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The Shape of Things to Come

BATTLE OF THE SEA AND THE AIR

(Continued from page 11.)

a gentle reduction in altitude. His fleet passed into the clouds. Now he watched his flight instruments and his altimeter. Lower, lower, lower, until at 2200 feet he was occasionally catching flashes of the ocean floor.

Less than a minute later he saw his targets and at the same time heard dull rumbles and higher-pitched poppings above the drone of his motor. The torpedo bombers were engaging!

"PREPARE to dive," he told his men through his microphone. With the words he jammed open his throttle, settled himself in his seat so that he was looking through his bomb sights, and with one hand gripped the bomb toggles. With the other he slammed his stick to the left to begin his dive from a roll.

Over went the ship, the nose dropped, and it burst from the cloud, already doing 240 miles an hour. The course was straight down wind toward the enemy's largest battleship, and at an angle of dive well beyond 45 degrees.

Everything else was forgotten. Eyes were riveted on the target. The commander was cold, his mind on the alert. He was aware that multiple quick-firing guns and machine guns on the battleship opened fire on him a few seconds after he left the cloud.

The air speed indicator read 300, then 350, then 400 miles an hour as the battleship loomed bigger and bigger in the target sights from instant to instant. Then, satisfied that his sights were squarely on the bridge and funnels of the rolling battleship, the commander touched his bomb releases.

His entire salvo of 100-pound bombs started on its way. And at the same time he gripped his stick with both hands, pulling it back hard. The machine raised its nose ever so slightly.

As it did so the scene faded from before the commander's eyes. Blood pulled away from his brain, hammered in his neck, his stomach, his legs. It was the "black-out" which always followed recovery from the dive.

His machine passed fifty feet over the fighting towers of the battleship, where his bombs already were exploding.

Behind it were seven other machines also roaring down wind away from the other ships. On the deck of one battleship was a flaming mass of buckled metal near a series of gaping holes in the deck. One of the bombers had failed to come out of its dive.

As his sight returned slowly the commander made certain that his motor was functioning. Then he looked to his men. His loss he accepted philosophically. He looked back to see the results of the attack.

SEVERAL of the torpedo bombers still were in action. Recklessly their pilots were driving them close to

the battleships to drop one last projectile. All the battleships had batteries in action. But every one of the ships was damaged in one way or another.

Some had decks and superstructures completely wrecked. Several had been struck by the heavy torpedoes. Two were listing heavily at the bow, and a third apparently had a jammed rudder, for it was swinging away from its fellows.

THIS is, of course, an entirely fanciful engagement between a battle fleet and naval air raiders. Such an encounter never has occurred in the history of the world, but the fight described here well may become fact in the next great sea battle.

Only warfare can decide whether aeroplanes are to be relegated to the harmless job of scouting or whether they can be utilised as striking weapons of great power.

But that the navy itself leans towards the belief that bombers and torpedo planes will be efficient fighting machines is evident from its procurement of squadrons of heavy bombers, dive bombers and large torpedo planes.

THE tactics of these three types of bombers vary greatly. The heavy bombers, machines capable of carrying projectiles weighing up to 1000 pounds each, release their missiles from great heights while flying in a horizontal plane.

No fleet has a defence against high bombing. The bombers pick the time and direction of their approach and, furthermore, are so high that anti-aircraft guns would be no deterrent. Modern anti-aircraft rifles will drive shells up to the 20,000-foot level, but the gunners admit that very little accurate shooting can be done above 10,000 feet.

DIVE bombing is a special navy science. The bombers begin a vertical or near-vertical dive on their targets from great heights and from behind the screen of sheltering clouds.

Using the speed of the dive as his only defence, the bomber pilot sights his plane on the target, waits until he is so close he cannot miss, and then releases his bombs. After that the airman straightens out of his dive and speeds away.

Dive bombing has been found to be very accurate. Airmen say there is no defence against it either, but this has yet to be proved.

TORPEDO bombers are an entirely different breed of airplane. The machines carry the great torpedoes fitted with compressed air motor and a screw for self-propulsion. The torpedo bombers are not expected to fly close to enemy vessels, but will loose their explosives from ranges between 500 yards and a mile.

When dropped into the sea the torpedoes would propel themselves at their targets just as do torpedoes launched from submarines.