

# UP-GUNNING THE PRIVATEER

WITH THE WAR APPROACHING JAPAN'S HOME ISLANDS, THE US NAVY WANTED TO INCREASE THE FIREPOWER OF ITS ALREADY VERY EFFECTIVE FLEET OF PB4Y-2 PATROL BOMBERS

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War was moving ever closer to the heavily defended Home Islands of Japan during the winter and spring of 1945. By that time, the Imperial Japanese Navy had suffered tremendous losses of men, vessels, and aircraft — making capital ships nearly non-existent while the majority of the shipping traffic encountered was destroyer size or smaller. Make no mistake, attacking an IJN destroyer with a Navy patrol plane saw the odds fall in the ship's favor. However, US Naval airmen sortied day-in and day-out to clear the sea lanes of any vessel contributing to the Japanese war effort.

At this point in the war, Consolidated PB4Y-1 Liberator and PB4Y-2 Privateer crews typically encountered small cargo ships of less than 1200 gross tons. To counter these smaller vessels,

patrol planes would typically carry six 100-pound general-purpose bombs with four to five second delay fuses and six 100-pound incendiary cluster bombs. The four-engine Navy patrol bombers would usually fly a triangular flight pattern, for example from Mindoro, Philippines to attack targets along the coast of French Indo-China and return. Carrying 3100 gallons of fuel, PB4Y-2s would fly approximately 750 miles out, search for targets in a 100-mile area, then fly the 750 miles back making an exhausting eleven-plus hour flight standard for these crews.

On one of Patrol Squadron 117's (VP-117) first missions flown with its newly acquired PB4Y-2s, on 20 June 1945, L/Commander R.J. Crowley Jr. (USN) departed McGuire Field, Mindoro, in BuNo 59494, to attack targets in French Indo-China — any shipping at Qui Nhon, rolling stock and railroad infrastructure at Quang Ngai, shipping at Tourane, and rail

traffic at Tam Quan. This search sector is directly west of Pleiku, on the coast of today's Binh Dinh Province, Vietnam.

Arriving in the patrol area, Crowley first spotted two large trawlers at Qui Nhon, both between 150-300 tons. Three general purpose and three incendiary bombs were dropped and approximately 3000 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition were used to strafe the ships and surrounding dock areas. Flying inland at tree-top height, Crowley and crew then attacked the railyard at Quang Ngai. Two incendiary clusters and 1500 rounds of .50-caliber were used to destroy a railroad roundhouse, a smaller warehouse, and heavily strafe ten box cars.

Flying north, to Tourane, three river boats (estimated at between 75-100 tons each) and three 20 ton barges were sighted along the riverbanks. The first general purpose bomb dropped wide of the target, but on the



The Emerson Model 128 turret was designated 250SH-10 by the Navy and was installed in PB4Y-2 BuNo 59352. The aircraft is seen shortly after installation of the new nose turret on Emerson's ramp at St. Louis. In the background is B-24L 44-49916 that was used to test a variety of turret installations, most notably the radar-directed tail guns for the B-47 Stratojet. (Alpha Archive)