5276 RESCUE GROUP
FIFTH AIR FORCE
APO 710

25th October, 1944

SUBJECT: Discussion of Balikpapan Rescue Plan.

TO : Commander E. E. Fahey, USCG, Liaison Officer, Air-Sea Rescue Committee, Allied Joint Chiefs of Staff.

1. Rescue protection of the Balikpapan series of strikes commencing 30 September, 1944, is of particular interest in that it includes in one operation a number of tactical principles and methods, some generally employed in the Pacific, and some developed by Air-Sea Rescue Service Fifth Air Force. The operation illustrates in particular:

a. Central Operational Control.
b. Operations Section Procedure.
c. Rescue Intelligence.
d. Rescue Communications.
e. "Rescue Line."
f. Base to Target coverage.
g. Submarine Lifeguard Service.
h. Seaplane Rescue Stations.

Tactics not illustrated, but which might have been employed:

i. Boat Rescue Stations.
j. Air Rescue Controller.

2. The following is by no means a complete discussion of these matters, but will serve to give a picture of the operation:

a. Central Operational Control.

The concept of Air-Sea Rescue as a Life Saving Station, a local service under the control of the Fighter Sector Controller, must give way and has given way before operations involving hundreds of thousands of square miles, from several stations, and overlapping radio control. Rescue is confined neither to a local area, nor to a unit, but its service is area wide depending upon needs of the moment, and its facilities must be disposed accordingly. But within each Air Force, central control of rescue is essential in order to provide area wide protection, maintain uniform procedure, utilize, and execute a non-delegable responsibilty. Operational control of rescue units and personnel, wherever located, must not be dispersed among commandd, wings, and task forces, but must be retained by the Air Force.

The distinction between combat forces and rescue facilities within a command, wing, or task force is that the combat forces execute the assigned task of the headquarters, whereas the rescue facilities execute a non-delegable responsibility of the Air Force. This responsibility can be activated only after all of the plans of the commands, wings, or task forces have been recieved, and the time element alone requires immediate and direct control of each rescue facility.

In the Balikpapan strike of 10 October, executed while the Thirteenth Air Force was supporting the Fifth Air Force, the headquarters involved were the two Air Forces, the V Fighter Command, V Bomber Command, XIII Fighter Command, XIII Bomber Command, and 91st Reccennaissance Wing. Rescue protection was planned, activated, and operated by 5276 Rescue Group, Fifth Air Force, employing a submarine from U S Seventh Fleet, OA 10's of 2nd Rescue Squadron, and PBY's from USS Orca assigned to Fifth Air Force.

b. Operations Section Procedure.

The Rescue Group is located at Headquarters Fifth Air Force. Having received the Operations Order of the Air Force, and the Air Intents of the units involved, the Operations Section of the Group develops the rescue plan and issues the Rescue Operations Order, which is dispatched by urgent message to all rescue and striking forces taking part. For a submarine lifeguard request is made in advance of Seventh Fleet, and all necessary operating details are sent to the various headquarters. For the 10 October Balikpapan Strike the lifeguard service was described in Rescue Bulletin No. 4 issued by 5276 Rescue Group and reissued as Rescue Bulletin No. 1, by Thirteenth Air Force.

c. Rescue Intelligence.

The Rescue Intelligence employed included not only the dispositions of enemy fighter strength to determine the necessity of fighter escort, but also a careful study of the route to the target in order to select Rescue Stations, or orbit points, which afforded protected waters for seaplane landings and areas free from enemy occupation or influence. Based on this intelligence, a Rescue Line was adopted. Another item of important intelligence developed was the fact that the shore waters from Balikpapan Bay to the north are very shallow and a submarine cannot approach safely nearer than from ten to fifteen miles. Ocean Current and Winds were also ascertained and included in the plan.

d. Rescue Communications.

The Communications Plan is set forth in Annex A of Field Order No. 2, Thirteenth Air Force, and as to the Lifeguard submarine in the Rescue Bulletin, Fifth Air Force Service maintains a Command Net over which to communicate with its seaplanes, and such a net is desirable, but must be sacrificed if only one frequency is available over the Liaison Set. (SCR 522) Such was the case in the Balikpapan strike, and all rescue planes monitored and operated the Primary Strike Frequency of the Thirteenth Air Force to which all the striking bombers were tuned.

e. "Rescue Line."

The Rescue Line is simply an adaptation of the route to and from the target, to rescue facilities and capabilities. For the Balikpapan strikes the Rescue Line, following a bomb run from East to West, was:

A turn to the Southeast and down the channel of Balikpapan Bay to its mouth, then due East for about 5 miles.

Thence Northeast to the Rescue Station of Daylights 11 and 12 (OA 10's) over the protected waters of Palsa Bay at 00°35' S., 119°45' E.

Thence along the Rescue Line of 30' S. to Sansapor and around the Coast to Moemfoor, passing near the Rescue Station of Daylight 13 (OA 10) orbiting over the protected waters between Batoedaka Island and Togian Island at 00° 25' S., 121° 55' E., and the Rescue Station of Daylight 1 (PBY) between Mandioi Island and Batjan Island at 00°35' S., 127° 25' E.

