

THE DIVE-BOMBERS: THE VAL AND DAUNTLESS



An SBD-3 Dauntless dive-bomber from Scouting Squadron Five that served from the Yorktown during the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Fizuka Tokuji recalled:

You dove from a height of about 8,000 metres and pulled up at about 400 metres. At this point a gravity force of 6 G's would bear down upon you. Every time without fail your senses would go black. There is a saying "I saw stars."

Tokuji's bombing technique was as follows:

Very shortly would come a signal from our leader "*totsure, totsure, totsugeki taisei tore!*" which meant "Take up attack position!" At this signal, each plane separated and dove according to the judgment or instinct of its pilot.

Inside the scope used for aiming there were parallel and vertical lines and a circle was etched on the glass used as a scale. The way we used our bombsight would differ according to the wind-angle and speed. If this calculation was not done correctly, a hit could not be expected, particularly on a moving target. Depending on the angle of descent, the point of aim would change. Crosswinds and headwinds would affect the aiming.

The observer in the rear cockpit carried out the wind readings. The observer might report a 5kph crosswind blowing from a certain direction. Based on this report, a pilot would have to adjust his aim considering the fact that the bomb would be blown by the wind after it had been released.

The Douglas Dauntless was produced in large numbers and had a successful war. The first USN version was the SBD-2 without self-sealing fuel tanks. Some of this model were embarked on the Coral Sea carriers. It was under gunned, with two forward-firing 0.30-inch calibre machine guns and one of the same calibre for the rear-seat gunner. There was no interrupter gear fitted so the gunner needed to be careful not to shoot off the machine's tail.

Only 87 were built before the improved SBD-3 added self-sealing fuel tanks, along with two 65-gallon wing tanks. The forward-firing machine guns were changed to the heavier 0.50-inch round, and the rear gunner got an extra 0.30-inch calibre gun.

The rear gunner's job also included, if necessary, flying the aircraft if the pilot was injured – the Dauntless was fitted with dual controls to enable this. According to pilot Jack Kleiss, in the Dauntless: