

Murto Jr., Thomas

Major Thomas Murto, Jr., Home After Sixty Flying Missions

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The welcoming arms of his two-year-old son Tommy, born after his departure, were all that Major Thomas Murto, Jr., hero of the "Wake Avengers," fighting squadron, needed to complete a perfect homecoming.

When Major Murto arrived at the home of his wife's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Howard B. Hartzell of Fourth Avenue, Tommy, who had been using the word "Daddy" to apply to his grandfather, immediately adopted his newly found father.

Twenty-six-year-old Major Murto, commanding officer of the Leathernecks, has accumulated 190 combat flying hours in 60 missions against the Japs, returning from the South Pacific with three Zeros to his credit.

A recent forced landing almost delayed the long-awaited homecoming. His Corsair fighter was shot down by anti-aircraft fire from coastal guns on New Ireland during his last strafing raid in April.

Flying through geysers of ack-ack, his plane's engine and fuselage were riddled, forcing him to pancake into the sea 30 miles offshore.

"I was scared to death but uninjured," he said. "I managed to escape from the cockpit just as the plane submerged, and I remained in the water until a Navy plane rescued me two hours later."

Major Murto, a 1939 graduate of Lehigh University, is the son of Dr. and Mrs. T. V. Murto Sr. of Trenton, New Jersey. He was commissioned at Philadelphia in July of '39 after which he served at Parris Island, in Cuba and at the New York World's Fair, prior to completion of flight training in Miami, Florida.

The youthful squadron commander got his first Zero while on a bomber escort mission against the Lukunai air base at Rabaul. His "Wake Avengers" are credited with 71 aircraft destroyed in air and three on the ground. Their last combat flying tour was devoted to strafing operations in which they



MAJOR THOMAS MURTO JR.

sank 15 supply barges and dealt heavy blows to supply areas on New Britain and New Ireland.

Major Murto scored a double aerial victory last January while leading his fighting squadron in one of his 30 fighter sweeps over Rabaul.

"My wingman and I dived on 15 Zeros that we spotted below," Major Murto said. "Our fire blasted the gas tank of a Zero on my first pass. Flames immediately enveloped their plane. The pilot bailed out shortly before it crashed into Simpson Harbor."

Later the same day the Major emerged the winner when he intercepted and destroyed a Zero that was riding the tail of his wingman's plane.

Though Major Murto does not talk as easily about his exploits as this interview would seem to indicate, he is emphatic on one point. He is anxious to get back into combat, to do his share to end hostilities.

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