

*Very good indeed*

DANGEROUS CALLINGS

Over the micky system comes the insistent voice of the Air Officer, "Boney closing in, bearing 150, distance 30 miles". The Captain orders "General Quarters" sounded. Over the steady bong, bong, bong, of the alarm system, can be heard the shrill notes of the bugler double-timing "Battle Stations". Men hurry to their assigned stations, preparing for the on-coming action.

A low-flying, single-engined Jap torpedo plane had somehow slipped past the combat air patrol and is boring in on the carriers.

The Jap is barely skimming the tops of the waves, and at tremendous speed. First the destroyers, then the cruisers and finally the battleships open fire on the Jap, but still he comes on. The torpedo plane is now in range of one of the carriers, coming in low and fast on the carrier's starboard bow. Suddenly the carrier's guns cut loose with a blast that shakes her decks. First the five-inch, then the forty millimeters and finally the rows of twenty millimeters in the starboard gallery concentrate all their fire on that single torpedo plane. Hundreds of tracers seem to be cutting right into the plane, black puffs of ack-ack explode all around her, big shells hit the water ahead, throwing up tall columns of water but miraculously the Jap seems to fly through them, unharmed, apparently. It looks as though every shot were a hit, but the plane doesn't seem damaged!

On deck, men look in astonishment at the on-coming plane, getting ready to duck. In a 200-mile-an-hour roar, the Jap plane flashes across the carrier's bow, wobbling crazily, trying to nose up, just as the carrier's port machine guns let go and liberally tear him apart. Flames burst out of his wing roots, then out of his fuselage by the cockpit, and in one huge sheet of fire, the torpedo plane splashes into the sea a few hundred feet from the carrier. A billowing pyre of black smoke marks the spot for minutes afterwards.

The Jap's approach was perfect, the crew of the carrier feels he must have dropped his "fish", it will hit in a few moments! Every man feels tense and utterly useless and helpless. Some men stand riveted to the deck, others nervously flinger their tin hats or brace themselves against the shock of the torpedo, a few men floor, some start counting seconds, without knowing why, then twenty-thirty; nothing happens! Those who had flopped, pick themselves up again in some embarrassment.

Miraculously, the explosion never comes. Evidently the pilot was badly wounded or killed or his release gears damaged or shot away and the torpedo was not released and most likely did not explode until the plane had hit the water.

Men engaged in dangerous callings all agree that the "pangs of anticipation" are greater than those of "realization".