

Lieutenant F. J.

Schuch Awarded

Silver Star

Sept. 18, 1945

Naval Airman Recently Received Medal for Aiding in the Destruction of Japanese Picket Boat

Lieutenant Florent J. Schuch, son of Mr. and Mrs. John A. Schuch of near Newton, was awarded the Silver Star medal by Rear Admiral J. J. Clark, chief of Naval Air Intermediate Training and commander of the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi, Texas, at mass decoration ceremonies held there recently. The award was given for assisting in the destruction of a heavily armed and armored picket boat in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire in the Western Pacific.

Lieutenant Schuch was previously awarded the Air medal. He was copilot of a Liberator search plane. He is expecting an early discharge.

A story published in the Press last May is believed to tell of the action for which he was decorated. It follows, in part:

Looking for Japanese shipping off the enemy mainland, his Liberator, piloted by Lieutenant Wayne D. Rorman of Blue Earth, Minnesota, was escorted by three twin-engine 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 strafing 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 Schuch prevented the aircraft from flopping over on its back.

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.

Chief Machinist's Mate Vincent 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.