

Vic Krygowski: We were hit by a kamikaze plane in our second patrol but we survived it.
[coughing]

Janis Kozlowski: So were you just ... were you on the surface at the time?

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. That's a whole different story. That could be a ... the subject of another interview some time.

Yes, we were on the surface. We were en route to our patrol area and we were.... Late in the afternoon a lookout spotted an airplane. Well, when a submarine spots an airplane you don't bother changing recognition signals, you know, any of that stuff, you just get out of his way. So, we pulled the plug and we went down and as we were going down this loud explosion rocks the whole ship and water begins to pour in in the conning tower area – from many, many openings. So now we thought that he was up there, he dropped a bomb that came pretty close to hitting us, did a lot of damage, and that he's circling up there to give us the coup de grace. Except that now we are under water but in Pacific waters depending on where you are you don't know how deep into the water they can see the silhouette from the air.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh

Vic Krygowski: So, you're sitting on pins and needles, you know, knowing he's up there and he's about ready to unload another bomb and maybe put you out of commission forever. So, we then ... Skipper.... The water intake was greater than we could pump out. So, the Skipper then had to make a decision because if we stay under much longer getting heavier we're not going to be able to fight this negative buoyancy so we're gonna have to surface and fight this guy on the surface with machine guns. So we surfaced.

Janis Kozlowski: So are subs equipped to fight on the surface with sub machine guns?

Vic Krygowski: Oh no, no. They weren't designed for that. That was just like a, you know, a second line of defense so to speak.

Anyway, I had you sitting on pins and needles now waiting for that bomb to drop. [Janis laughing] So the Skipper says "surface." So the alarm goes off, "Kaooogah, Kaooogah" and up we come. Now, when you blow main ballast tanks in the submarine only the conning tower comes out of the water, the whole ship doesn't come out of the water. And there's only one hull opening or one hatch for people to get in and out of the conning tower.

And the Skipper is watching the board, the depth gauge, and his Christmas tree display of lights and he says, "open the hatch." He's already spotted that the hatch is up out of the water. Meanwhile we have the gun crews all ready with their machine guns which came from a nice dry magazine down below ready to go on deck and put these machine guns in their sockets and start firing. The Skipper says, "Open the hatch."

So the Quartermaster of the watch is already on the ladder and every submarine hatch has a wheel in it that has prongs that go out to lock the hatch in place – they call [them] dogs. So he spins the wheel and the dogs recede. They're ok. Then all he's gotta do is to hit the latch, like on a screen door and the hatch flies open. So this guy's hitting this latch to a point where his hand begins to bleed and it's not opening. So the report goes back to the Skipper the hatch won't open.

Now the Skippers beside himself because, you know, [chuckling] because this never happened before and he doesn't see why this hatch wouldn't open. Others get on that ladder and they're hammering this with their fist. Somebody gets a hammer and is hitting on it. Nothing, nothing helps.

So now, what you got ... there are other openings on the submarine, of course, along the main deck. But now you've got to get the whole ship out of the water and you do that with what we call a low pressure blower. That takes about 15 or 20 minutes. So we get the low pressure blowers going and gradually the ship comes out of the water. In the meantime, we were all saying our prayers because we know now we are fully visible, we're on the surface. And he's up there circling. He can't miss!

So we were sitting on pins and needles. Everybody is sure that, not IF we're gonna die, you know, but WHEN are we gonna die. So the ship finally gets up out of the water and the gun crew up through the deck hatches to go up on the conning tower to put their guns in their sockets. And what do they find, but this big landing gear right over the conning tower hatch. He had come into the water after us as we were diving.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, so there's a big piece of airplane stuck on the conning tower. That's why the hatch wouldn't come open.

Vic Krygowski: That's right, that's right. So we had to then remove that big landing gear and we hack sawed off some of the name plates and we sent that to naval intelligence and they found out what kind of a plane it was that hit us.

But anyway, we knew then that he had come in the water after us and there was nothing around us and we searched the whole surface. He was not ... we thought maybe he'd be floating out there in a life preserver or something. But the kamikaze don't believe in life preservers because their mission is to go out – it's a one way trip guaranteed for the sake of the emperor and you give up your life so that the rest of the country is safe.

Janis Kozlowski: So he never tried to save himself, he just went down with his airplane in the water?

Vic Krygowski: Well, he was probably killed on impact in the airplane. So he probably went down in his seat and sank with the wreckage.

Janis Kozlowski: How far off from Pearl Harbor were you at the time?

Vic Krygowski: We were just south of the island of Iwo Jima at the time. And, we reasoned ... see this was March 20th of 1945. We reasoned that that must have been ... oh, and the Marines were just about securing Iwo Jima at that time at great cost to us. And we reasoned that he must have been one of the last Jap planes that could possibly get off the island and rather than strafing a few Marines on the island he saw this multi-million dollar submarine with 80 people on board and he figured he was gonna earn his place of honor on the Emperors whatever – honor roll – and he would be then deified forever by the Japanese people.

Janis Kozlowski: But he never ... he didn't really damage ... nobody got hurt on your sub?

Vic Krygowski: No, no, not a single person.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, that must have been a pretty scary experience.

Vic Krygowski: Yep. Oh, it was, especially when that water began to pour in. We had to do what we could to funnel it down to the bilges so that the bilge pumps can start pumping it overboard. But the intake was so far greater than the output that the ship was getting heavier and heavier. And if you get enough negative buoyancy then, you know, you only go one way and that's straight down.