

Thirty men left the carrier Hornet on the morning of June 4, 1942. Thirty men, air-borne in under-armed, under-powered, old-style torpedo planes. They were the best torpedo planes to be had in the South Pacific at that time, but they were hardly equal to the job they had to do. Their orders were to find and destroy the carriers in a Jap fleet reported en route to attack Midway.

Of the thirty brave men who left the Hornet that morning, only one came back.

Flying low beneath broken clouds, Torpedo Squadron Eight went after the Japs. They lost contact with the other squadrons off the Hornet during the first hour, so when they finally topped the horizon and spotted the Jap warships moving away from Midway, they were completely alone.

Breaking radio silence, they notified the Hornet of the position and strength of the enemy, then dropped to torpedo attack level. Skipper Waldron wiggled his wings, opened the throttle, and headed straight for the target, the squadron screaming after him.

The sky swarmed with Zeros. Torpedo Eight had neither fighter cover nor accompanying dive-bombers to divert some of the concentrated defensive fire from the Jap warships. The squadron hit the curtain of fire like a pine plank heading into a buzz saw. Anti-aircraft bursts were searing faces and tearing off chunks of fuselage from the old planes but the Jap carriers were dead ahead, crowded with planes rearming and refueling. Torpedo Eight had a mission and nothing was going to stop them!

The odds were heartbreaking. Plane after plane of the gallant squadron plummeted into the sea; yet the few who were left kept boring in, dropping their torpedoes at point blank range almost under the shadows of the carriers. In this way they made certain for the task force and for the Navy that the Japs' air power was crippled from the start.

One last plane dropped its torpedo, zoomed over the carrier, then disappeared into the sea. Forty minutes later, divebombers from the Hornet arrived and pounded the confused Jap fleet into defeat.

The following day, a PBY patrol plane swooped over the scene of the action and spotted a lone wounded flier floating in the oil slicks. He had watched the whole action from start to finish from beneath the shelter of a black seat cushion, a cushion held above his head to hide him from Jap strafing planes. They picked him up and flew him to Midway for hospitalization.

His 29 squadron mates who "did not make it back" were listed as "Missing in Action."

Bill Abercrombie was a member of the Kansas Freshman Football Team in 1936. Mike Getto tells me that Bill Abercrombie was a good football prospect and a great fellow. Bill's father, C. W. Abercrombie, is with the Hartford Fire Insurance Company, Kansas City Stock Yards, Kansas City 15, Missouri.

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Your Commander-in-Chief, and mine, Harry S. Truman, was a boyhood friend of mine. He grew up in Independence, Missouri, where we went to school together. Bess Wallace Truman lived three blocks from me, and Harry Truman lived an equal