

Sergeant Coon Participates In Catalina Rescue Of Fliers

HEADQUARTERS, 13th AAF, PHILIPPINES—Sergeant Clarence L. Coon, Jr., Greenville, Miss., 13th AAF flight engineer, was member of a Catalina Rescue crew that saved eleven 13th air force airmen after their plane crashed on a water takeoff on a heavy sea.

The crashed Catalina and the rescue plane were both part of the "Snafu Snatchers" squadron of the 13th AAF emergency rescue group. The first rescue plane had just taken aboard survivors of a crashed B-24 Liberator that had been disabled by Jap anti-aircraft at Balikpapan Oil Fields, Borneo.

Sergeant Coon's plane also answered the Liberator's distress call and was circling the area as the sister ship made the rescue. The second rescue plane watched anxiously as the sister rescue plane made preparations for a water takeoff under almost suicide conditions. The plane was overloaded and the sea was now running eight-foot high.

Emergency Landing

Just before the "Cat" left the water a huge roller tipped up the tail and instantly the plane buried itself, nose first, splitting the hull and ripping the ship apart.

Lieutenant Bryan W. Guess, Bartow, Fla., pilot of the second rescue ship shouted into the inter-

com phone to his crew: "Emergency landing. Better hang on, looks pretty rough."

It looked as though all on board the crashed Catalina were lost, until suddenly Mae Wests started bobbing to the surface as the men fought their way out of the sinking wreckage.

The pilot and co-pilot were thrown through the top of the flight deck after the plane had gone down. When they came to the surface they were both still strapped to their seats. The pilot suffering a broken leg.

Captain Nicholas E. Bailey, flight surgeon on the second rescue plane, and an expert swimmer, dove in and swam underwater, kicked in the plexi-glass gun blister and dragged an unconscious flier to the surface, applied artificial respiration for an hour and saved his life.

The nose of Sergeant Coon's plane was badly damaged in making the quick landing and water was pouring into the hull. After 45 minutes of terrific battling the pilot finally got her into the air. "We went through hell when the ship started to take off, and none of us thought she'd ever get off the water," Sergeant Coon remarked.