

Sgt. Coon Coaxes Plane Back To Base With Engines Riddled

HEADQUARTERS, 13TH AAF, PHILIPPINES—With both engines riddled from Jap machine-gun fire, a rescue Catalina plane piloted by Lt. Bryan W. Guess, 580 S. Floral Ave., Bartow, Fla., was coaxed back to its home base on "about one-half" a sputtering engine, due to the engineering ability of Flight Engineer Sgt. Clarence L. Coon, Jr., Greenville, Miss.

The Catalina, part of the 13th AAF "June Air Force," had been patrolling the coast of Borneo as rescue cover for the B-24 Liberators and fighters of the 13th, hitting Jap targets in Borneo. The bombers had completed their mission and all had started for home, with the amphibious Catalina following behind as is the practice, always on the alert in case one of the bombers is forced to crash-land.

Everything Movable Dropped

All indications were that it would be a quiet, routine trip back to the base, when suddenly a terrific barrage of Jap anti-aircraft fire came up from a hidden gun nest. Flight Engineer Sgt. Clarence L. Coon, Jr., yelled into the interphone: "Oil going out in starboard engine!" Lt. Guess jammed the throttles ahead trying to get altitude before the engine burned out, and a moment later the motor was dead.

Everything movable was tossed overboard to lighten the plane,

with the exception of the ship's guns. Lt. Guess contacted his base in the Netherlands East Indies, reporting that it was doubtful his plane would make home. The Catalina dropped dangerously low to about 200 feet, but after much effort on the part of Engineer Coon she finally climbed to twenty-five hundred, with the remaining engine slowly losing oil.

"Half-Engine" Landing

Four and one-half hours after the engine had been shot out the Catalina made a perfect "half-an-engine" landing at its 13th AAF jungle airbase. A large delegation of fellow rescue airmen were on the strip "Sweating out" the return of the crippled plane. Glancing at the ambulance parked nearby, Lt. Guess remarked: "I'm sure glad to see such a nice welcoming committee, but what's all the excitement."

Sgt. Coon is a member of a rescue unit that has saved more than 570 Allied airmen from capture or death on the open sea. The rescue unit is a vital part of the 13th Jungle Air Force, that has made history in its long march from Guadalcanal to the Philippine and China.

Bartow is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence L. Coon, Sr., Greenville. He entered the armed service in June, 1943, prior to which he was a student at Mississippi State College and was graduated from Drew High School.