

# Battle Of Leyte Gulf

As fought from the air.

The heroic surface engagements by ships of TAFFY-3 against the Central Force of Japanese Admiral Kurita, have been well reported in numerous books, and TV documentaries. Previously untold in graphic descriptions, by the pilots, are the activities of the Composite Air Squadrons of the three Taffy-s. They were involved in vicious air attacks on the Japanese fleet and numerous dog fights with Japanese aircraft from many air fields in the Philippines, from October 24<sup>th</sup> thru October 27<sup>th</sup>. The detailed unvarnished report by the men who made it happen from the air, is now yours to read and know.

These pilots reports were obtained from the U.S. National Archives, by the Author of 'LAST 'STAND OF THE TIN CAN SAILORS', James D. Hornfischer .

Our VC-10 fighter pilot, Dick Roby, was the interface, with Hornfischer, in obtaining these reports for the web sites etc.. VC-10 Fighter Pilot James F. Lischer, volunteered to do the retyping of this huge document. Tony Potochniak repackaged the report, in preparation for placing it on the two web sites listed in this report..

The following is from the official US Navy Action Report which was submitted on 18 November 1944 and as of this date, 21 May 2004, is declassified. The contents, as excerpted from the report, are here prepared for the following Web Sites listed, [WWW.USSGambierBay-VC10.com](http://WWW.USSGambierBay-VC10.com) Web Master, Robert G. Potochniak. [WWW.OurOldNavy.com,Robert](http://WWW.OurOldNavy.com,Robert) Cox USN (Ret.) Web Master. This report is the property of Tony Potochniak survivor and active historian of the USS Gambier Bay (CVE-73) and VC-10, military units. They are a part of Task Unit 77.4.3, (Taffy 3).

The subject of this report. It consists of pilot reports on the action that took place on three momentous days, 24, 25, 26 October 1944 as well as collateral information about the people involved that were airborne and are here listed from official records.

This list of pilots and aircrew, airborne on 25 October 1944, was authenticated by  
W. V. R. Vieweg, Captain USN, Commanding Officer, USS Gambier Bay

## VC-10 Aircrew:

|                          |           |       |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Austin, Lawrence Merwin  | 657 60 24 | ARM3c |
| Blandford, Donald Arthur | 386 14 48 | AMM2c |
| Blaney, Donald Robert    | 300 61 16 | ARM1c |
| Bounds, William Foster   | 656 71 97 | ARM3c |

|                             |           |       |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Britt, John David           | 656 18 20 | AM1c  |
| Curtin, Murray Adrian       | 300 58 35 | AOM1c |
| Grabos, Fred Francis        | 725 57 63 | AMM2c |
| Holly, Leonard (n)          | 225 17 30 | AMM3c |
| Houlihan, John William      | 601 06 81 | ARM3c |
| Jennings, Arthur Fred       | 600 94 50 | AMM2c |
| Lock, Jack (n)              | 651 02 46 | ARM2c |
| Martin, Richard Sinclair    | 346 87 97 | AOM1c |
| Orewyler, Jack Herbert      | 381 73 09 | AMM3c |
| Phillips, William Riley jr. | 576 71 49 | ARM3c |
| Saint, George Milton        | 664 20 46 | ARM2c |
| Shrader, John William       | 871 68 40 | ARM3c |
| Vilmer, Louis jr.           | 856 87 65 | ARM3c |
| Westbrook, Charlie Maygill  | 563 38 40 | AMM2c |

**VC-10 Pilots:**

|                    |         |             |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|
| Abercrombie, W. W. | 291299  | Ensign USNR |
| Bassett, H. B.     | 98468   | Lt. USNR    |
| Bennett, D "C"     | 320359  | Ensign USNR |
| Bennett, P. "A"    | 354430  | Ensign USNR |
| Crocker, R. L.     | 3235853 | Ensign USNR |
| Dillard, B. F.     | 291131  | Ensign USNR |
| Dugan, C. J.       | 291322  | Ensign USNR |
| Ellwood, C. R.     | 106396  | Lt. USNR    |

|                    |        |               |
|--------------------|--------|---------------|
| Gallagher, W.      | 298962 | Ensign USNR   |
| Giger, L. C.       | 300723 | Ensign USNR   |
| Hunting, C. F.     | 145254 | Lt. (jg) USNR |
| Huxtable, E. J.    | 77138  | Lt. Cdr. USN  |
| Jackson, J. R.     | 124756 | Lt. USNR      |
| Lischer, J. F.     | 290810 | Ensign USNR   |
| McGraw, J. D.      | 300725 | Ensign USNR   |
| Oliver, J. F.      | 106058 | Lt. USNR      |
| Osterkorn, E. A.   | 306467 | Ensign USNR   |
| Phillips, R. L.    | 157139 | Lt. (jg) USNR |
| Seitz, E. W.       | 106559 | Lt. USNR      |
| Shroyer, W. C.     | 315372 | Ensign USNR   |
| Turner, J. I.      | 326360 | Ensign USNR   |
| Wallace, R. J.     | 329478 | Ensign USNR   |
| Weatherholt, R. E. | 240633 | Lt. (jg) USNR |
| Harders, H. J.     | 106655 | Lt. USNR      |
| Roby, R. W.        | 100098 | Lt. USNR      |
| Stewart, J. R.     | 98696  | Lt. USNR      |
| Wickersham, C. A.  | 106786 | Lt. USNR      |

The following personnel were aboard the U. S. S. Heerman (DD 532) during the surface action and no information is available as to their whereabouts or condition: Note: As of this writing we know Dahlen was killed while aboard the Heerman, the two enlisted crew survived.

These three were manning a TBM on 24 October 1944 and made an emergency water landing and were picked up by the USS Heerman, a destroyer from the screen.

Three squadron men aboard Heerman after being picked up on October 24, 1944

|                      |           |                           |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Burns, Edgar Houston | 645 21 83 | ARM3c                     |
| Ubbink, James (N)    | 608 59 41 | AMM3c                     |
| Dahlen, W.           | 156445    | Lt. (jg) Killed in Action |

Known survivors (Of the USS Gambier Bay) total 706 They were located and rescued after 45 hours in the water.

Authenticated: W. V. R. Vieweg, Captain USN

(Post action report, no date.)

The actions reported, herein, involved the invasion and retaking of the Philippine Islands and the initial landings which were made on the island of Leyte with the troop ships and supporting combat vessels being in Leyte Gulf

Operating outside the Gulf were the escort carrier groups assigned to support the landings. Each group was composed of six escort carriers and three destroyers and four destroyer escorts as a screen for the carriers. There were three task units as Task Group 77.4 under Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague. They were called Taffy 1, 2 and 3. and their official designation was 77.4.1, 2 or 3.

This report is about the action of the aircraft from Squadron VC-10 embarked on the U.S.S. GAMBIER BAY attached to Taffy 3, or Task Unit 77.4.3, Rear Admiral C. A. F (Ziggy) Sprague. This task unit was stationed in the northernmost operating area, approximately forty miles east of the island of Samar. There were about fifty miles between each of the three Taffy groups.

The duties of the aircraft from these groups included combat air patrol and anti-submarine patrol of their own task unit. In addition they were on scheduled flights over

the island and supported the ground troops in whatever was required. Ground stations would call for bombing and strafing where indicated. In addition fighters from those flights provided combat air patrol to prevent enemy aircraft from interfering with or attacking our troops.

### **US Navy Action Report**

From: Commander Task Unit 77.4.3 (Commander Carrier Division Twenty-Six).

To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet.

Subject: VC-10 (Gambier Bay) Aircraft action reports No. 1-B of 24 October, 2-B, 3-B, 4-B, 5-B, and 6-B of 25 October,, 7-B of 26 October and 8-B of 27 October 1944 - submission of.

Following is the verbatim copy of the report of the 24 October action over Leyte Island by E. J. Huxtable, Lt. Comdr., USN: (Commanding Officer, VC-10) (Changes or additions are in parenthesis)

#### **(Report 1-B)**

Two divisions of fighters took off at 0500 24 October 1944 to make rendezvous and proceed to the objective area over Leyte Island for combat air patrol. The flight organization was as follows: Lt. Roby, Lt (jg) Courtney, Lt(jg) Phillips, and Lt (jg) Hunting, first division; Lt. Seitz, Ens. Dugan, Lt Ellwood, and Ens. McGraw second division. The available pilot's reports are attached for interest and information.

After orbiting at the various initial points west, north, and north-east of Tacloban for approximately two and one-half hours, the flights of Japanese craft began to appear on the scene coming from the west and northwest intent on attacking our shipping in Leyte Gulf. The interceptions that followed, that were made by this group and others in the air, very effectively minimized the success of the enemy raid. The effectiveness of the interception by our group was, however, greatly curtailed due to the acute shortage of gasoline in several planes.

At about 0800 a lone SALLY was intercepted and shot down by Lt. Roby's division, with he and Courtney getting credit for the kill. At about the same time, Lt. Seitz's division, which was orbiting much higher intercepted a flight of four SALLY's, and Lt. Seitz got one and Ens. Dugan another. This about ended the action for the flight as a group.

Since there were apparently only a very few enemy fighters in the air, or at least none to effectively worry our own VF, the interception of this and other groups turned into individual actions in going after the bombers to knock them down before they arrived at LEYTE GULF. The action commenced at about 13000' and ended at about 8000' when the few remaining bombers went through a cloud layer and out into the LEYTE GULF area where AA was active.

Due to the speed at which the bombers were traveling on their approximate 15 degree glide, very few overhead runs could be made and tail chases and long bursts from dead astern were by far the most effective. While Lt. Ellwood stayed up above the group to worry around with one or two ZEKES, the rest of the planes, with the exception of Lt. Seitz, went in and piled into the rest of the bomber formation which was estimated originally at 15-21 LILLY'S. Lt. (jg) Hunting shot down one on a tail chase, Ens. McGraw got two, and damaged another, Lt. Roby got one and another probable.

All pilots agree that, although the LILLY'S were flying a very tight formation, only on one occasion was any defensive fire noted. Some return fire was noticed emanating from the dorsal turret on the SALLY'S. The appearance of most of the enemy planes was usual and nothing out of the ordinary was noticed in their flight, markings, or general tactics.

None of the pilots had any serious complaints concerning any of their equipment used. Excellent combat results were achieved with the FM-2 wing guns and few link jams developed. It is notable that one plane was airborne a full five hours with only one wing tank, and this included about one half hour of combat flying.

Submitted: E. J. Huxtable, Lt. Comdr, USN

Commanding Officer, VC-10.

24 October 1944

Report of Lt. R. W. Roby regarding Combat Air Patrol over Leyte Island, P. I., 24  
October, 1944

I took off the USS Gambier Bay at 0500 for objective CAP over the Leyte-Samar area. My division consisting of Lt(jg)'s Phillips, Courtney and Hunting. Lt. Seitz's division included Ens. Dugan, Lt. Ellwood and Ens. McGraw. We arrived on station at Point William at 0530. We orbited until daylight and then I assumed station NAN to KING and Lt. Seitz from NAN to WILLIAM. At 0730, Lt. Seitz came to Pt. King and made rendezvous with me. There had been no bogeys up to 0745.

At 0745 we investigated two friendly planes making propaganda drops along Carigara Bay. After that my division stayed at angels 3, and Lt. Seitz's division went to angels 8. At 0800 bogies were reported (Note: This would have been reported by radar contact and ground control information.) approaching from the west and almost at once I tally hoed a SALLY to the west and above me. I started to climb and kept the SALLY in sight. However, when I reached angels 8, Courtney, my wingman, tally hoed a SALLY on the starboard beam. I turned into it and fired a long burst in a flat side run. The SALLY caught fire at once. Courtney followed me in and shot off the right wing. The plane then rolled over and spiraled down to the ground in flames. At the same time, Seitz and Dugan shot down one each and another outfit got the fourth one.

As I was due to return to base at 0820 with the two divisions, I called the commander of support aircraft for permission to do so. However, before I received permission, another group of bogies was coming in. Of my eight planes, one did not have sufficient gas. My wingman and I started climbing to angels 12, and at about that time a group of over 20 bombers were tally hoed by VF from another squadron. I spotted them east of my position and about 2000' above. I turned toward them and intercepted 15 LILLY's. They had started to push over and were at angel 11. I made a steep stern run on one and got some hits but had to break off to miss an F6F coming in from astern and flat. (Note: Two or three of the carriers in Taffy 1 were equipped with F6F's the rest with FM-2's) I then pulled up to astern of a bomber well forward in the group and shot from dead astern. After a long burst this plane (LILLY) burst into flames, rolled over, to spiral into the ground.

