

Affidavit of George Fain Black

This affidavit concerns an event that occurred at about 0700 hours 19 March 1945 in Franklin, CV 13, approximately 50 miles southeast of Kyushu Island, Japan.

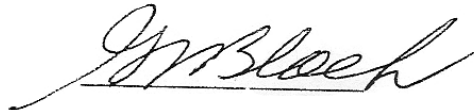
I had just arrived in the aft mess hall starboard side in a chow line, was served and sat down to eat breakfast. After a few seconds there was a terrific explosion aboard the ship and I believe it was forward and at the hangar deck. The concussion threw me and others sailors along with the mess table. across the compartment to starboard among bombs on racks seabags and mattresses for hammocks. Being completely addled and ears ringing I managed to get to my feet and obey the order given me by Walter Bigusiak RM1/C, to follow him to Radio # 2 starboard side aft just under the flight deck. A cook who was wearing a white uniform and white apron was leading us. There were 13 of us in a line who, on the double were going topside to the hangar deck from the port side main hatch. The lights went out. The PA system announcing General Quarters quit. The aft mess hall was heavy in smoke; several sailors did (not regain consciousness and in a desperate lunge, we all headed for the ladder. The first deck above us contained a small compartment holding six bunks and lockers a telephone and scuttlebutt. The leader, the cook named Simms ran up the ladder and grabbed the scuttle wheel and turned it loose saying it was too hot to handle.

The 13 of us then attempted to retreat back to the mess hall and opening that hatch fire and smoke entered the small compartment. We were trapped. Someone picked up the phone and attempted to call ship's operator and got no response. It was announced the phone was dead. Simms and Bigusiak told us all to sit down on the bunks and conserve energy and oxygen. This was our position for several hours. There were many explosions that were nearby and some were so close to us that we were racking around in the bunks. To attempt to stand would only get you knocked down. Several attempts were made to use the telephone to no avail. I along with others removed towels from the bunks wetted them in the scuttlebutt and wore them as face masks as the air was stales heavy and hot. On occasion Simms would say it was too hot. His position was a sitting position on the ladder. In near panic it was said we had blundered into a shelling; another said he thought we had been torpedoed. The ship started listing to starboard and everyone thought we were going to be capsizing. Explosions continued intermittently and at intervals for a very long time. There was a lull but the wheel still wouldn't budge. There was another explosion, this time on the hangar deck and near us. It started letting smoke into the compartment through the vent system. Simms who was about 15 years older than the rest of us including my leader, Walter, took charge of things. He yelled that the wheel had cooled and he put all his weight into the loosening of the wheel and it finally began to turn; however the hatch would not budge. Simms put his shoulder to it and it began to open. Water then began to pour into the opening and onto the ladder. Everyone was on his feet now and clamoring to get to the ladder. Simms

yelled that the hangar deck was afire but we had to move fast. Everyone thought we were going to be caught in a capsizing. Simms managed to get through a maze of airplane wreckage and yelled to form a line and come on out. I was beginning to choke but I yelled out a number for everyone climbing up and through the hatch. Simms pulled a guy up and out and he in turn did the same. I kept yelling the numbers and when # 11 was pulled through a guy wearing a gas mask motioned for me to go on out. I did so and pulled him out. We were inside a burned out bomber that had been lying across the hatch. The list probably caused the wreckage to slide away from the hatch allowing us to be freed. A water pipe had burst by the explosion and water put out the fire above us. We dodged fire, smoke, ruined aircraft, carnage and a big black hole going in line; one on one to the only light we could see starboard. Radio # 2 was heavily damaged. We didn't see any body still alive and made it to the gun mount for the 20's and 40's starboard aft for air. In a second or two we all gathered together in the gun mount and squatted down hoping to miss all the exploding ammo and rockets. Then the gasoline and napalm tanks exploded. All of us instinctively jumped into the water. Bigusiak told me he couldn't swim. He and the cook and a couple of others were all that were left. There was not a life jacket, life belt, raft or buoy for any of us. The raft lines were dangling and the raft was missing. That is the last time I saw any of these people. I figure Walter had to try and he jumped rather than be incinerated. His body was never found. Simms body was discovered and he was listed KIA. None of the people I jumped with were rescued from the sea.

It was Simms who made the judgment call to go forward. He was the one who finally forced the wheel and hatch and led the 12 of us out. He saved us all there; however, the events of the sea left me as the only one to be rescued later by the destroyer Hunt.

Before me the undersigned personally appeared George Fain Black who is known to me and personally has sworn that the facts written herein and above are true and correct.



George Fain Black

Signed and sealed this the 8th of January 2003 in Houston, Harris County, Texas.

