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Edward M. Owen, LCDR, USNR

Born in Pittsburgh, PA, January 27, 1914, he was graduated from the University of West Virginia in 1935 with an A. B. degree. He joined the U. S. Naval Reserve as an aviation cadet in 1936 and was designated Naval Aviator on September 25, 1937. He served with VB-4 aboard the USS *Enterprise* until October, 1940; spent a few months at the Naval Reserve Unit at Philadelphia as an instructor in primary flight training; and in December 1940 was sent to the Flight Test Section at NAS Anacostia where he remained until March 1943. While on duty at Anacostia he did a good deal of work on the new Navy Hellcat fighter which his squadron later flew.

In March 1943 he went to sea aboard the new USS *Yorktown* as Flight Officer in VF-1. The squadron's designation was changed to VF-5 in June 1943. Lt. Comdr. (then LT) Owen became Commanding Officer of the squadron in September 1943 and served in this capacity until March 22, 1944. It was a half-year packed with sorties. Lt. Comdr. Owen emerged an "ace," with five shootdowns to his credit.

The hit-and-run raid on Marcus Island September 1, 1943 (in which four carriers participated) was the first time that Hellcats had been used over Japanese territory. Lt. Comdr. Owen was very enthusiastic about the Hellcat and described it as the "best airplane in the world." There was no air opposition over Marcus. Our planes bombed and strafed ground installations, destroyed seven twin-engine Jap bombers parked on the runways.

In talking about the attack on Marcus, Lt. Comdr. Owen pointed out the fact that it marked the re-entry of our carrier Navy into the South Pacific. He described it as a "pattern raid" or "sample raid" and said that the plane and operations employed were slightly different from any used up to that time and marked the first use of the tactics which led to the taking of the Gilbert and Marshalls.

The two-day attack on Wake on October 5 and 6,

involving the greatest carrier force ever assembled, started with a dawn fighter attack. VF-5 encountered a swarm of Jap Zeros just over the target and shot down 16 in 30 minutes. Lt. Comdr. Owen got one of them. "The Jap pilot made a mistake" he said. "He made a pass at me from above and astern, then pulled up ahead which made him a sitting duck. I let him have it, hit the engine, gas tanks and the cockpit—apparently killing the pilot."

Lt. Comdr. Owen attributes the success of our fighter squadrons in large part to the sound tactics devised by Commander John S. Thach and Commander J. H. Flatley.

During the Gilberts invasion on November 10-24, 1943 the mission of the *Yorktown's* planes was to raid Mili and Juluit and support the Makin landings. During the first five days they raided Mili repeatedly in an effort to neutralize the airfield. There was no air opposition—there were Jap fighters on the field but they didn't come up. Several two-engine bombers were destroyed on the ground. After the raids on Mili the *Yorktown* withdrew to an area between the Gilbert and Marshalls to act as interceptors for Makin and Tarawa.

The raid on Kwajalein and Roi on December 4, 1943 came as a complete surprise to the enemy. They did succeed, however, in getting their planes in the air and there was "quite a scrap." Lt. Comdr. Owen shot down two planes that day, a Zero and a float bi-plane. His squadron was supporting the bombers, came in at high cover (19,000 feet), encountered no air opposition until leaving their targets (VBs attacked shipping, VFs strafed the airfield). At this point a flock of Zeros appeared. One of them came in behind one of our fighters and Lt. Comdr. Owen led his division in an attempt to get him. He shot the Zero down, but he had maneuvered so violently that he got separated from the rest of his squadron. He then saw a Jap seaplane and shot him down. Six Zeros then started making runs on him—one took the heel off his shoe, another took the earphones off his goggles. The Japs finally quit and he flew about 145 miles back to the carrier. His controls were shot up and the engine was losing power steadily. When he was over the fleet he hit the silk. The destroyer *Bullard* picked him up. She came along side, dropped a net over and he was pulled aboard. The sea was rough and when the waves tossed him aboard he hit the deck hard and was pretty shaken up. Later he was transferred back to the *Yorktown* on a boatswain's chair.

On January 30, the *Yorktown* Air Group hit the installations on Taroa in the initial stage of the Marshalls campaign, they did not run into any air opposition although there was some. The next day the Air Group bombed and strafed targets of opportunity—sank a number of small boats, strafed troops. VF-5's job was supporting the bombers which attacked gun emplacements and supply areas. They stayed in this vicinity about 5 days and then went back to Majuro to rearm and refuel.

The attack on Truk on 16-17 February began with a

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72-plane fighter sweep making a dawn attack. The idea was to knock out all the air opposition and there was plenty of it to knock out. The first day at Truk our flyers got 129 Japs—VF-5 accounted for 29 of them. Lt. Comdr. Owen shot down two. He described the scene as kind of like a Hell's Angels sortie—there were so many planes in the air, so many burning. Following the first sweep of fighter planes came other sweeps of SBDs and TBFs escorted by fighters. All enemy planes in the air and on the ground were destroyed—the second morning there were no enemy planes in the air. Lt. Comdr. Owen said that the Truk attack was an exceedingly well-planned operation—one of the best we've had.

After Truk the boys were full of pep—morale was greatly boosted and on February 22 they went up and hit Saipan and Taipan. There was very little air opposition. Two of the men in VF-5 got three planes. The squadron strafed the airfields on the two islands. The entire Task Force destroyed between 70 and 100 Japs on the ground, set fire to fuel dumps and bombed runways and hangars. They left the place “looking pretty much like Saturday night,” then went back to Majuro, and down to the South Pacific to Espirito Santo. Lt. Comdr. Owen was detached from the squadron here and ordered to duty at the Navy Building, Washington D. C., then to Patuxent River, MD.