I did not see my wingman after starting the first run. I then pulled out and came in behind another bomber and started firing from dead astern. Pieces flew from his tail and his left engine caught on fire but due to my rapid rate of closing, I had to break off to avoid a collision and I did not see this plane actually go down. I fired at one other bomber, but he was in AA range and I broke off. This plane was hit by AA and went down. I joined up with others in the flight and landed at 0945 with 4 rounds of ammunition left in one gun and about ten gallons of gas when I landed.

(End of report)

REPORT OF LT(JG) C. F. HUNTING--OBJECTIVE AREA - CAP OVER LEYTE  
ISLAND, P. I. 24 October, 1944

I took off at about 0500 and at 0505 I joined up with Lt (jg) Phillips to proceed to point William. Here we joined up with Lt. Roby and Lt (jg) Courtney. We were then directed to orbit point NAN at angels 8. At 0800 we made contact with 4 SALLYS- three of which were soon burning. I observed some hits by Phillips on one SALLY.

At 0815 at angels 15. 30 miles from point NAN, 15-21 Jap bombers were sighted. I left Phillips and made two high side runs from the port side with no apparent damage. I made an overtaking run from dead astern and fired a long burst from about 300 to 500 yards. The planes remained in tight formation and were taking no evasive action. I saw the plane I had been firing at start smoking in both engines and it went into a steep left spin and caught afire. The plane was identified as a LILY.

I estimate the speed of the LILY'S, when they were in their glide approach at about 240 knots. I saw no bombs dropped or jettisoned nor did I see any return fire from the LILY's. I did see some small caliber fire from dorsal turrets of Sally's attacked by other planes from my flight. I saw no parachutes anywhere in the area, and apparently all enemy personnel went down with their planes.

(End of report)

REPORT OF LT(JG) E. H. COURTNEY REGARDING COMBAT AIR PATROL  
OVER LEYTE ISLAND, P. I., 24 October 1944.

( Report written by Lt. Stewart of VC-10) Verified by Lt. Comdr. Huxtable and Lt. R. W. Roby-also of VC-10.

Lt (jg) Courtney flew wing position on Lt. Roby on this flight. When chasing the SALLY tally hoed by Lt. Roby, Courtney tally hoed a SALLY on his starboard beam. When Roby made a flat side run, Courtney went in with him on a section run. Both planes were firing at the same time. Courtney broke off last and his burst shot the right wing off the SALLY.

When the flight of LILLY'S were closed on and Roby made his stern run, Courtney followed a LILY which broke out of formation and headed down in a steeper dive than the rest of the enemy planes. He tailed in dead astern of her at about 8000' and fired five or six long bursts into her. The LILY smoked some but definitely did not flame. Courtney continued firing on her until she had completed a 180 degree spiral and had disappeared into a cloud.

He climbed back up to 8000' and attempted to locate more enemy planes without success. He then returned to base, critically low on fuel and landed at 1000.

(Note: This report was apparently prepared while on the return to Hawaii. Lt (jg) Courtney was not airborne on 25 October and therefore was not with the men who prepared this report for him but returned by a different route.)

(End of report)

Report of Lieutenant E. W. Seitz, VC-10, concerning a flight 24 October 1944.

On October 24th, at 0805, while on CAP over Leyte, contact was made with a group of 4 or 5 SALLY's. I made a high side run on a SALLY from its starboard quarter. I fired a 4 to 5 second burst and shot off the port wing immediately behind the engine. The plane burst into flames and fell to the earth about 6 miles west of Tacloban. No personnel were seen to jump.

REPORT OF ENS. C. J. DUGAN, CONCERNING FLIGHT OF 24 October 1944.

I took off at 0500, 24 October 1944, for CAP island objective and made routine patrol with Lt. Seitz and division until 0750 when we tally hoed a formation of four or five SALLY bombers over Pt. Love. The bombers were at about 9 to 10000 feet. We were at about 7000 feet. We started to climb and follow. Lt. Seitz took one plane and I tailed onto another. The plane I took had an altitude and speed advantage, and I chased him to the eastern side of the island. I got into range junction with no results and then tailed in and fired from dead astern. The plane smoked badly after about a three second burst. I was closing fast and fired a long burst. As I went by the wing roots flamed and the plane rolled into a dive. It crashed about five miles north of TACLOBAN AIRFIELD.

I was very low on gas so I pulled up to look for my division. I made rendezvous with Lt. Ellwood and started for base. Lt. Seitz called in that he was departing for base. I chased another bogie but it was an FM2. Lt. Ellwood did not follow and I departed for base alone using ZB. I came upon a large carrier task unit about 65 miles out and made an emergency landing to refuel. Later I returned to my own ship.

(signed) C. J. DUGAN Ens., A-V(N), USNR VC-10

REPORT OF LT. C. R. ELLWOOD REGARDING CAP OVER LEYTE ISLAND, P. I.,  
24 October, 1944

We made a pre-dawn (0500) take off from the GAMBIER BAY, made rendezvous and departed for the Island objective, for combat air patrol. Lt. Seitz was leading our division, with Ens. Dugan on his wing. Ens. McGraw was on my wing.

We were assigned to orbit point NAN at angels 8. Up until 0800 we chased three separate bogies all of which proved to be friendly. ( Note: Radar control would have sent these planes out to investigate bogies.) At about 0800 we sighted and gave chase to the first enemy plane our division had reported. This plane was evidently one of a group that had closed from the north-west, and was heading toward Tacloban and letting down to gain speed. It was a SALLY with brown camouflage. We were above and behind this plane. Seitz and Dugan were closing-one on each side-with McGraw and I bringing up the rear, and also working to set up a bracket position.

Soon after this, several planes from the flight made do any good here with Ens. Dugan and Lt. Seitz so close-so I looked back for other possibilities. I saw one plane coming down towards us-although high and still out of range. I turned back towards it, and pulled up into a chandelle. It was a Zeke-either silver or light gray like the underside of our FM-2. I decided not to give chase by myself and without altitude advantage. I looked back and saw that Lt. Seitz's SALLY was flaming down with one wing falling by itself. I found a lone FM-2 and was trying to get him to follow me as I could see a melee above us and over ORMOC. While climbing, I kept looking back, and once again a plane started a run from above and astern. I turned away from the other FM-2 to attempt to set a weave-but this other plane paid no attention to me-so I turned my plane around to get in a head-on shot at this ZEKE which was now firing his 7.7. Seeing that I couldn't get around in time, and I would be shot down if I didn't do something violent, I shoved under in more or less of an inverted cartwheel, I blacked out and came out on what should have been a course behind the ZEKE-and going in his same direction-but I didn't see him any rendezvous and we returned to base to land aboard at 0930.

(End of report)

REPORT OF ENSIGN JOSEPH D. MCGRAW COMBAT AIR PATROL OVER  
LEYTE ., P.I. 24 October 1944

Our VF division was catapulted at 0500. We joined up and departed from over the lead destroyer. We arrived on station at about 0525, and patrolled from Point KING to Point NAN. At about 0800 over point KING a large bogie was reported. We started climbing at full military power as we were only at about 4000'. We had been chasing a bogie on the deck which turned out to be a TBM. We tally hoed three SALLY's high above us (about 12000'), and Lt. Seitz and Ens. Dugan, his wingman overtook two of them to shoot them down a few miles west of Tacloban Town. I was unable to close within firing range. I think the third SALLY was also shot down by a VC-10 fighter.

During the chase I became separated from my section leader, so I joined up on Lt. Seitz. We circled at point KING again until Lt. Seitz was forced to leave due to shortage of fuel. I remained on station as I still had about 65 gallons.

At about 0840 a large bogie was reported coming in at point KING, high. Just then a large formation of twin-engine bombers was tally hoed.. I was at 10,000', and as I climbed to 13,000' I sighted about 21 LILLY's in close formation headed for Leyte Gulf-at 15,000'.

I made my first run on a section of LILLY's, low, and on the starboard side of the formation. I fired a long burst at mid-range of about 200 yards at the section leader from a full deflection down to about 30 degrees.

My tracers were hitting the starboard side of the fuselage just aft of the cockpit, but he seemed to suffer no serious damage.

Then I concentrated my fire at his wingman at about 100 yards range. After a long burst from 20 degree deflection to almost dead astern, that went into his starboard engine and wing root, the LILY burst into flames, and dropped out of the formation. Just as he fell, in flames, his starboard wing came off. Just as the LILY burst into flames another FM-2 zoomed very close underneath me-coming from my left. He may have been firing at the same LILY as I-although I saw no other tracers. There was no return fire from this plane, although the dorsal hatch was opened. He made no evasive action-but held in formation. His speed was 160-170 knots, and mine was from 180-200 IAS.

I recovered to the right of the bombers and made another beam run from the starboard, this time on a lone LILY low and on the starboard side of the formation. I fired a long burst from full deflection down to about 30 degrees, and observed hits on the fuselage and cockpit. I then sucked in behind and fired another long burst at his port engine, which exploded and caught fire. Then I fired into his port wing roots, which also flamed. As the LILY dropped off on his left wing, I rolled to the left. As I did the rear hatch gunner scored 8 hits on my plane, although none did any serious damage. The LILY continued its roll and spun-in in flames.

I recovered on the left side of the remaining bombers, and I now saw only six left. I made two more runs on the rear LILLY's but observed no real damage from my fire. Three more of the bombers were shot down by other fighters, two were in flames, before they arrived over the transports in the Gulf. As the remaining three bombers dove thru the thin layers of clouds over the ships, the ships' AA opened fire. I pulled out to the left and headed back to point NAN. I observed two planes crash into the water that had probably been hit by our AA fire, and one was close alongside a large landing ship just off shore.

At Point NAN I joined up with Lt. Seitz, who had turned back, and Lt.(jg) Hunting. As we were all quite low on fuel we headed for our base. I landed aboard with from 8-10 gallons at 0930.

(End of report)

Following is the verbatim copy of the Final Report of Fleet Action 25 October 1944, action against the Japanese Fleet when it attacked the task unit 77.4.3 which included the U.S.S.GAMBIER BAY and Squadron VC-10.

Tactical and Operational Data narrative and comment from pilots on action of VC-10 based on USS Gambier Bay. Mission: Attack on Japanese Fleet. Participants were 10 FM-2 aircraft and 9 TBM aircraft launched while Task Unit 77.4.3 was under attack from the Japanese force of: 4 battleships, 6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and from 12 to 14 destroyers.

The reports of the squadron commander and of most of the pilots that participated are printed below but statistical information, materiel inventories, sketches of dispositions are omitted.

## **Report 2-B**

This flight was launched under the worst possible conditions with the enemy fleet a few miles astern and already shelling our disposition, and as a result the attack could not be organized and planned as it could have been with just a little more notice. Two of the nine torpedo planes had nothing but their ammunition to attack with, and one of the others had only two inert rockets. Planes were launched and the attack made in spite of these handicaps.

To summarize, seven VT and ten VF type planes were launched with all possible speed commencing at about 0655. (Note: There was a TCAP flight over Leyte launched at 0500 which is why there were fewer planes launched than the total complement. There were also a couple of TBM types that were never able to be launched.) Within one half hour two more VT were launched loaded with torpedoes. As long as the planes remained under 1000' it was easy to spot the enemy warships, but to make an effective attack on these ships under the very cloudy and rainy weather conditions altitude has to be gained. Some time was required before even a fairly good try could be made due to the weather. Since the flagship of the disposition was ordering immediate attack, Lt. Comdr. Huxtable made the best of a very poor situation and finally found a hole in the clouds for the few torpedo planes he had loaded to make an attack. Due to mechanical or personnel failures in failing to release the bombs on the first try, second and third runs had to be made to properly get rid of the bombs. The fighters, meanwhile, had climbed to altitude and found a few holes through which to make vertical strafing runs at the weather decks of the exposed ships. Soon after 0800 the enemy fleet began to move out into a clearer area and three very effective bomb hits were scored on two CA's and one near miss on one of these. The TONE class cruiser that was hit on the fantail by Ens. Shroyer with two bombs soon went dead in the water. The two planes that had been loaded with torpedoes, which took off later, proceeded to their attack at about 0800, and apparently made very good launchings against a BB, but there was no observation of results. The rockets carried by one plane were launched at a new type DD after the main attack had taken place with unobserved results.

