

C*O*N*F*I*D*E*N*T*I*A*L

STATEMENT

The mission was originally scheduled for Dec. 27, 1944, I believe, but was rescheduled because of weather until finally Dec. 30. It was, as I recall, the longest B-25 mission during my term of service with the 38th Bomb Group. Some of our planes had been equipped with more fuel tanks than most of the others so twelve of the longer range planes from all four squadrons were scheduled for this mission. Twelve crews from two squadrons were assigned to fly these planes. My crew and five others were from the 405th squadron and we flew in second position over the target which was more than 700 miles west of Morotai. I was flying a plane from another squadron.

In addition to a five-man crew, my plane had the squadron Gunnery Officer as an observer and a Lieutenant from a photo unit who was to make motion pictures of the strike for eventual use in news reel films for state side release. I was flying number 3 in the first flight in our squadron. As we approached Tarakan, we closed up into tight formation and turned left to a 190-degree course over the target. I had a feeling that our flight leader had turned a bit soon which put us closer than desired to the squadron ahead of us and I shouted to my copilot, "too close" as we pushed our throttles to the firewall and dropped about 800 feet to tree top level.

I had already begun firing the twelve .50 cal. guns in the nose when I suddenly flew through the bomb blast from a bomb dropped by the number 3 plane in the flight ahead of us. Mud covered my windshield. From then on, I saw nothing of the target but tried to stay low (for best protection) by twisting my head from side to side to see trees on each side of us. My copilot dropped the bombs by observing passing targets through his side window. I did not know it at the time, but the number 2 man in our flight was blown out of the air over the target, possibly because he encountered a bomb blast as the force was going up while the blast I flew through had already expended its energy and was falling as I

went through it. After we reach the southwest coast of Tarakan and turned north to go around the island, I pushed my hand outside my window and rubbed a little mud off a small part of the windshield in order to have some forward vision. We flew to the north side of Tarakan Island and turned east to return to Morotai. At this point, my tail gunner reported that a plane had ditched a little way behind us. Other planes also observed this and our squadron leader circled to observe the plane and check for survivors. By this time we had climbed to 800 or 900 feet. We noted that the five men had gotten out of the plane but did not seem to have a life raft. I had an emergency kit in the forward compartment and dropped down to fly low over the survivors, and my flight engineer dropped the kit out through the forward escape hatch. A couple of men from the ditched crew swam toward the kit.

As we rejoined the flight overhead, we noted that one of the survivors had floated away from the rest. By the time the men got the raft in the kit inflated, the floating man was some distance away and moving toward the beach. It was the tide carrying him and he made no motions whatever. Our planes could not stay in the area very long so the squadron leader assigned me and one other plane to cover the survivors until the Catalina could come in to pick them up. We were then to fly to Dipolog on Mindanao to get gas and then return home. Shortly after they left for home, we learned that the Catalina was already part way back to Morotai (having been called to another rescue as I now understand) and could not get out to pick up our crew. Soon after that I discovered that I could not transfer my reserves of fuel into my wing tanks which made it unusable. We tried the emergency hand pumps to no avail. I informed the other plane that I didn't have fuel enough to reach any emergency base and had elected to stay at this location in the air as long as possible and then ditch here. We knew that the Cat would come back the next day, weather permitting. The other crew turned for Dipolog.

As we circled the men in the water, I was disturbed because they were not heading for the shore of a nearby island. I realized they thought the Cat was coming. Soon the man floating toward shore reach the edge of the water,

but just lay over his floatation cushion without moving. We did not know if he was alive but we knew that he must be at least seriously injured. I flew low over the men in the channel on a raft and tried to signal them to go for the shore. They did not understand. About three hours after the first craft ditched, my fuel gages were bouncing off empty. I circled this little island a few miles north of Tarakan one more time to be sure there were no Japanese air, land, or water borne personnel coming in that direction. I lined up parallel to the shore of the island near the beached man and made as near a perfect ditching as there could be. We were in about four feet of water and stopped about a hundred yards from the man on the cushion. Our first effort was to reach the man on the cushion - he was still alive. We quickly gathered all survival equipment and headed for the beach. In two or three trips back and forth we managed to secure two rafts as well as other emergency gear.

We carried our gear about another hundred yards to the edge of jungle ferns behind a stand of trees growing on a tidewater mud flat. We carried the injured man to our temporary camp a few feet into the ferns I assigned two men to take one raft part way out through the trees to watch for unfriendlies. We pulled our other raft close to the ferns. We could not see the other crew on the water from our position. The tide kept coming in. About an hour later, the men on watch come sloshing through the water warning that a Japanese landing craft was approaching our downed plane. They had abandoned their raft for fear its bright orange color would be observed moving through the trees to where we were. It wasn't long before we found ourselves standing in water. There was no high ground near us. I feared that the raft we had was too visible and tried to deflate it, ultimately stabbing a hole in it to hasten the process. I knew there was a patching kit under the seat.

The Japs pounded around on our plane for about a half hour. It was getting dark. They finally motored way without making any search for us, retrieving the raft in the trees before they left. As twilight began to settle in, I suddenly saw a motion through the ferns near us. And the next hole through the ferns, I saw a familiar face - one of them men from the other crew, shortly followed by the three other

men. We were now together. When they saw me ditch, they knew the jig was up and headed for us but the current of the incoming tide had carried them beyond the point we were on and about a mile further west they made shore. As they moved toward us, they encountered some natives and a hut. They had some exchange with them and then noticed the Japanese landing craft coming near on its way to our plane and hid in the jungle a short distance from the natives. After the Japanese left the area, they again headed for us until we met.

The tide was still coming in. I have learned since, that six to eight-foot tides are usual in this area. The island, Tibi Island, is located in the mouth of a big river from the interior of Borneo. It was actually very little more than a swamp at high tide. Four of the uninjured moved away from the main group looking for higher ground, but the quickly enshrouding darkness left them separated from us and essentially lost. I did not like our location because we had such a limited viewing angle. Before darkness totally enveloped us, I noticed a tip of the island about 400 yards from us that was covered by ferns, elevated a bit, with an unobstructed view of the water for a great distance. I decided that when the tide receded, we would move across the mud flats to that point. About midnight, we packed up. The mending kit glue was hardened and I had to insert a wooden plug in the hole I had made, some of the men chewed gum from the rations and I was able to put that around the plug and complete the sealing of the hole. We pumped it up and put the man we had rescued into it. He had two compound fractures in his right arm. One of the men who had joined us also had a broken arm so we put him in the raft.

We started out towing the raft over the mud, five of us pulling. Another of the men who had ditched first was the tail gunner and when they made their unexpected ditching, he suffered a compression fracture of his back and was hurting so bad he could not pull, even having to ride on the end of the raft at times. We finally made the base of a ten-foot mudbank that led up to our objective. We managed to get the injured men up the bank, and then the raft. We moved about 10 or 15 feet into the ferns and made camp. During the night it drizzled and we covered the injured with an emergency

tarp, the rest of us sitting on the edge of the raft with our feet outside. We managed to keep jungle rats at bay. The tide came up again about dawn but the water wasn't as deep around us as at our first camp.

In midmorning, we observed a large canoe with several men in it and a machine gun in the prow moving along a hundred yards offshore. Their gaze toward us left no doubt they were looking for us. After the tide moved out in the early afternoon, we smelled cigarette smoke and our lookout near the edge of the ferns spotted two Jap soldiers moving along the base of the bank approaching us. We sat for some time in complete silence. When we felt they had left us, I went to our lookout point and noticed that our tracks over the mudflat were still quite plain. They had obviously noticed them and had chatted about them which explained the sounds of their voices we had heard for two or three minutes. Later in the afternoon, a water-borne patrol passed by again.

The weather was not good that day so I didn't expect to see the Cat. Night settled in and we settled down. After we had arrived at this camp the first night, we heard sounds like something pushing through the ferns some small distance away. We could also hear voices but could not determine if they were the four men who had separated from us. I determined not to give our location away.

On the second morning, January 1, 1945, we observed the water patrol again. Sometime after that, we heard the drone of aircraft engines. We made ready to signal or to hide under the tarp with ferns pulled around us. The sound moved from the north of us to the west of us, low and obscured by the trees on the island. Soon, a big black B-24 came into view to the south and we began to flash our mirrors and wave the tarp. In just a few seconds, the Cat came into view close behind. It turned east and then began a curving flight path toward us and I knew we had been spotted when he flew over us and started lowering his wingtip floats. The tide was still up, nearly to the top of the bank. We started inflating the raft and moving it to the water. The injured men got aboard. The others got in the water around the raft and used first aid splints (about 4x16 inches) carried on our forearms

as paddles as the plane, now landed, was taxiing toward us. The pilot did not know the water depth but I did and kept signaling him on in toward us.

We were nearing the plane when one of the Cat crew jumped into the forward turret and swinging it toward shore. I looked back and saw that the other four men had come to the shore and one of them jumped into the water to swim toward us. I yelled to the Cat, "Don't Fire, friendlies." The pilot now realized he would have to shut the engines down until all the rescues could be made. We soon got to the Cat and were assisted aboard. Two of the Cat crew dropped down into our raft with paddles and went off to pick up the four men. During this time, the Cat pilot, Captain Wientjes, started the process of getting the engines started. He had not wanted to shut them down because there had been some trouble getting one of them started that morning. As the final group of men came on board, one engine started right up. Then they wound up the inertial starter on the second engine. It coughed and spit without starting. It was on about the fourth try that it finally came to life to everybody's relief. Following takeoff, and after reaching a few hundred feet, we could see a Jap counterpart to our P.T. boats racing through the water across the channel that separated Tibi Island from Tarakan Island. But we were safely away and headed for Morotai. Shortly, the crew broke out parts of a roast turkey and we had our first meal in about 50 hours. Your uncle invited me up to the flight deck and I sat in the copilot's seat for about an hour during the return flight.

Upon arriving at Morotai, all of us wound up in the hospital. Those of us not injured, had numerous scratches and bruises, mostly from our jungle experience and uncounted mosquito bites (in spite of the liberally applied repellent). Those not seriously injured returned to our squadron's area about a week later. There were actually four men who sustained injuries that resulted in being returned home.

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