip for an almost perfect landing at a high speed and without flaps.

Decorated Previously

Pilot and crew have been decorated for previous attacks. Lieutenant Rorman received the Air medal and the crew Letters of Commendation for sinking an enemy picket boat off Japan, last October. Later the pilot won the Distinguished Flying Cross and the crew Air medals, when they attacked enemy shipping near Iwo Jima, sinking two vessels under harassment of enemy fighter planes.

In all, the Liberator crew is credited with the destruction of nine Jap ships. They have completed fifty-two combat missions.

Lieutenant (junior grade) Schuch is 24 years old. Mr. and Mrs. John A. Schuch, his parents, live on Route Five, Newton. A former student at Newton Community high school, he worked as a clerk for W. P. Wheeler & Son prior to entering the Navy.