The fighter pilots could notice no specific results from their strafing with the exception of greatly decreased AA fire. The damage to several ships could have been heavy. One of the VF was hit hard by heavy AA, but pulled out and was escorted to a field by another fighter. On the way to Tacloban field, these two planes were attacked by a lone TONY which fled the area when our two VF fired at him. Ens. Gallagher's plane was badly damaged, and he had to make a water landing about a mile in front of our disposition of ships that were fleeing the Jap Fleet as fast as possible and could not be picked up. He and his two crewmen were seen to get into a raft. They were never recovered.

In spite of the fact that two of the torpedo planes had no loadings and only ammunition, many strafing and dummy runs were made by them to distract and draw firepower. The fighters, when their ammunition had been expended, did the same thing if their remaining gas allowed them to do so.

It is interesting to note that the enemy is using various colored bursts for spotting his heavy AA fire. Also noteworthy is the fact that the pilots apparently are more afraid of the heavy AA at medium to high altitudes than they were of the fire at much lower altitudes near the ships.

In the approach tactics, cloud cover had to be used of necessity, and the TBM's were using a very steep glide angle to attack at high speeds and pull back up into the clouds. The fighters made almost vertical strafing runs-firing from about 5000' to pull-out points a low as 600' and they also would retire into the clouds at high speed. Sun cover did (not) come into use due to the cloud conditions over most of the targets.

Most of the planes had to land at Tacloban or Dulag fields on LEYTE at the conclusion of their attack, although one VT and one VF landed on the U.S.S. MANILA BAY to join in another attack later on. Our base, the U.S.S. GAMBIER BAY, was sunk by enemy shell fire during the squadron's attack on the enemy fleet.

Due to the fact that the planes and pilots were widely scattered after the attack, no appropriate or effective data on materiel factors can be presented. However, most of the equipment used in very hard and unusual circumstances performed normally and well. The failure of the bomb-release mechanism in two instances may have been due to personnel failure in the excitement of the moment. Insofar as is known, the torpedoes ran true and did not porpoise. The possible failure of two bombs to detonate` may have been due to improper fusing in the excitement on deck prior to take-off.

E.J. Huxtable, Lt. Comdr., USN

Commanding Officer, VC-10

25 October 1944

(End of Report)

Statement of Lieutenant Commander E. J. Huxtable, USN - Compron 10

At 0530 on 25 October, 1944 an eight plane TCAP was launched from the GAMBIER BAY. Secure from General Quarters was sounded at 0635 and Condition THREE set in the Gunnery Department. I went below for breakfast at this time and at 0655

(approximately) General Quarters was sounded and I immediately returned to the Ready Room. The word was passed there that a Japanese Fleet was twenty miles astern and we manned planes immediately. Ten fighters were flown off and five torpedo planes catapulted. I was in the lead VT which I found had no bomb load. I sent one of the deck crew to ask the Air Officer for a bomb load, but was told to launch immediately. As I taxied on to the catapult the first enemy salvo landed in the formation and I knew the enemy was much closer than twenty miles. The VT rendezvoused on the starboard bow at 2000 feet. Fleet course was 90 degrees full or flank speed. Weather ahead was clear, overhead was overcast at 2000 feet, astern was a large squally area with lowering overcast in which was the Japanese Fleet. I could see their gunfire flashes as we were rendezvousing and at this time BENDIX broadcast "Attack Immediately". My fighters had started towards the Japanese and I followed with the VT at 2000 feet just under the overcast. The first ship I saw astern of our carriers was one of our own destroyers on a course of about 120 degrees. She was firing at the Japanese cruisers and under heavy fire herself with several salvos of splashes in the near vicinity.

Farther west was a column of four Japanese cruisers with a MOGAMI class in the lead on a course of 060 degrees at flank speed. Astern of these on a course of 90 degrees (approximately) was a column of four Japanese battleships with a FUSO class in the lead.

At this time I was on a heading of 290 degrees (approximately) and climbing through a rift in the clouds at 2500 feet. The Japanese cruisers were giving our formation a heavy concentration of fire whereas the Japanese battleships appeared not to be firing at all. I decided to attack the Japanese cruisers immediately. I turned back in an easterly direction and spread my VT out in column and climbed to 3000 feet above which was solid overcast. I turned back to attack on a westerly course above a thin overcast at 2000 feet. The fighters had not contacted but I believed this no occasion to delay for fighter protection and went in to attack. Shortly after I came out of the thin overcast at 2000 feet and distant about 4000 yards from the Japanese cruisers they opened fire with a terrific barrage of AA both heavy and medium. I was coming in on their starboard bow and told my flight to concentrate on the lead cruiser which was nearest and I made a feint for the after cruiser, trying to draw as much fire as possible away from my planes which had a bomb or torpedo load. Turning left at the end of the line I went back through the clouds to a position ahead of the cruisers and started to scout them, drawing heavy AA at 6000 to 7000 yards distant. They had changed course to 30 degrees and I advised base. Our force was making much smoke and between that and the murky weather it looked like the Japanese contact had been broken for a while.

My planes had become separated and two were hit by anti-aircraft fire. Base advised return to TACLOBAN FIELD on LEYTE. One of the two planes was forced to make a water landing in the vicinity of own force. My fighters had joined with DEXTER group which was not in contact at this time.

99 BENDIX was organizing a fighter group for strafing runs and I decided to remain in the vicinity for a short while to see if I could be of assistance.

The cruisers were evidently trying to box our formation between themselves and the battleships. I advised that the best course was now south as cruisers had now gained a true bearing of 30 degrees from own force and both cruisers and own force were in clear weather. Battleships were still in area of smoke and low visibility west of formation as were our own destroyer's. The CVE on the port quarter at this time was receiving concentrated fire from the cruisers on course south. The fighters started strafing runs and as they started their runs I made simulated torpedo attacks in to about 3000 yards drawing quite a bit of AA but no damage. I made four runs in this fashion and then saw what I presumed to be DEXTER TBMs start bombing runs. I heard flight leaders from the other CVE group preparing for attacks and decided that the situation was much improved and left for TACLOBAN at 0915 (approximately) to bomb up.

Arriving at TACLOBAN at 0945 I circled until 1000 waiting on fighters which were low on gas to land. During this time I inquired from HALIFAX if bombs were available at TACLOBAN. HALIFAX said negative and I decided my best bet was the other group of CVE's, which previously had been too engaged. Over TACLOBAN one of my VT had joined up with me. On return I encountered own force and asked permission to land and rearm. Five CVEs were present at this time but I was directed back to TACLOBAN departing at 1030. TACLOBAN was filled and I was directed to DULAG FIELD where I landed at 1130.

(End of statement)

Statement of Lieutenant J. R. Jackson, Jr. U.S.N.R.- Compron 10

At approximately 0650 on 25 October 1944, I was in the Ward Room eating breakfast when General Quarters sounded. When we reached the Ready Room we were told to man the first plane we found.

At 0700 we were launched from the deck of the GAMBIER BAY to attack an enemy surface force consisting of 4 battleships, six heavy or light cruisers and several destroyers, which was shelling our own force from a distance of approximately fifteen miles and closing. Our aircraft, a TBM-1C carried a load of two-five hundred pound SAP bombs and a full load of ammunition.

We joined up with the Squadron Commander, Lieutenant Commander E. J. Huxtable and two other TBM's flown by Lieutenant Bassett and Ensign Shroyer. We then headed for the enemy force in a climb, but because the Japanese Fleet was so close we had only twenty-five hundred feet altitude when we reached them. We made a three quarter turn which gave us another thousand feet altitude, then Lt. Comdr. HUXTABLE lead us in the first attack in column. I had my bombs set for release in train at 240 knots, 150 feet apart.

The enemy fleet was in a rain squall at the time and as I entered the clouds, the rest of the air group was lost to sight. When I emerged I found that I was not on a target and since the base of the cloud was at about 1000 feet it was too late to find one, so I continued my dive in a turn to the right. This turned out to be a bad move because instead of coming out over the leading warship as planned, I discovered that we were over the starboard side of the force. We had attacked from ahead and the right turn took us over the remainder of the enemy force at less than 1000 feet altitude. I think that this move came as such a surprise to the enemy that it is the only reason we escaped. I continued the dive until we were just clearing the surface of the water. I had everything wide open and I glanced at the airspeed indicator and found that we were indicating well over three hundred knots. The air seemed to be full of tracer and exploding AA shells. The water was one mass of splashes and spouts and never before have we seen such heavy fire.

We passed between two battleships one of them being a KONGO class and the other an unidentified class. It is entirely possible that their own AA might have inflicted damage upon each other because they were both firing as we passed between them. The fire followed us for what seemed minutes but was probably about twenty or thirty seconds until we got out of range. Still, scattered three and five inch followed us. A great deal of the fire seemed to pass behind us evidently, because of our speed although it looked as if the plane was wreathed in fire.

After flying clear of the force we found ourselves alone. The radioman and gunner W. F. Bounds, ATM3c and J. Orewyler, AMM3c, respectively, reported everything O.K. so we started climbing, staying clear of the AA fire which we could see lancing out at other planes.

Throughout, the Japanese had continued shelling our forces.

Meanwhile, we heard over the radio that our destroyers were going to make a torpedo attack and to be careful not to hit them. We continued climbing ahead of the force until we reached an altitude of 10,000 feet. Every few seconds there would be a burst of AA fire in our vicinity.

At this time we heard Ensign GALLAGHER report that he had been hit and was making a water landing.

The leading ships had by this time cleared the clouds and we found ourselves astern of the leading cruiser, a MOGAMI class. I immediately started my dive and at 3500 feet released the bombs. Immediately the tracer again opened up but I continued my dive ahead and was soon clear. Looking back we saw the one explosion which seemed to be just slightly short of the target, but close enough to shake them up considerably. The reason for only one explosion was soon made known when BOUNDS reported that only one bomb had dropped. Again we started climbing. The enemy fleet had again gone under the cloud, but by checking its course we knew it would again soon emerge.

We leveled off at 7000 feet and since there did not seem to be many explosive AA shells coming up through the clouds, we started orbiting at the west side of it. In a few seconds the MOGAMI class cruiser again appeared and before they could see us we were in our dive. As I nosed over I saw a bomb from another plane hit on the stern. I continued my dive meeting very scattered fire. At 2500 feet I released the bomb. As we looked back we saw it hit just forward of amidships, probably near the bridge. There was a sheet of red flame and black smoke rolled up. A few seconds later we heard another plane report the leading cruiser was putting out smoke both on the stern and forward, so we are positive that we had a very good hit.

We had climbed to 2000 feet and started for TACLOBAN to rearm when we sighted our other carrier force. It being nearer we started for her, instead.

Almost immediately we heard our last transmission from our ship. She gave bearing and distance to TACLOBAN and said to rearm and return. I orbited our base twice and proceeded to TACLOBAN at 0840.

As we left we saw this picture: our own force headed south. Our own ship nearest the enemy (less than 4000 yards) was following a zig-zag course but had been hit at least once and was being straddled on almost every salvo. The main Japanese fleet still proceeding on a south by southeast course. Our own destroyers and destroyer escorts attempted to get between our force and the enemy, but had been boxed by an enemy cruiser and five destroyers in line, distance about five miles northwest.

On the flight to TACLOBAN I was joined by four VT and 11 fighters from other ships.

I landed on TACLOBAN strip at 0950 and was unable to rearm and I was not allowed to take off again.

(End of statement)

Statement of Ensign B. F. Dillard, U. S. N. R., Compron 10

On 25 October, 1944, I took off at approximately 0700. As I turned back abeam of the ship for rendezvous, I saw three shells land close aboard the port side. While climbing through a heavy overcast, I became separated from the group with the exception of one plane from the FANSHAW BAY. We were to attack immediately, so, upon finding a hole at 9500 feet I started a strafing dive upon what I believed to be the leading cruiser. I faintly remember recovering from the dive but remember nothing more until I regained consciousness at 800 feet. My cockpit hood, helmet and goggles were missing. There was a 4" hole in the port side of the cockpit.

