

# Catalina Ace Pilot Killed

Flight - Lieut. Brian Hartley Higgins, 28, D.F.C., and six other airmen were killed when an R.A.A.F. flying-boat crashed during training exercises off the New South Wales coast.

Flight-Lieut. Higgins, who lived at Wangaratta (Vic.), was one of the R.A.A.F.'s most experienced Catalina pilots.

The other victims were:—

Pilot-Officer Max Alexander Larkin, second pilot, married, Elwood (Vic.).

Sgt.-Pilot Alan Fullerton Craddock, second pilot, single, Geelong. (Vic.).

Flying-Officer Norman John Brown, wireless air-gunner, single, Yass (N.S.W.).

Cpl. Thomas Henry Poole, fitter, married, Toronto (N.S.W.).

Cpl. Jaffre David James, fitter, married, South Fremantle.

L.A.C. Henry George Lovett, fitter, married, Toronto (N.S.W.).

Flight-Lieut. Higgins was a member of the first R.A.A.F. Catalina squadron to go into action in the South-west Pacific. He was stationed at Rabaul before Japan entered the war.



Flight-Lt. B. Higgins, D.F.C.

He participated in the only two raids R.A.A.F. Catalinas have made on the Japanese island base at Truk.

He bombed Rabaul eight times in the first two weeks of Jap occupation.

He was over Rabaul when the Japs first used night fighters in the South-west Pacific area. He escaped them by diving through the smoke of Matupi volcano.

In all he flew 25 bombing missions in Catalinas and 25 in Mitchell bombers.

About a year ago he rescued Lieut. Walter Higgins, U.S. Liberator pilot, and seven of his crew when they were forced down on a storm-swept reef near Trobriand Island while returning from bombing Rabaul.

Higgins also had just returned from bombing Rabaul. He went out again, landed in a rough sea near the reef, and took the Americans on board.

Lieut. Walter Higgins, while on reconnaissance in a Liberator, first sighted the Japanese convoy destroyed in the Bismarck Sea battle.

## Found Fortress Crew

Brian Higgins later rescued the crew of a U.S. Flying Fortress who had parachuted into dense jungle near the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Blacktrackers, who reluctantly took a ride in Higgins' Catalina while Higgins pointed out parachutes tangled in trees, found four of the crew.

Higgins located the four other missing men on a salt pan, and landed his Catalina on what he thought was a coastal river.

At dawn next morning, when he went to take off, he found the Catalina high and dry on a mud bank, the 20ft. tide having receded.

He had to wait until late afternoon for the tide to come in before he could take off.

## AIRMEN SAVED BY VOLCANO

### Dived in Smoke to Evade Zeros

Shortly before his death in an air accident off the New South Wales coast this week, Flight-Lieutenant Brian H. Higgins, D.F.C., of Wangaratta (Vic.) described how a Catalina flying-boat, bombing Rabaul early in the Pacific war, eluded Japanese fighters by diving into a column of smoke from a volcano.

Flight-Lieutenant Higgins was flying Catalinas among the islands round Australia before the Japanese came into the war. Later he took part in 25 night bombing raids on enemy bases, damaged a Japanese transport and aircraft-carrier, and rescued many Allied airmen shot down off the coast.

"I was out one night with Flight-Lieutenant Terrence Duigan on a raid on Rabaul," he said. "We arrived over the target about 10 p.m., and picked out a ship lying in the harbour."

"I was in front at the bombsight, wondering why the Japs. hadn't thrown up any ack-ack or used their searchlights. Of course, they had their fighters out, cruising round above us, but I had never met Zeros before, and was ignorant of their little ways."

"Just as I was about to release the bombs the Zeros swooped and started firing at us. We shoved the old Cat's nose down and dived. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and it was a puzzle to know how to get out of the Japs' way."

"Then we remembered Matupi volcano. As we picked it up it huffed a big cloud of smoke. Down went our nose again, and we belted right through it. That little dodge saved us, for we didn't catch a sight of the Zeros again, getting back home with only one casualty, a chap shot through the leg."

Flight-Lieutenant Higgins was latterly acting as an instructor at an R.A.A.F. training station.

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