

a thin rod of white light struck the mirror and ricocheted back across the dome. In the blue vault above us there appeared a circle of light, and in it clouds. Slowly this spotlight moved across and upwards. Through a gap in the clouds a tiny black silhouette—no larger than the smut on a window-pane—appeared and to our ears came the roar of aero engines, muted still by distance, but unmistakable. The moving plane moved up the sky—by this time, intent on watching the leisurely preliminaries to sudden death, we had quite forgotten our immediate surroundings. Higher the plane crawled, lazily one wing-tip rose as it banked steeply for the dive. Now it was plunging towards us. There was a sharp click near our head. In the little bully-beef box an orange light shone behind the figure "2,000."

"Range 2,000 feet," chanted the Lieutenant, then "Range 1,700 feet 1,500 feet . . ."

The distant stutter of machine-gun fire superimposed itself on the noise of the engines.

"You're under fire," remarked the Lieutenant conversationally, and we felt like it too. It may have been the ultra-fine acoustics of the place, but this was better than any newsreel stuff. This was the real thing—at any rate it *had* been the real thing for someone. We wanted to duck but knew it would be undignified even if it were excused as force of habit and we thought, not without admiration, of the cameraman who had made the film. And wondered, too, as one can do sometimes in the passage of a split second, how many films he managed to make before he was caught by the bullets we could only hear, or before he got a safer assignment.

The plane was still diving steeply towards us and it was now possible to identify it—a Junkers twin-engined dive-bomber—then the pilot pulled back on the stick and it roared up and over our heads, the arrogant black crosses showing distinctly on the wings. As it pulled out of the dive there came the thin whistle of the bombs, first faint then screaming loudly downwards. Then the roar of a near-miss which seemed to rock the deck.

We ran a finger under our collar and tried to resume normal breathing.

The Spot Before the Eyes

The projector was still turning but now the mirror shot the image back to its original starting-point and once again the clouds opened and at the self-same moment the plane appeared again, climbing across and upwards.

"Two separate attacks are shown on each reel," explained the Lieutenant, "and each attack is shown four times. In that way it is easier for trainees to correct their mistakes. Now notice how the sights show up on the screen."

He grasped the cross-bar attachment on the l.m.g. mounting and, looking through the peep-hole, directed the sights at the plane. The ring-sight at once appeared in orange silhouette on the screen. The range-box above us clicked again as the plane dived.

"Now notice the yellow spot just ahead of the plane on the screen," we were told. We had been too steamed up the time before to see it, but there it was drifting down, always just ahead of the machine. That, we were told, was the Future Position Indicator and when the image cast by the sights on the screen centred on this yellow spot and moved with it, the supervising instructor knew that the trainee was allowing the amount of "lead" necessary to bring his

fire to bear on the aircraft. The trainee, however, was himself unable to see the yellow spot, for the peep-hole through which he looked at the target was fitted with a yellow glass filter.

More Sound and Fury

Down came the Junkers again in identical attack, like a recurrent nightmare. Again the pilot pulled out and we saw the cold grey belly of the plane, the empty bomb-racks and the bleak, black crosses and we felt our stomach muscles bunch in anticipation of the explosion.

"Care to have a try at getting it in the sights?" asked the Lieutenant. Having been taking it now for a good 200 feet of film, we thought it would at least be something if we could even lay a bead on the enemy. We stood behind the l.m.g. mounting and grasped the crossbar attachment. The image of the sight moved (wobbled would be a better word) across the dome and followed the film as it swung slowly upwards for the third time. We knew enough about the effective range of small-arms fire not to open up as soon as the plane appeared, but instead did our best to swing the sights ahead of the machine. We watched it bank and begin the dive and we heard the first click from the knowing little box on the upright alongside us. That meant 2,000 feet—rather outside l.m.g. range if our memory served. At the 1,500-foot click we gave tongue—"Opening fire."

"All right, just press the metal bar on the grip."

We did, and an infernal row broke loose from somewhere around our feet.

"BONG-BONG-BONG-BONG-BONG-BONG."

We grabbed for an imaginary tin-hat, feeling certain that the muzzle-blast must have carried it overboard, and the uproar ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

"Cannon-fire," explained the Senior Service laconically. "Try some smaller stuff."

A switch clicked over and our now sweaty palms clutched the grips again. The bomber was now almost at the nadir of its dive. As it pulled out we gave it the works.

"Tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat"

This was better, this was the noise we knew. The Junkers was screeching up again. ". . . tat-tat-tat-tat . . ."—there was a sudden silence. We squeezed frenziedly. No good.

"No more ammo.—you've shot away the equivalent of one pan of Lewis-gun ammunition," explained the Lieutenant, "and when that happens the sound cuts off automatically."

You've got to admit it, the Navy is prepared for most contingencies, even in class-room training.

We remained to watch the third repeat of the first attack and saw the second version through its four presentations—and we had another bong or two with the Chicago piano, for the juvenile dies hard in most of us. Then the violet dusk of the Northern (or Southern) latitudes faded and the house-lights went on once more.

We thanked the admirable Crawshaw and our friend the Lieutenant and stumbled out blinking into the sunlight once again. Overhead a big Dakota transport bumbled placidly towards Whenuapai aerodrome, carrying mail and homeward-bound airmen. But there wasn't a Junkers dive-bomber in sight anywhere and we felt that perhaps after all the Dome Trainer had had quite a bit to do with that happy state of affairs.



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