The AA fire was somewhat heavy and of many different colors, mostly pink and orange. While the FANSHAW BAY plane was leading me to TACLOBAN airstrip, we were attacked by a TONY, which fled when fired upon with no visible damage. I received

minor cuts on the face. There was no other damage to the aircraft (B-22). Pilot of escorting plane was said to have believed that my aircraft was out of control from two to four minutes.

(End of statement)

Statement of Ensign J. I. Turner, U. S. N. R., COMPRON 10

On 25 October, 1944 at 0500, two divisions consisting of Lieut. OLIVER, myself and Lieut. HARDERS, Ensign BENNETT, Lieut. STEWART, Lieut. ROBY, Lieut. WICKERSHAM and Ensign GIGER Took off for target CAP. At 0915, after sighting no enemy planes, we were instructed to land at TACLOBAN. All landed safely except myself. I landed and due to the misunderstanding of the signal landed long and hit an overturned plane on the runway. Both planes caught fire but I escaped uninjured.

At 1515 I again took off with Lt. (jg) C. F. Hunting to fly a CAP. At 1715 we jumped from six to eight ZEKES low over Point NAN and attacked. Lt. (JG) HUNTING flamed one and I hit two without any apparent damage. We were separated and I called for HUNTING's position. He was directly over TACLOBAN airfield with an emergency landing. I heard him receive instructions to orbit Point WILLIAM, but when I tried to find him I was fired on by the transports in the area. I believe Lt.(jg) HUNTING was shot down by this AA. I landed at about 1815.

On October 26th, 1944 I downed my plane because of low fuel pressure for combat, so did not fly.

On October 27th, we were ordered off TACLOBAN to DULAG and took off about 0830. At 0930 my engine began to lose power and shortly after I was forced to make a water landing. At 0915 I saw Ensign LISCHER shoot down a TONY and at 1000 I saw him chase a VAL, which he later got. I was picked up by a destroyer escort with minor lacerations on my face.

(end of statement)

Statement of Ensign J. F. LISCHER, U.S.N.R., COMPRON 10

On 25 October 1944, at approximately 0655, word was passed that a Japanese task force of approximately four battleships, and several cruisers and destroyers was directly astern of us, 20 miles away. General Quarters was sounded and at about 0700 I took off in B-14, (Plane number used on fuselage) Bureau No. 55421.

I joined up on seven other FM-2s and we sighted two destroyers about 12 miles astern.

The weather was very bad, with the enemy enclosed in a heavy rain squall. The group of fighters I was with attacked the destroyers, but during the attack I lost contact with them

BOROGAN on the east coast of SAMAR. They had apparently just been under attack, one destroyer was burning and a cruiser was leaving an oil slick. We reported to HALIFAX (Seventh Fleet Command) and he told us to remain there and inform him of any developments. At 1430 (approximately) a large group of carrier planes struck because of the storms. Intense, light and medium AA was encountered from the destroyers. On recovering from my strafing run on one of the destroyers, I encountered sight of eight of our VTB covered by approximately four divisions of VF. I joined up with them for the destroyers had moved into a heavier squall, and I thought I could be of more value with a coordinated group. This group was led by 99 DEXTER, who was Commander Fowler I believe. We attacked a force of about six heavy cruisers who were closing and shelling our carriers. We made several attacks on the cruisers. I expended all my ammunition on a MOGAMI class cruiser and a TONE class cruiser, making about eight runs in all. I encountered moderate, heavy and medium AA during this time. During the action I observed two bomb hits on two cruisers. One cruiser was hit amidships, unidentified, and a TONE class was hit at the stern and was stopped, leaving a large oil slick it drifted a short ways, and then lay dead, slightly down at the stern. At 0900 I departed for TACLOBAN airstrip according to orders I received by radio from BENDIX base (USS FANSHAW BAY,) flagship task unit 77.4.3) to land there to refuel and rearm.

At 1145 I took off with Lt.(jg) R. L. PHILLIPS. At approximately 1230 we saw the Japanese task force on a course of 000 degrees, speed about 20 knots. About 15 miles east of the task force. I observed a probable hit on a battleship, a possible hit on another battleship and a possible hit on a cruiser. Also, many near misses. At 1500 PHILLIPS and I returned to TACLOBAN low on gas. The task force was on course of 015 degrees, speed 20 knots (approximately) at this time, still east of BOROGAN, but within five miles of SAMAR.

On the 26th. of October, 1944, I took off at 0800 and joined up with four other CATNIP VF on local CAP - negative.

On the 27th of October at 0730 I took off with six other fighters under Lieut. STEWART from TACLOBAN and we proceeded to DULAG airstrip. After becoming airborne we were ordered to circle southeast of DULAG over LEYTE GULF because of an air alert. During this time we observed one TONY retiring from the transports and we gave chase. Lieut. STEWART caught him first and gave him a good burst before he overran.

The TONY skidded in front of me and I got in a long burst, and as I pulled up his right wing went down and when I looked back he had crashed and exploded right on the beach about 10 miles south of DULAG. Lieut. WICKERSHAM and one other pilot got in a few bursts on the TONY.

Retiring to our orbit point, Ensign TURNER had engine failure and while we were orbiting him, after he had landed in the water, I observed a VAL come out of the clouds

and turn towards land. I chased him and finally shot him down five miles south of DULAG and 3 or 4 miles inland. He crashed and exploded. We then landed at DULAG at 0945, after Ensign TURNER had been rescued by a PT.

(End of statement)

#### REPORT OF LT. H. B. BASSETT CONCERNING OCTOBER 25 FLIGHT.

Take-off was at approximately 0700. Within five minutes after becoming airborne, the Skipper gave instructions for immediate rendezvous. Four VT made rendezvous in right echelon-HUXTABLE, Bassett, Crocker, and Shroyer, this being the order, with two other VT joining us enroute to the target, which seemed to be about 12 miles north at the time. During join-up I heard orders from base to attack at once. We began to climb as fast as possible heading in the direction of ships which we could see firing on our disposition. Heavy cloud formation with base around 1500' obscured most of the enemy ships, but Huxtable found one thin spot which enabled us to read 2500'. Just as we deployed for attack I noticed a great deal of AA which was apparently directed at someone who preceded us. I swung to the Skipper's port side, interval about 100 yards just prior to his signal for attack. I lost sight of other planes at that time. We seemed to be approaching a column of cruisers from the south-their course being easterly. As the Skipper dove to the left, heading for the second ship in column, he instructed me to take the one on the right which was in the lead. It was a MOGAMI class. I pulled up to about 2800' as the distance closed and as I nosed over from the cloud base, I realized that the AA was becoming very intense. My run was from slightly abaft the starboard beam of the cruiser. The dive was approximately 35 degrees. Almost simultaneous with the release of my first bomb at 2000', the plane shuddered from a hit and I released the second bomb at once-pulling out at 1500' at about 200 knots, and within about 20 seconds I was able to get into the clouds ahead of the cruiser.

The weather prevented both my crewmen and myself from observing results. Since none of us felt the bomb explosion I am inclined to believe that my 500# bomb (GP) had hydrostatic fuses only. Several of our planes had been loaded for ASP flight scheduled for 1000, and I don't know if the ordnance men had time to effect a change of fuses on such short notice. This will have to be ascertained from other sources.

Not knowing how badly the plane was damaged, I climbed to 8000' on instruments. Upon emerging from the clouds I could see and my crewmen could check rather closely the damage to the tail. When the stick was pulled back there was a slight binding, but was otherwise satisfactory with all instruments all right. Later investigation showed that the starboard horizontal stabilizer had been hit from beneath by an explosive shell which had made a hole about 10" in diameter below and 18" in diameter above-completely severing two of the fore and aft braces and producing a bulge in both the leading edge and the after braces athwart ships.

The latter bulge being forced against the elevator causing the binding mentioned before. One piece of shrapnel came thru the glass window on the port side next to the radioman's seat, but caused no damage inside.

Orders were received about thirty minutes after our attack to proceed to Tacloban field for rearming and refueling. I proceeded there singly and was informed the field could take emergency landings only. I circled until 1100, joining my group meanwhile and landed at Dulag shortly after 1100.

My plane was repaired by changing the starboard horizontal stabilizer and I was able to proceed from Dulag to the USS Savo Island on 27 October. My crewmen and some Army personnel effected the repairs by removing the stabilizer from a wrecked TBM and putting this on my plane.

(End of report)

REPORT OF LT. R. W. ROBY CONCERNING ATTACK FLIGHT 25 OCTOBER,  
1944.

At 0650 I was in the ready room when word came from Air Plot that the Jap Fleet was 30 miles astern and that all planes were to take off immediately. I manned a fighter and was launched at 0655. I joined up with five or six of our own VF and we started climbing toward the Jap Fleet. At approximately 0710 we broke out in a clear area over a portion of the Jap force-consisting of four or more DD's. We made attacks immediately. After three or more runs, I pulled up to 9500 feet and made rendezvous with Dexter VF and VT.. I made vertical runs with the VF planes from that group. After that I became separated and joined with other VF and made about four more passes. By 0800 my guns were either jammed or empty, but I made repeated dry runs at a group of cruisers to draw their fire. I left the area to go to Tacloban and rearm at about 0920.

I arrived over point WILLIAM at 0950 and escorted Ens. Dillard into the field. However I was ordered to circle until further notice, by the commander of support aircraft. At 1040 I landed, re-fueled and re-armed at Tacloban.

(End of report)

REPORT OF ENS. P. A. BENNETT REGARDING ATTACK FLIGHT 25 October,  
1944

Enemy shells were landing nearby when GQ was sounded aboard the USS GAMBIER BAY about 0700 on October 25. With the exception of some fighter pilots in condition 11, most of the pilots were in the wardroom eating breakfast. All available aircraft were ordered manned and launched immediately. All planes were airborne by about 0710

(with the exception of 4 VT and some VF on the hangar deck) There were 6-8 VF and 7 -VT launched at this time. The carrier group was headed for a rain squall at this time and when I, in the last plane, was launched, it was necessary to go on instruments almost immediately. By the time a clear area and friendly planes were located they were already on the way to the target. By the time I had climbed to altitude and arrived on the scene the attack was under way. I was joined about this time by an FM-2 from my squadron who flew around me and headed for the Jap formation ahead. The FM-2 began a strafing run on the leading cruiser, and as I came up, I followed him in the attack. (I had taken off with no bomb or rocket load). No AA was seen to burst near us at this time. After pulling back up into the clouds where I lost the FM-2 a Jap BB emerged from the rain squall behind the cruisers and a strafing run was made on it. I broke out of the clouds at about 3500'. The run was made at a target angle of about 010 degree and at about a 60 degree glide-and recovery was into the clouds again. The AA was heavy, and many bursts were below and to starboard. There was some tracer. Except for one small hole in the right aileron we were not hit. The gunner and the radioman strafed all targets within range. I don't believe we did much damage at this time, but we did draw AA from planes that were attacking on the enemy's port side.

By this time our carriers in our group were being called regarding landing and rearming. They (the planes) were told to go to the beach. I decided to try to get to the beach and pick up some bombs, but as we were swinging around TG 77.4.2 was picked up on radar distant about 25 miles, and I headed out for it. While circling here and waiting for permission to land, I joined up on Comdr. Fowler (VC-5) and landed with him on the USS Manila Bay at about 1000.

We were rearmed and took off from the USS MANILA BAY at about 1115 (about 12 VT and 5 VF) and took a course of about 240 back to search for the Jap Fleet. We sighted a Jap BB and a heavy cruiser dead in the water. A DD was underway nearby. We left these ships, as Comdr. Fowler was looking for the main Jap force. They were sighted off the coast of Samar on course of about 300 (degrees) at 1200. Another group of planes came up. They were to attack from the northeast while we came in from the northwest

The Japs had now changed course to about 350 (degrees). As the VF started down, the Japs turned toward us, and hoping for a bow to stern run my radioman had set up the bombs to be released in train with an inter valometer setting of 20' for 240 knots. I started my glide run from about 8000'-and weaved about to dodge the AA which was rather thick but not very accurate. By the time I reached release altitude (2500') I was coming in almost directly over the stern of the Jap CA I had picked as a target. Glide was made at about a sixty degree angle with 250 knots being indicated. On pull-out one bomb slick was observed close off the CA's port quarter, and a dark brownish smoke hung over the ship. According to my crewmen and what I could see, three hits were scored across the stern of this CA-class undetermined. I joined up with Comdr. Fowler and returned to our own carrier group and landed aboard the FANSHAW BAY at about 1330.