For Fighters and B bers returning to Morotai, the . Scue Line left 30' S., at 124° and continued to Morotai, passing Rescue Station of Daylight 3 (B3Y) at Tifore Island.

Daylight 14 (OA 10) and Daylight 2 (P3Y) provided alert over Sansapor and Morotai respectively.

The Rescue Line accomplished these purposes: It provides a known route along which search may be made for lost aircraft. It provides safe areas for emergency landing - bailing out, crash landing, or ditching. It provides safe seaplane landing areas. It gives the striking aircraft definite position and landmarks for locating rescue aircraft. By concentrating the bombers along one route, it increases the prospect of communication between distressed aircraft and its companions. It assists navigation.

The Rescue Line common to all striking aircraft is not suited to all theatres, nor to all situations in the Pacific, but on the whole it is a safe and useful adjunct to rescue in this theatre.

f. Base to Target coverage.

The Fifth Air Force Rescue Service provides not only immediate rescue as an integral part of strike procedure, but also protection along the entire route. The latter may vary, depending upon rescue facilities available, protected water stations, state of the sea, and enemy activity. Insofar as possible, the rescue coverage extends from the immediate area of the target to each home base.

g. Submarine Lifeguard Service.

This service is completely explained by the Rescue Bulletin on the subject.

h. Seaplane Rescue Stations.

The Southwest Pacific, and in particular the area West and Northwest of New Guinea, is well adapted to the development of Rescue Stations, the Characteristic of which are that they are suitable for emergency landing by striking aircraft, meet the needs of the rescue seaplane or boat, and are free of enemy influence. Three of the Rescue Stations for the Balikpapan strikes were adapted to their purpose, and the fourth, over Tifore Island was chosen because friendly Dutchmen were living there. Each seaplane was instructed, upon arrival to make a search of the area of the station determine the spots best suited to each type of emergency landing, and upon an approach by plane in distress to advise what action to take and to lead it to the point of landing. Later this information was collected and forwarded to all Units for subsequent strikes.

In adopting the Rescue Station, the Rescue Service by no means abandoned the policy of going to aircraft in distress, but simply developed the advantage of having a pin point of rescue to which aircraft still airborne might go for assistance The Rescue Station makes the seaplane available to all combat aircraft, the majority of which if not shot down over the target can reach a station not to far distant. The seaplane is free to leave at any time upon specific call for rescue of airmen already down or about to emergency land.

The Balikpapan area proved well chosen. One B-24 came directly to the Daylight in Togian Bay for the first strike, and its entire crew was immediatly rescued. Another B-24 with radio out missed Daylight 13 over the Togian Islands, but landed just inland on Batoedaka Island. Its crew was extremely well received by friendly natives, and was rescued the second day thereafter following a day of bad weather. On 10th October three fighters came to Palau Bay Rescue Station, landed, and were rescued. Another fighter had bailed out some 50 miles to the west and one of the two seaplanes at Palau Bay was led to the spot for the rescue.

i. Rescue Boat Stations.

The Rescue Boat program is just getting into operation, and the technique of their operation is to be developed. But in many areas it is possible to place a rescue boat in an area similar to the Seaplane Rescue Station. This may be done for a single strike, or the boat, usualy a pair of boats, may remain at the station for a continuous period. Supply is by other boats, by seaplane, and by dropping from C-47. A communications plan is carefully developed, so that the boats may be kept acquainted with air traffic and be in communication with aircraft in distress.

j. Air Rescue Controller.

The Air Rescue Controller is a strike leader appointed by the rescue service to contact the seaplane or boat at its orbit point and to give it directions. The office was created in order to increase rescue protection of the forces striking Japanese task forces in Mindanao Sea en route to Leyte Gulf. The rescue plan had to be made the night before in respect to a moving target, the location of which would not be known until the next day. Seaplanes with fighter escort were sent to an orbit point in the area with instructions to receive orders from the Air Rescue Controller, on the final orbit position to take. On the second day two seaplanes were provided, and an Air Rescue Controller was appointed for each Air Force. The Air Rescue Controller has since been employed with good results in the protection of strikes against ground targets.

3. The Balikpapan plan does not include one of the basic protections affored by Fifth Air Force Service - immediate rescue by seaplane at the target. This was precluded by inability to provide fighter escort. It has for long been a standard service, and on numerous occasions rescues have been made under ground fire.

4. The results of the Balikpapan rescue plan were good. Twenty-four men were rescued by seaplane, and sixteen are known to have been rescued by submarine. Information on coverage by one submarine has not been reported. All airmen who reached water or land alive away from the target were rescued, and it is believed that the same is true of all these who reached the water alive off shore from the target.

/s/JOHN H. SMALL, JR.,
/t/ JOHN H. SMALL, JR.,
Major, Air Corps,
Commanding.