

Horvath Jr, Joseph

Local Gunner 'Sprays' Japs From P-T In Daring Rescue Of Wounded U. S. Flier

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"I opened up on the beach while they were rescuing the pilot. I shot up some supplies, and sprayed the beach to port and starboard".

Joseph Horvath Jr., 23, Gunners Mate second class, USNR, son of Joseph Horvath, 617 Williams Street, Bethlehem, was telling of his part in the daring rescue his PT boat made in Wasile Bay on Halmahera Island, the day following the invasion of adjoining Morotai Island in the Southwest Pacific.

Horvath was at the trigger of a bow machine gun on the PT boat that went in within 100 yards of Jap shore positions to pick up a wounded Navy fighter pilot.

His PT was one of two assigned to the dangerous mission. The Navy flier had been shot down over Lolobata airstrip—the most heavily fortified Jap position on Halmahera. Floating half unconscious in a rubber raft in Wasile Bay which opens off Kaoe Bay, the downed airman was protected for 8 hours by an air cover of 16 Hellcat fighters and 4 Avenger torpedo planes.

Efforts to rescue him by Catalina flying boat were fruitless. The Jap anti-aircraft and shore battery fire was too intense. Then the assistance of the PT boats was requested.

Four and a half hours after he had been shot down, two Motor Torpedo boats started out to do the seemingly impossible.

Dashing wildly down narrow Kaoe Bay, flanked on both sides by 90 millimeter shore batteries, they successfully evaded the screaming enemy shells.

Twisting and turning to evade the Jap fire, they criss-crossed enemy mine fields.

For two and a half hours they were under constant fire. Shells fell within 25 yards of the skillfully maneuvering torpedo boats, now ahead, now behind.

Some fell so close that they plucked the "rooster tail" wake thrown up by the PTs as they sped at full throttle past the Jap gun positions.

Overhead Navy carrier based

fighters and torpedo bombers constantly strafed and bombed, endeavoring to put the guns of the Japs out of action long enough for the PTs to make the rescue.

Then under cover of a smoke screen laid by the planes, the PTs approached to within 100 yards of the Jap shore positions near the airstrip. The wounded pilot's rubber raft had drifted close to a Jap lugger anchored there, and he had secured it to the anchor chain.

"Eight planes dove on the beach while we were in there," Horvath said later. "Some of them came

right over us at an altitude of fifty feet, passed over the lugger, and strafed the beach."

While an officer and another member of the crew dove in the water and brought the wounded pilot aboard, Horvath swept the beach with his machine gun fire.

With the rescued man aboard, the two PT boats, then, opened fire on the Jap lugger, destroyed it, and then once more ran the gauntlet of Jap gun positions along Wasile Bay through Kaoe Bay's narrow mined channel to safety.

Horvath has been in the South-

west Pacific for 6 months. He enlisted in the Naval Reserve in October 1942, and received his "boot" training at Bainbridge, Md. After attending gunnery school at Newport, R. I., he volunteered for duty with the Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons, and received a two months course on PTs at Melville, R. I.

Before he joined the Navy he was employed as a machine hand by the Bethlehem Steel Corp. for 3 years. He is a former student of Washington Junior High School in Bethlehem.

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