(End of report)

REPORT OF ENS. JOSEPH D. McGRAW REGARDING ATTACK FLIGHT 25  
OCTOBER.

General Quarters sounded at about 0700 and we manned all our aircraft. I took off at about 0705 and joined our VT and escorted them to the Jap Fleet which was then shelling our carriers. At about 0725 we hit their ships. I made about 11 strafing runs on one BB (Judged to be a FUSO class) and three CA's one of which was a TONE. I started the first runs at 8000' and I used a little cloud cover at this height and started succeeding runs at 6000'-pulling out usually at about 1000' and sometimes to about 600'. Their AA at lower levels was fairly heavy but inaccurate.

Before leaving I observed a CA turning to port and apparently badly damaged. I also saw one of our carriers dropping far behind the rest-she was being heavily shelled and smoking badly.

I landed aboard the USS MANILA BAY at about 1000 with only five to 8 gallons of gas. I had come in on the ZB.

At 1115 we were launched again to make a major attack on the Jap fleet. Cripples were to be ignored. Comdr. Fowler of VC-5 was leading this flight. We encountered the Japs off the coast of Samar about 20 miles. There were at least 2 BB, four CA or CL and 7 or eight DD. At about 1245 we attacked this group. I strafed the lead BB which I saw hit with bombs amidships-by Comdr. Fowler, I believe, and I then strafed a CA on the other side of the BB as I pulled out and then a DD in the outer screen.

I continued on my way to the rendezvous area. On the way back to the MANILA BAY, we passed a Jap BB dead in the water and down at the stern, a CA listing to port and 1 DD apparently un hit. There was a pilot near them in the water in his life raft. A BB was circling nearby. I landed aboard the USS MANILA BAY at about 1415.

(End of report)

REPORTS OF THREE VF PILOTS REGARDING ATTACK FLIGHT OCTOBER 25.

LT(JG) R. E. Phillips

We were scrambled at about 0700 and joined up with our VF. We went direct to the Jap Fleet which was about 20 miles astern of our disposition. I made three strafing runs on a DD and all my guns went out of order.

My last two runs were made with one gun firing. I then went back to base and reported-no answer-so I proceeded to Tacloban and landed at about 1000.

I took off again at 1205 with Ens. Lischer and spotted the Jap fleet off Samar Island. We tracked them and reported information to commander support aircraft until 1330. I saw an air group (PEPPER Radio Call) make a strike on them. We then reported and returned to Tacloban for flying objective CAP and landed at about 1630.

Ensign. Wallace.

We scrambled at about 0700. I joined up with the other VF from my squadron and we proceeded to the target. I made eight strafing runs on a Fuso class BB and a Mogami class CA. My first run was from 10,000' and following runs were from six or seven thousand feet-with pullouts at 1500' to 2000'. The damage done is undetermined, but we seemed to reduce their AA fire. We returned to Tacloban and landed about 1000.

Lt(jg) C. F. Hunting.

I took off at about 0700 when all our VF were scrambled. At about 0745 I joined up with Ens. McGraw and made five strafing runs on a cruiser. I think it was a MOGAMI class. These runs were made from about 6000' and over a period of about forty-five minutes. The last run I made was a dry run with torpedo planes. I landed at Tacloban airfield at about 0945.

REPORT OF ENS. E. A. OSTERKORN REGARDING ATTACK FLIGHT 25 OCTOBER.

I took off at around 0700 and looked around to join up with planes of our group, but did not find any. I proceeded to the area over the Jap Fleet and entered the clouds at about 6000'. I came out of the clouds, after finding a hole, and proceeded into my attack glide. Bombs were armed with nose and tail fuses. In the first run nothing happened. I climbed back up into the clouds, and saw a group of VF going in on a cruiser and I followed them in. One bomb was released this time, but no explosion was seen. I climbed back up and got set for a third run. I again went in on a cruiser, released one bomb-but no explosion was seen. I then proceeded to Tacloban airstrip. I circled with my wheels down, but I was not given permission to land. I pulled up my wheels and continued circling. A few minutes later the AA opened up on me, so I put down my wheels and proceeded to point KING. I circled there until I heard Lt. Comdr. Huxtable call in and I then joined up on him to go in and land at Dulag.

(End of report)

Report of Lieutenant E. W. Seitz, VC-10, concerning flight 25 October 1944.

At about 0700 on 25 October, GQ was sounded and all pilots were ordered to man all planes. I was catapulted in a FM-2 almost immediately after I had started the engine. After I cleared the ship I looked back and saw one of the carriers straddled by 5 or 6 shells. The Japanese fleet position was reported so I headed for them. In about ten minutes I attacked along with some Dexter and Catnip torpedo planes. Intense A.A. was absent. (Note: The word absent is used but it probably was a mistake for there was plenty of AA, perhaps the word "not" is missing.) Brilliant red, purple and yellow A.A. were seen above 4000 ft. All bursts below that level were black. It looked as though the Jap DD's were throwing up a lot of 20 and 40 MM stuff. I made runs with three other attack groups, expending all my ammo in about 8 or 9 runs. I made one dummy run with another group to ascertain the type of ships we were attacking and to observe bomb hits. I believe there were one or two Mogami class cruisers and one Fuso class among the battleships. I also saw several Teratsaki DDs. The A.A. seemed to decrease considerably as the attacks progressed. Hits were reported. I saw no hits, but did see one cruiser and 2 DDs dead in the water.

After expending all my ammo and most of my fuel I flew to Tacloban airfield. There I encountered other pilots from my squadron. We refueled and rearmed and were ordered by the officer in charge (Marine General) to fly a target CAP over the island. Pepsicola Base sent us to point K. One of the divisions contacted 2 Zekes but lost them in the clouds. Upon completion of the CAP we were ordered to fly to Taffy 2. While enroute to Taffy 2 we encountered 4 units of Taffy 3 and decided to land on Dexter Base. We were taken aboard at about 1630. At 1715 I was scrambled along with 7 other pilots because of a threatened Jap air attack. We were up for one hour but results were negative. We landed at 1815 during a rain squall.

(End of report)

REPORT OF LT. C. R. ELLWOOD, (Composite Squadron Ten) CONCERNING  
FLIGHT OF 25 October 1944

Shortly before 0700 on 25 October 1944, it was announced over the public address system of the USS GAMBIER BAY that surface units of the Jap Fleet had been tally hoed approximately twenty miles astern of our formation. As far as I know we were cruising in a north easterly direction and into the wind. The announcement to man all planes was followed by another that the Japs had opened fire. I was the third fighter to leave the deck. The first plane had already disappeared and the second turned into our formation as though to rendezvous over it. I turned away from the formation and as I came back over it at least eight planes had rendezvoused on me.

The foremost units of the Jap Fleet were in a thick rain squall, and we climbed toward it.

As I climbed it became apparent that either the whole Jap disposition was in the rain squall or at least obscured by it. We made a 90 degree turn into the squall picking our way through holes, and had been in it only a short while when we sighted a group of destroyers which were probably the tail end units of the disposition.. We immediately started repeated strafing runs.

At first the Jap destroyers seemed to be maneuvering wildly in every direction and finally got into several columns. After several runs I heard DEXTER and CATNIP skippers preparing for their torpedo and bombing attacks. By this time our fighters had separated after their repeated dives and recoveries into the clouds. I paralleled the Jap disposition on the port side in effort to get up front and be of some use on the torpedo and bombing runs. I found some torpedo bombers making bombing runs on three cruisers (in column), and started making strafing runs on the last one which all of the attacks seemed to be concentrated. During these runs I observed only one bombing hit which exploded on the bow and seemed to knock out all of the forward batteries. My guns were all firing intermittently so that I had to charge them after each run. Finally I had but one gun firing, and only forty gallons of gasoline so I departed for the beach. The amount of AA had decreased to where there was only occasional bursts during my last few runs.

On the way to TACLOBAN I found two TERATSUKI type destroyers dead in the water. I climbed for a strafing run and reported their position. They both opened fire and one started getting under way. I made one run firing until my one gun quit. I recovered and they were still firing at me when an FM-2 went almost directly over them at a very low altitude. We joined up and flew to TACLOBAN AIRSTRIP.

C. R. ELLWOOD

LT., USNR VC-10

REPORT OF ENS. C. J. DUGAN, (VC-10), CONCERNING FLIGHT OF 25 October  
1944

At about 0700 all aircraft were scrambled. I was on standby and was about third of six planes off. We rendezvoused and departed base. The first Jap shell splashes were hitting around the ships as we took off. We contacted the Jap Fleet about 20 miles off our port quarter. The visibility was rather poor, but the continual gun flashes made the fleet plainly visible.

We could then hear a formation of bombers preparing to attack, so we went in on a strafing mission. On my first run I fired at a destroyer and then a cruiser; they were in column. I pulled out at about 3000 feet and recovered straight up into the heavy cloud formations.

The AA was very heavy with a great deal of light stuff about like 20 MM coming from the DD's. This fire was not effective over 2000 feet, and I was usually out of my run by that altitude. The large AA was the best for judging altitude that I have ever seen, however, it was almost always astern. As near as I could tell, they shot under me on the run, and behind me on a deflection shot. High speed and continual change of altitude seemed to me to be the best way to avoid the heavy AA.

After about three runs with our group, I became separated from them so I went to about seven thousand feet and broke into the clear. At this time I spotted our VC-10 torpedo planes under Lt. Comdr. Huxtable coming in for an attack and I joined with him. When he gave the word I went on a strafing attack. All of this group was in heavy AA from the time that they arrived over the Japs until they recovered. However, I don't know what the effects of the runs or the damage that was done for I recovered low on the water and continued west until I was in a clear area.

I then heard a plane asking for support on a group of cruisers and went to that area. It was a group of CL's closing on our carrier force. I joined with a group of VF which were making runs and expended the last of my ammunition. The AA from these ships was greatly decreased when I left. I then joined with a single torpedo planes and made runs with them from different angles in an effort to spread the AA. At first it seemed to work, but toward the last I don't think that they were firing at anything that didn't have the bomb bay doors open. My gasoline was getting low so I called in and received orders to go to the beach to refuel and rearm and get back if possible.

At TACLOBAN only those planes low on fuel could land. I had about ten gallons left so I went in and landed. I found most of the other VC-10 fighter pilots here with Lt. Stewart in charge. Operations were extremely difficult. However, the Army personnel gave us excellent cooperation in rearming and refueling. About 1330 I took off with Lt. Seitz and Ens. Abercrombie. We flew CAP over the island until about 1500 when we departed for the USS KITKUN BAY.

We flew one CAP scramble hop that evening which was negative.

C. J. DUGAN

Ens., A-V(N), USNR VC-10

REPORT OF ENS. R. L. CROCKER REGARDING ATTACK FLIGHT 25 OCTOBER,  
1944.

On the morning of 25 October at approximately 07000 I took off in a TBM1C. However, due to the emergency conditions, my plane did not have any bombs or torpedoes and only two armor-piercing rockets and full ammunition.

I joined up on Lt. Comdr. Huxtable and three other VT pilots from our squadron, but was told not to go in on the first attack, as I had no bomb load. I then flew alongside the enemy disposition in an attempt to divert the AA fire, while the others attacked. I was fired on by their heavy caliber guns, and as a result my instruments went out and I had no radio or communications.

After the attack I spotted Ens. Gallagher smoking badly and I joined up on him and started to lead him to Tacloban. It was soon apparent that he wouldn't make it, so I went in front of our own disposition and he landed about a mile ahead of our ships. He went over on his back after the landing, but all three got out and were together. I dropped several dye markers and a float light and my seat boat pack to them. I then climbed for altitude over the enemy force, and, being by myself I circled for a while waiting for someone to join up with. However, after half an hour I went ahead and made runs on the DD's firing my rockets and machine guns. My turret gunner also fired. I received one 20 MM or 40 MM hit in my port wing stub and engine but there was no loss of power. After my last run I saw another plane fire 8 rockets into the water beside the DD's so I investigated and sighted a sub just submerging. I had nothing to attack with. I returned to Dulag where I landed. A fighter crashed into me as I was taxiing off the strip and damaged my propeller.

(End of report)

REPORT OF Ens. W. C. SHROYER REGARDING ATTACK FLIGHT 25 OCTOBER,  
1944.

I took off around 0700 and attacked immediately on the battleships. I was with Lt. Comdr. Huxtable. My load was 2-500# bombs. I strafed but did not drop on them due to bad weather restricting visibility. There was lots of AA fire. Then I pulled out and went right into cloud cover. when I came out of the clouds I was at 2000' right over the 6 Jap cruisers. Luck was with me and I got away from them by diving on the water as there was terrific AA fire.

Then I started climbing up by myself and about 0900 carried out a dive-bombing attack on a TONE class cruiser from 10,000'. There were about ten or twelve FM's that went in strafing, so I followed them in. My two bombs must have dropped on the fantail. This was confirmed by two of the FM pilots-Lt. Paul Garrison VC-5, and Ens. Lischer VC-10. A half-hour later I saw this cruiser dead in the water.

I then tried to go after more bombs but was ordered to Tacloban. I landed at Dulag field. On the 27th. I flew from Dulag to the MANILA BAY.

(End of report)

REPORT OF ATTACK FLIGHT 25 OCTOBER, 1944, LT(JG) R. E. WEATHERHOLT

At about 0700 General Quarters sounded, and I reported to the ready room. The other planes had taken off-or were taking off and we had just been informed of the presence of a Jap fleet 20 miles to the north of us. They had commenced shelling our disposition. We had four VT which did not take off with the first group, and we were to be loaded with torpedoes. At around 0720 Ens. Gallagher took off with the first plane loaded. I took off with the second plane loaded about at about 0730. At that time we had two more planes nearly ready. I circled the ship waiting for the other two planes to be launched and intending to join up to make an attack.

At that time the shelling was very close to our ship-as close as 75 yards. I circled for 30 minutes and when other planes had not been launched at that time, I departed to find other planes to make an attack with. At about 0830 or 0900, I joined up with another VT and we were sent in to make our drops on a BB. We went in against either bow-and about 15 degrees off dead ahead. The other VT made his drop slightly ahead of mine. The BB turned toward him and then straightened out. I did not observe any hits.

(End of report)

**3-B**

(The report below is partial but sufficient concerning an attack made later in the morning from the USS MANILA BAY in which at least two VC-10 pilots participated, this report is apparently by Lt. Cmdr. E. J. Huxtable and is marked report 3-B)

Two of our pilots, one VF and one VT, participated in this major attack on the Jap Force by the CVE groups. This was the first attack of the day in which loadings could be properly made and the attack properly planned. It was successful in damaging several units of the enemy fleet.

Commander Fowler was leading a group of approximately 35 VF and VT type planes from Task Unit 77.4.2 and were to attack from the north-west. Lt. Comdr. Dale was leading approximately the same number, and was to attack from the northeast in coordination. Our two pilots, Ens. McGraw and Ens. Bennett, were flying in the group attacking from the northwest.

A wide circle was made to coordinate the timing of the attacks of both groups and a large cumulus cloud was skirted on approach, and the attack began from about 8000'. With the fighters strafing immediately ahead of the VT, the torpedo bombers went down in a very steep glide angle and had as their targets the major enemy ships mostly to the front and center of the disposition. At the same time several planes loaded with torpedoes made their runs and many bomb and torpedo hits were scored.

Ens. Bennett chose a heavy cruiser (type unknown) which was on the starboard flank of the disposition as it was heading north, and scored three of four bomb hits across the stern of the vessel. Damage was probably heavy from these hits and from the one near miss. Ens. McGraw made his major strafing pass at a NAGATO class BB which was hit by bombs, and dipped down twice in his recovery to strafe a heavy cruiser and a destroyer. In spite of very heavy anti-aircraft fire, our planes were not hit, made rendezvous with the group, and returned to base.

There were no adverse comments from the pilots participating in this attack regarding material failure. Everything used performed satisfactorily and normally.

E. J. Huxtable, Lt. Comdr., USN Commanding Officer, VC-10

25 October 1944

#### **4-B**

(The following is report number 4-B made by E. J. Huxtable)

The report of Ens. McGraw, which is attached, is very complete, and only a few comments need be made.

Ens. McGraw had already been in the air about six hours when he took off on this flight from the foster carrier the U.S.S. MANILA BAY. Excellent fighting spirit and fighter tactics enabled him to again help materially in stopping and turning what could have been a serious raid on our task group of CVE's.

Undoubtedly, if he had been able to release his wing tank, the performance of his plane against the enemy would have been greatly improved, however, when intelligently handled the FM-2 is definitely the master of a ZEKE when both planes have auxiliary fuel tanks.

The flight of ZEKES encountered was using our proven tactical formation--both as to section and division and in escorting. This is one of the few cases of this that has come to our attention.

Ordnance, Communication, and Engineering details were normal, with the exception of the droppable wing tank. Serious trouble continues with the FM-2 wing tanks under combat conditions and has been covered in previous reports. This remains the major source of trouble and worry with this type of plane when flying under combat conditions.

E. J. Huxtable, Lt. Comdr., USN Commanding Officer, VC-10 25 October 1944

REPORT OF ENSIGN JOSEPH D. McGRAW CONCERNING CAP AND ATTACK  
FLIGHT OF OCTOBER 25, 1944.

At 1500 I took off from the USS MANILA BAY as section leader of an eight plane flight on local CAP mission around TG 77.4.2. At about 1615 we were vectored out about 30 miles where I tally hoed 18-20 Vals with 10-12 Zekes as escort. We made a high side run on the Vals who were in a formation of V's-line astern. There were two Zekes on each side and about six above them.

In the first run, my wingman shot a Val down in flames, and the plane I shot at dove down in front of me and I continued to shoot at him until he flamed and broke up. The Zekes had followed us down and had closed enough to shoot at us in our dives. The Zekes tracers went over my right wing, missing me. I rolled over in a steep, diving right turn and lost him. Then Lt. Fischer, the division leader called on the radio saying that he had been hit and was going to make a water landing. I did not see him after that. He was later picked up by a fast BB unit (?).

When I recovered from my dive at about 3500', I climbed back up to find myself directly beneath the leader of the VAL formation, which had turned and was heading back toward Luzon-course about 270. I climbed up ahead and to their right to make another pass. I found one Zeke between myself and the Vals. As I turned and started in on my run, the Zeke slowly turned into me. He had a belly tank. I still had my left wing tank which I could not release. I had the altitude advantage so I fired first and held the trigger down. The Zeke did not seem to try to raise its nose and fire at me. When he was only a few feet in front of me, his engine exploded and fire and smoke came out. His prop started to windmill slowly. I pulled around to get on his tail as he passed underneath me. He continued on a little way, then made a slow nose-down left turn. He entered a glide with his engine smoking and prop wind milling slowly. He never pulled out, but held that angle of dive until he hit the water.

I then started looking for the Vals again, but they had disappeared into a line of clouds. As I came through these clouds, I was climbing, and, on breaking into the clear, I sighted six planes high above me at about 6000'. I was then at about 2500'. They were flying our type of division-four plane formation. I climbed to recognize them and at about 4000' saw that they had belly tanks and round wing tips and were Zekes. There were no Vals around. I dove away and headed back toward the ship. I later met my wingman and the division leader's wingman searching several oil slicks in the water. I counted 8 of them. We joined up and came in to land at 1800. The score for our flight was three certains-2 Vals and one Zeke. Lt. Fischer may have downed a plane, but I don't know.

(End of report)

## 5-B

(The following is marked as report 5-B, made by Lt. Cmdr. E. J. Huxtable, USN, Commanding Officer of VC-10. Note that it is reporting on the early flight on 25 October 1944 that left the ship at 0500. It can be assumed that it appears in the total report at this point because these pilots made their reports later than the ones on the ship, due to circumstances.)

Two (2) four (4) plane FM-2 divisions were launched from the U.S.S. GAMBIER BAY at 0500 (I) for Target Combat Air Patrol over LEYTE ISLAND.

On the way to rendezvous point one division at 10000 feet above a locally solid overcast received some highly accurate AA probably from our transports in the area below. Shrapnel hit the vertical stabilizer of one plane.

One division orbited points KING, LOVE, and MIKE at 10000', and the other division at 15000' on the orders of PEPSICOLA BASE.

About 0815 (I) Lt. Wickersham tally hoed one OSCAR about 3000 feet above and one mile distant, and his division gave chase with Wickersham in the lead. After a 30 mile chase Southwest over LEYTE, Lt Wickersham caught up and fired a long burst into the OSCAR from dead astern. He was about one foot off the surface of a river when hit. He bounced off the river and crashed into flames on the shore.

Due to the inability of the GAMBIER BAY to take planes aboard, the division landed at Tacloban Field on LEYTE at 0915 (I). During the landing, due to a misunderstanding of the signal, one plane landed long and hit an overturned plane on the runway. Both planes caught fire, but the pilot escaped uninjured.

(At this time it might be of interest to describe the conditions of TACLOBAN field. It was not prepared for operations but was under Army construction. The runway had shell holes from Japanese attacks prior to this day. It seemed to observers that about every third plane crashed because of these conditions. The Army never the less rose to the occasion and supplied ammunition and fuel and did the best it could to keep operations going. Some fighters were lucky and able to operate off the field. The next day or two finally brought a break and they moved the flyable planes to DULAG and those planes joined with the TBM's there. The TBM's had been sent there for they were able to stay in the air longer than the fighters for they had more fuel. The fighters operated out of TACLOBAN as long as they could and then were sent off. Ultimately all surviving planes were sent out to the carriers left from 77.4.3 and then all were retired from the area as no longer a viable organization.)

Planes were refueled and at 1200 (I) took off on Target CAP with one plane from VC-4 relieving the one lost from our division.

One ZEKE was tally hoed and one division fired on it before it escaped into the clouds. It was not seen again.

At 1500 both divisions were ordered to return to T. U. 77.4.2 as the USS GAMBIER BAY was sunk during the morning. On the way they found T. U. 77.4.3 and due to the fact that they could not contact 77.4.2 they landed on the U.S.S. KITKUN BAY.

No adverse comments made by the pilots. All equipment performed normally and satisfactorily.

E. J. Huxtable, Lt. Cmdr. USN

Commanding Officer VC-10

25 October 1944

REPORT OF LT. J. L. OLIVER, DIVISION LEADER VC-10, USS GAMBIER BAY  
REGARDING FLIGHTS OF 25 OCTOBER, 1944

We had eight planes that took off from the GAMBIER BAY at 0500 for objective CAP over LEYTE ISLAND.

First Division

Lt. Stewart  
Ens. Abercrombie  
Lt. Wickersham  
Ens. Giger

Second Division

. Lt. Oliver  
Ens. Turner  
Lt. Harders  
Ens. Bennett

We made rendezvous and were over SAMAR ISLAND at about 0540. We reported in to PEPSICOLA BASE and they told us to orbit point KING or MIKE. It was still dark and we couldn't see very well at this time. While we were trying to find these points I became separated from my second section. As soon as it got light they rejoined me over point MIKE. We patrolled points KING MIKE and LOVE while Lt. Stewart's division was patrolling these points at angels 10-we were at angels 15.

At 0815 PEPSICOLA BASE asked Lt. Stewart for the location of our base and whether or not we were under TAFFY 3. They were given the information and they told us that our base was under attack by enemy surface forces. We were then ordered to land at TACLOBAN AIRFIELD. We did this at about 0900. Shortly after this many other planes started landing at the same field and we re-fueled and took off again at about 1200. While we were at the field they had two enemy air attacks and I saw one enemy plane burst into flames as it was hit by AA fire at the south end of the strip. This happened just as we were lined up ready for take off.

After take-off we had Lt. Oliver, Lt. Mudgett from the WHITE PLAINS, Lt. Harders, and Ens. Bennett. I think the other division must have been Lt. Roby, Lt. Stewart, Lt. Wickersham, and Ens. Wallace. I think there was one more plane but I don't know who was in it. Lt. Seitz, Ens. Abercrombie and Ens. Dugan took off about ten minutes later. This group did not join with us. We received orders then from PEPSICOLA BASE to return to our base. After we had gotten about ten miles on our course to our ship they changed our orders and told us to remain on CAP. My four planes went to point KING at angels 12 and Lt. Roby's five planes went to point NAN at mattress elevation. While on patrol we sighted one ZEKE but he dove away thru the clouds and we did not see him again. At 1500, we received orders to return to TAFFY 2-the whole group, but I did not join with Lt. Roby because he had received his orders first and had already started. I heard his group on the radio and they were returning to TACLOBAN strip due to the fact they were low on gas and could not find this group of carriers. We flew on course for about 35 miles and sighted a task force to the south, and flew towards it and it turned out to be TAFFY 3. We asked FIDO base for a bearing and distance to TAFFY 2 and at this time the KITKUN BAY gave us a Charlie on the light and we landed. Lt. Mudgett returned to his own base rather than landing on the KITKUN BAY.

I took off from the KITKUN BAY at 1720 on a scramble, but there was no activity on this flight and returned to land aboard at 1810.

On the way to the objective area when we first took off in the morning, the weather was bad and it was dark and the enemy surface units were not sighted and the first thing I saw were the lights on the coast of SAMAR.

There were, I know, seventeen of our fighter pilots were in the air at the time of the surface attack. I saw sixteen of these pilots at TACLOBAN-and two more were accounted for, I only saw one VT pilot of our group-Lt. Jackson. Ens. Turner ran into a plane on the runway in landing and wrecked his plane. As far as I know he remained on the field last night.

(End of report)

REPORT OF ENS. W. W. ABERCROMBIE, A-V(N), USNR, VC-10, (CVE-73)  
CONCERNING FLIGHT OF 25 OCTOBER 1944.

I took off at 0500 on TCAP in a division of FM's composed of Lt. Wickersham and Ens. Giger, Lt. Stewart and myself. We patrolled point KING until approximately 0800 when Lt. Wickersham spotted an Oscar. We gave chase with Wickersham in the lead. He closed and went through a cloud to shoot the Oscar down.

Due to the inability of our base to take us aboard, we landed at TACLOBAN at 0915. When our planes were gassed and armed, we took off to perform additional TCAP, on station from 1330 until 1530 when we were told to go to TAFFY 2. Enroute we encountered TAFFY 3 and were taken aboard.

REPORT OF LT. HARDERS, CONCERNING FLIGHT OF 25 October 1944.

At 0500, 25 October 1944, I took off with the LEYTE ISLAND CAP as second section leader of the division called CATNIP 4. As we left for the island I was not rendezvoused, but planned to make a running rendezvous on the way to the island. I caught up with the formation and my wingman, Ens. Bennett, joined me at point QUEEN. Very shortly after that I lost Lt. Oliver, the division leader. PEPSICOLA BASE ordered us to patrol points KING, MIKE, AND LOVE at 15000 feet. I rejoined Lt. Oliver on this station where we patrolled without encountering opposition. When our fuel became low, PEPSICOLA BASE ordered us to land at TACLOBAN FIELD and refuel. We landed there and during the landing lost the plane of Ens. Turner, who hit another plane which was on its back in the center of the runway at the time of this landing. Ens. Turner was not injured.

At 1200 we were ordered to take off again and resume CAP. Lt. Mudgett of VC-4 replaced Ens. Turner in the division. While patrolling point KING at 12000 feet, I made a tallyho on a ZEKE at about 7000 feet. On the way down two ZEKES passed abeam of us heading northwest. We did not see them again. We all fired a long burst at the first ZEKE before he got into the clouds he was skirting. After he entered the clouds, we did not see him again. At about 1500 we were ordered to return to T.U. 77.4.2. We found T.U. 77.4.3 and could not get 77.4.2 on the ZB so we landed on the USS KITKUN BAY.

H. J. Harders Lt., USNR VC-10

ADDITIONAL REPORTS OF VF PILOTS FROM VC-10 ON CAP MISSION 25  
OCTOBER

ENS. J. I. TURNER A-V-(N) USNR.

On 25 October, 1944, at 0500 two divisions consisting of Lt. Oliver, myself, Lt. Harders, Ens. Bennett and Lt. Stewart, Ens. Abercrombie, Lt. Wickersham, and Ens. Giger took off for target CAP. At 0915, after sighting no enemy planes, in my division, we were instructed to land at Tacloban. All landed safely except myself. I landed, and due to the misunderstanding of the signal landed long and hit an overturned plane of the runway. Both planes caught fire, but I escaped uninjured.

Lt. STEWART A-V(N) USNR.

Eight planes were launched at 0500 on target CAP. The division were as listed in other reports. My division made rendezvous and arrived over the area at 0535. It was too dark to orientate our position with accuracy until about 0555. At about 0545 while at 10000' above a locally solid overcast, I led my division somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the transports. At that time we received highly accurate AA fire and I got a small shrapnel hole in my vertical stabilizer. We were assigned orbit points KING, LOVE and MIKE at angels 10. At about 0815, Lt. Wickersham tally hoed one OSCAR about 3000' above us and one mile distant. After a chase of about 30 miles Wickersham shot the Oscar. PEPSICOLA BASE told us our task unit ships could not recover us and that we were to land at Tacloban. We landed at approximately 0915. When the second division landed, Ens. Turner cracked up his plane.

ENS. ABERCROMBIE. A-V(N) USNR

I took off at 0500 for target CAP and flew in Lt. Stewart's division. We patrolled point KING until approximately 0800 when Lt. Wickersham spotted an OSCAR. We gave chase with Wickersham in the lead. He closed and went thru a cloud to shoot the OSCAR down. Due to the inability of our base to take us aboard we landed at Tacloban at 0915.

LT. WICKERSHAM. A-V(N) USNR

Take-off at 0500, and landed at Tacloban at 0915. At about 0800 I tally hoed one Oscar. After chasing him 35 miles southwest over Leyte, I caught up with him and fired a long burst into him from dead astern. We were about one foot off the surface of a river he was following, and when my shots hit him he immediately began to smoke. His plane bounced off the river and crashed into flames on shore.

ENS. GIGER A-V(N) USNR

I took off at 0500 on target CAP over Leyte. at about 0810 Wickersham tally hoed an Oscar and shot it down. I landed at Tacloban at about 0900.

(End of reports)

**6-B**

REPORT 6-B, LT. CMDR. E. J. HUXTABLE, USN, C/O OFFICER VC-10.

This flight took off at 1515 at Tacloban Airfield as an extra combat air patrol section to engage enemy aircraft which had been in the area all afternoon.

The two pilots on this mission had already flown six hours each on this day. They were patrolling the assigned orbit point for about an hour, a flight of ZEKES was seen and intercepted. There were possibly six to eight ZEKES in the immediate vicinity and one FM-2 was already attacking one of the enemy planes. Hunting and Turner attacked and apparently started out making a section run, and both hit the same plane to destroy it. Then, due to the numerical superiority of the enemy, a dog fight resulted in which Hunting's plane was hit in the engine and Turner was able to hit and damage two more ZEKES. Hunting soon returned to the Tacloban area trying to make an emergency landing. He was directed south and was shot down by friendly AA fire along the beach. He made a successful water landing although injured, and was picked up by natives. Turner stayed to fight with the Jap planes until they either left the area or went into heavy cloud cover. He then landed at Tacloban just at dusk.

Nothing out of the ordinary was noticed concerning the enemy planes and equipment or their tactics. The engagement was strictly a dog fight from our angle, and tactics corresponded.

The fact that Hunting's guns went out after a few bursts was probably traceable to the fact that they had already fired six to seven hundred rounds already, and probably had not been properly serviced under the emergency conditions prevailing. Other items of equipment performed in a normal and satisfactory manner.

E. J. Huxtable, Lt. Comdr. USN

Commanding Officer

25 October 1944

REPORTS OF TWO VF PILOTS REGARDING CAP FLIGHT OVER LEYTE  
ISLAND, P.I.

25 OCTOBER, 1944

Ensign. Turner

At 1515 I again took off from Tacloban to fly with Lt (jg) C. F. Hunting to fly combat air patrol. At 1715 we jumped from six to eight Zekes over point NAN and attacked. Lt(jg) Hunting flamed one and I hit two without apparent damage. We were separated and I called for Hunting's position,. He was directly over Tacloban airfield with an emergency landing necessary. I heard him receive instructions to orbit point WILLIAM, but when I tried to find him, I was fired on by the transports in the area. I believe that Hunting was shot down by this AA. I landed at about 1815 at Tacloban.

## C.F Hunting

AT 1515 I took off at Tacloban for CAP over Samar and Leyte. At 1600 we sighted an FM-2 attacking two Zekes. With Ens. Turner I attacked. It developed into quite a dog fight. Ens. Turner shot down one Zeke. During this engagement my guns went completely out and my plane started vibrating badly. I returned to Tacloban field for an emergency landing. I was ordered to stay clear of the field because of fire, so I started south along Leyte beach. My plane was hit in the engine by friendly AA along the beach. I ditched the plane due to resulting engine failure in the water between the transports and the beach, and the AA continued to fire at me after I had made the water landing. I made a successful water landing without being able to lower my flaps. I was picked up by the natives in an outrigger boat after being in the water about 30 minutes. I was put aboard the USS FREMONT for medical treatment as I had received some small pieces of shrapnel in my right arm and face. I was then transferred to the USS MERCY on 26 October.

## 7-B

### REPORT 7-B, LT. CMDR. E. J. HUXTABLE, USN, C/O OFFICER VC-10

On 26 October 1944, at 0730, five of our planes that were temporarily based on Tacloban Airstrip took off on a routine combat air patrol over the LEYTE-SAMAR area.

Due to lack of facilities at the airstrip oxygen could not be replaced that had been used during the fighter flights of the previous day, and consequently the group was flying at 10000' rather than at a more advantageous higher level. At about 0800, while the group was over the Ormoc area, on the west side of the island, a flight of six OSCARS was sighted at four to five thousand feet greater altitude heading for the LEYTE GULF AREA. As soon as our group started climbing for altitude for attack, the enemy planes went in various directions, and apparently were not looking for a fight in any manner. No fire from the enemy planes was seen to be directed at our flight.

Lt. Stewart and Lt. Wickersham who were in the lead succeeded in closing on one plane that fled to the eastward, and each got in two or three bursts from almost dead astern to smoke the plane and cause the Jap pilot to bail out of his aircraft. It is very interesting to note that on top of the enemy parachute was a large red ball, indicating, perhaps that the enemy is still interested in who he might be strafing in a parachute.

While it is definitely questionable as to the quality of the Japanese pilots in this encounter, the FM-2 certainly has again proven its worth in catching this type of enemy plane in spite of original altitude advantage enjoyed by the enemy. Enemy tactics were certainly not of the best--offensively or defensively--while our group stayed together and concentrated their attention to gain a decision.

E. J. Huxtable, Lt Cmdr., USN  
Commanding Officer VC-10 26 October 1944

REPORTS OF FIGHTER PILOTS WHO WERE ON COMBAT AIR PATROL OVER  
LEYTE ISLAND, P.I. 26 OCTOBER, 1944..

Lt. Stewart:

We took off at Tacloban airfield at 0730 on 26 October. The flight was composed of Lt. Stewart, Ens. Wallace, Lt. Wickersham, Lt. Roby and Ens. Lischer. We orbited points KING, LOVE, and MIKE at angels 10 due to lack of oxygen. At about 0800 we tally hoed six Oscars over point LOVE at angels 14. It was the start of a stern chase. Two of the enemy planes broke off and went into the clouds near point PETER, three headed for Point SUGAR. Lt. Wickersham fired at this last one from astern, and then I closed into this plane from dead astern to about 600' at which time he pulled up into a tight right chandelle. I opened fire as he started his turn and followed him thru. He started smoking immediately and when he had completed about 120 degrees of his turn, he rolled on his back and bailed out. Ens. Wallace followed the chute down but did not strafe. The chute had a large red circle on the top of it. We could not find the remaining five Oscars, and we landed at Tacloban at about 1000.

The entire afternoon of the 26th we were alerted with our planes at the take-off spot at the end of the runway. This was in compliance with the orders of an army colonel in charge of the field. The field was under strafing and incendiary attack about 1600 by four Oscars.

Ens. Wallace:

We took off at Tacloban at 0730 on combat air patrol. At about 0815, six Oscars were tallyhoed and one was shot down. We landed at Tacloban at 1000.

Lt. Wickersham:

Take off at 0730 at Tacloban. Landed there at about 1000. At about 0800 we tally hoed six Oscars at about 5000' above us. We caught the last one and Lt. Stewart and I shot it down. I got two bursts into him from 20 degrees to dead astern and I clearly saw him bail out. Lt. Roby saw the parachute open.

Ens. Lischer:

I was also on a combat air patrol flight, but took off 30 minutes later than the rest of my squadron flight and was with a group from the WHITE PLAINS. We landed at Tacloban at 1000 after having negative results on the flight.

Lt. Roby:

Took off at Tacloban at 0730 with the group noted by Lt. Stewart for combat air patrol over Leyte. At about 0815 I tally hoed six Oscars approaching Leyte at Ormoc Bay. We had a disadvantage as to altitude, but Lt. Stewart and Ltr. Wickersham shot one down and we dispersed the others. We were vectored after the other bogies but had negative results. We landed as ordered at 1000.

## **REPORT 8-B,**

LT. CMDR. E. J. HUXTABLE, USN, COMMANDING OFFICER, VC-10

This flight was intended as a ferry hop only between Tacloban and Dulag fields on LEYTE ISLAND. Two planes took off, due to the Army order to clear the field, that never would have been flown without repairs in normal circumstances, and one of these was an operational loss due to engine failure.

Shortly after the planes were airborne, a condition RED was set in the area and the planes orbited over LEYTE GULF -- some distance out due east of Dulag. Due to the fact they were only intending the flight to be a short ferry hop, they were continuing to fly below the low clouds which had a bottom at about 1000'. While orbiting and keeping on the alert for enemy planes, a TONY was seen and all planes able to try to attack tailed after the enemy and shot him down, apparently without the enemy ever having seen our fighters. He was only at cruising speed and took no evasive tactics until after he had been well hit and when it was too late. At about this time, Ens. Turner, who had to try and fly his plane by using the emergency fuel pump, had to make a water landing due to complete loss of power. Six of the remaining planes stood by to orbit, set rescue facilities in motion, and dropped rescue gear. Another had to proceed to Dulag to land in emergency conditions. While orbiting over Ens. Turner, who seemed to be well covered, Ens. Lischer saw a VAL come down through the cloud layer and head in the general direction of the Dulag Field. He chased the plane and caught it within a few miles, and it crashed 3-5 miles south of Dulag about 3 or 4 miles inland. Some evasive action was attempted, but the enemy had no altitude to use to evade the much faster FM-2 and was easily caught in the tail chase by Ens. Lischer.

After the flight had determined that Ens. Turner had been picked up, they returned to land at Dulag Field. A twenty-mile ferry hop had resulted in the shooting down of two enemy planes.

It is considered likely that no material failure occurred in the cases of the engines operating poorly and the guns on one plane failing to fire. Facilities on Tacloban were not present to repair or check routine mechanical or engineering troubles, and the failures that occurred were definitely thought to have resulted from lack of proper maintenance.

E. J. Huxtable, Lt Cmdr. USN

Commanding Officer, VC-10

27 October 1944

REPORTS OF VF PILOTS ON CAP FLIGHT 0730-0900 27 October, 1944.

Lt. Stewart:

I was informed by the Colonel in charge of the field at Tacloban that all planes not off the field that morning would be junked. We departed Tacloban for Dulag at 0730. Pilots were Lt. Stewart, Ens. Wallace, Lt. Wickersham, Ens. Giger, Ens. Lischer, and Ens. Turner. Ens. Turner took a plane up that had no fuel pump and he was trying to operate the plane using his emergency pump. Lt(jg) Phillips also took off in a plane that he had grounded due to the fact that the engine had been cutting out.

We flew to point WILLIAM and then south and were to approach Dulag from the east. A RED alert was broadcast, so we orbited at mattress elevation of about 1000' midway between the southern transport group and Dinagat Island.

A Tony was tally hoed on a southerly course. It was a tail chase. I closed on this plane very rapidly and opened fire at about 500' and got in a long burst before having to break off to keep from ramming him. At this time he was in about a ten degree glide at 500' heading down toward the beach a little south of point SUGAR. After I pulled out from the port side I saw three other planes fire on him from astern. I saw neither smoke or flame as he continued his descent in a slight right turn until he hit the beach and exploded.

Following this Ens. Lischer reported to me by radio that he was chasing a VAL which he reported shooting down a few minutes later. At about 0830 Ens. Turner's engine failed and he made a water landing in the Gulf. I contacted the commander of support aircraft and a SOC was sent to rescue. Ens. Wallace dropped his boat pack and departed for Dulag. All other planes circled until rescue was completed by a DE and by a PT boat. All planes that remained in the air landed at 0930. A PT boat returned Turner to Dulag.

Ens. Wallace:

I took off at 0730 at Tacloban for Dulag. I was leading the flight as I had been to the Dulag strip previously. A RED alert was sounded so we had to circle over Leyte Gulf. We tally hoed a Tony and I assisted in knocking him down. My firing was from a position astern. Ens. Turner made a water landing in Leyte Gulf due to engine failure. I threw my life boat to him and then went over to land at Dulag strip at 0845. At that time, I had only one gun left that would fire.

Lt. Wickersham:

I took off with the others at about 0730 and landed at 0930 at Dulag. At about 0845 we tally hoed a bogey which was a Tony at about our altitude (1000') and turning away from us. We caught up with him and fired, and there were about four of us firing at him at the same time. I got in three bursts. He began to smoke and went into a slow diving turn to crash and burn on Leyte. I don't believe he had ever seen us.

Ens. Giger:

I took off at 0730 from Tacloban for flight to Dulag. Soon after we were out over the Gulf, our group tally hoed a Tony. I got in a stern run and fired with the one gun that was working. Ens. Turner's engine failed and he made a water landing. Upon completion of the rescue operations we landed at Dulag at 0930.

Ens. Turner:

We were ordered off Tacloban field and to fly to Dulag and took off at about 0730. At about 0830 my engine began to lose power, and shortly afterwards I was forced to make a water landing. At about 0815 I saw our VF shoot down a Tony and at about 0900 I saw Ens. Lischer chasing a Val which he later got. I was picked up by a destroyer escort. I had minor lacerations on my face.

Lt. Roby:

We were ordered off the Tacloban field by the Army. At about 0730 Lt. Stewart and about six other VF took off for Dulag. I was unable to leave because my starter was inoperative. At 0930, I had it repaired and took off to land at Dulag.

Lt(jg) Phillips:

We left Tacloban at 0730 and I landed at Dulag at about 0915. My engine was cutting out and my landing at Dulag was an emergency.

Ens. Lischer:

On 27 October at 0730 I took off with six other fighters under Lt. Stewart from Tacloban and we proceeded to the Dulag airstrip. After becoming airborne, we were ordered to circle southeast of Dulag over Leyte Gulf because of an air alert. During this time we observed one TONY retiring from the transports and we gave chase. Lt. Stewart caught him first and gave him a good burst before he overran. The TONY skidded in front of me and I got in a long burst, and as I looked up his right wing went down and when I looked back he had crashed and exploded right on the beach about ten miles south of Dulag. Lt. Wickersham and one other pilot got in bursts at the TONY also.

Retiring to our orbit point, Ens. Turner had engine failure, and while we were orbiting him, after he had landed in the water, I observed a Val come out of the clouds and turn towards land. I chased him and finally shot him down five miles south of Dulag at about 0930 after Ens. Turner had been picked up by a rescue craft.

(End of report)

So ended the momentous three days for Squadron VC-10, and CVE USS Gambier Bay of Carrier Division 26 of Task Unit 77.4.3 in the Battle Of Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands. Lost also were destroyers and destroyer escorts from our supporting screen, USS Hoel, USS Johnston, USS Samuel B. Roberts. We remember also the loss of the CVE USS St. Lo from a Kamikaze later on 25 October 1944.

END OF ALL REPORTS

(All reports are typed verbatim as submitted. There have been no changes except the correction of names of people involved when needed.)

COMPOSITION OF TASK UNIT 77.4.3 (Taffy 3)

**Escort Carriers**

USS Fanshaw Bay

USS St. Lo (sunk)

USS White Plains

USS Kalinin Bay

USS Kitkun Bay

USS Gambier Bay (sunk)

**Destroyers**

USS Hoel

USS Heerman

USS Johnston

**Destroyer Escorts**

USS Dennis,

USS John C. Butler

USS Raymond

USS Samuel B. Roberts (Sunk)

**Carriers referred to in reports that were from Task Unit 77.4.2**

USS Manila Bay      USS Savo Island

## ***GLOSSARY***

Aircraft involved in these reports, both US and Japanese:

| <b>U. S.</b>          | <b>Japanese</b>                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| TBM Torpedo Bomber VT | Lily (Lilly?) Bomber                |
| FM-2 Fighter VF       | Zeke Fighter (commonly called Zero) |
| F6F Fighter VF        | Kate Torpedo plane                  |
| SOC Scout Observation | Tony Fighter (Copy of ME 109)       |
|                       | Jill Torpedo plane                  |
|                       | Val Dive bomber                     |
|                       | Judy Dive bomber                    |
|                       | Oscar Fighter                       |
|                       | Sally Bomber                        |

**Ship designation, type of ship is indicated by U.S. terms.**

BB Battleship

CA Heavy cruiser

CL Light cruiser

DD Destroyer

DE Destroyer Escort

CVE Escort Aircraft Carrier

### **Ordnance terms**

Tracer Ammunition that shows a tail of fire as it travels.

SAP Bombs, semi-armor piercing

GP Bombs, general purpose

7.7 Caliber of machine gun used by Japanese

### **Operating terms and organization terms**

Division Four planes

Section Two planes

Bogey, bogies Unidentified aircraft

Tallyho Term used to describe seeing an object

CAP Combat Air Patrol

TCAP Target Combat Air Patrol

Scrambled Take off to become airborne

ASP Anti-submarine patrol

Angels Altitude description, angel 5 = 5000 feet.

Chickens Fighter aircraft, friendly

Bandits Enemy aircraft

Charlie Signal given by carrier when ready to receive planes.

Disposition Formation used by group of ships

Time Twenty-four hour clock is used by all.

Chandelle Aerobatic maneuver used by fighters.

Screen Ships that surround others to protect them from submarines.

GQ General quarters, man battle stations

Red Condition red, attack imminent

### Abbreviations

|         |                         |
|---------|-------------------------|
| AA      | Anti-aircraft fire      |
| Compron | Composite Squadron      |
| ZB      | Radio homing device     |
| Cardiv  | Carrier division        |
| IAS     | Indicated air speed     |
| Knots   | Nautical miles per hour |

### Code designations

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Dexter    | Cmdr. Fowler, Air Group Commander       |
| Catnip    | Lt. Cmdr. Huxtable, Commanding, VC-10   |
| Pepsicola | Ground control of air support at Leyte. |
| Halifax   | Seventh Fleet Command                   |
| Bendix    | USS Fanshaw Bay, Flagship of 77.4.3     |

### End of Reports

Tony Potochniak survivor and active historian of USS Gambier Bay and VC-10

This “*Battle of Leyte Gulf As Fought From The Air* “ report, may not be copied, reproduced, mechanically or electronically without the written permission of its composer, Tony Potochniak, USSGambierBay@aol.com

Robert Potochniak Web Master [WWW.USSGambierBay-VC1-.com](http://WWW.USSGambierBay-VC1-.com) son of Survivor Tony Potochniak

Robert Cox USN (Ret) Web Master [WWW.OurOldNavy.com](http://WWW.OurOldNavy.com) is the great Nephew of Gambier Bay Survivor, Virgil Cox Robert Cox, retired from the US Navy in 2004.

Another excellent historical web site can be viewed at [WWW.bosamar.com](http://WWW.bosamar.com) it is the property of Robert J. Cox USN (Ret). It has been used by numerous authors and historians for many years. This site is a well documented reference, of the Battle off Samar.. Mr. Cox served on US Submarines for near 25 years.

