

Well, coming up shortly was my last mission with the 118<sup>th</sup> tactical reconnaissance squadron. The thing is, we were supposed to have had the largest number of allied airplanes in the air to destroy an airfield which was to the north of us. This was an airfield at Hankow, China, which was approximately 10 miles to the east of Tung Ting Lake. Well, the thing was that B-24s up at higher elevations, B-25s, P-38s, P-51s, P-40s and even the CACW, Chinese American Composite Wing, were to have gotten in on this mission. We were suppose to be the last ones in on the field to go ahead and look over everything and to shoot up what was left and so on. Then we were to completely destroy the field. It didn't work out quite the way it was suppose. The weather was so bad that all of the other squadrons heard the message to abort the mission because of bad weather.

We were up at Suichwan, which was in the mountainous area toward Tung Ting Lake. As we took off, we flew in and out of canyons to stay underneath the Japanese radar. We didn't hear the message to turn back. Things didn't go too well from the point of view that we were led in by a first Lieutenant from one of the other fighter squadrons. By mistake, the Lieutenant turned at the wrong checkpoint. Instead of going a little bit further, he turned about 10 miles too soon. We flew over a horseshoe shaped valley and the weather was right down on top of the hills surrounding this valley. We had maybe 400 or 500-foot elevation there where the cloud cover was. At any rate, we flew over 3,000 Japanese troops.

Now, the trouble with the whole mission was that we had to fly in and then fly out exactly at the same place. I was hit coming out. If I remember right, there were 4 of us that were hit there. Two of them were hit going in and two of us were hit coming out. Some of the guys had a pretty rough time of it, but others got back. I understand that several airplanes had to belly in on the way back. Anyway, I heard that there were only three flyable airplanes out of, I think it was 11 of us combined with the 2 squadrons that we had.

At any rate, coming out I was hit by machine gun fire. We were flying as close to the ground as possible, probably about 10 feet above the ground. As soon as I was hit, the temperature gage just went over to the top heat area, just as rapidly as a dickens. In other words, I lost my coolant in a hurry. I immediately started going up for altitude and I was only able to get up to 900 feet when the engine started losing power. It got so dog gone hot in the cockpit. I knew darn well I had to get out. There were no second thoughts about it. I had to get out.

Flying in, I noticed this island, across from Yochow, about 3 miles away. I went towards this island. You know before anything happens you always talk, well gee, what's the best way to get out of an airplane, and so on and so forth. The thing is that it was decided, you just turn the airplane upside down, fall out, and pull your ripcord and that's it. Well, its not really it. What happened was at 900 feet I turned my plane upside down, pulled the emergency release for the canopy to fall off and it didn't work. So I tried to roll back the canopy by hand. I couldn't get it. So I jacked the pin back and forth and finally, I was able to roll the canopy back.

Then with my seat straps loose, well, I thought I would just fall out. You don't fall out. You're pushed to the back of the canopy and you have to pull yourself out. So consequently then, with the plane being inverted in a slight climb, the plane started in an inverted spin to the left. Okay, I saw the rudder and the stabilizer going and as soon as they went past me, I pulled the rip cord and it seemed like only seconds, a very very short time, before I hit the water.

Well, here I am, I'm 5' 5" and dog gone it, the water was over 6 feet. Here I am trying to step on the bottom and bounce myself up so I can breath. I eventually got all the straps loose except the strap around my left leg. Well, I had purchased a knife in Calcutta for a whole sum of \$12.50 American money. That was a lot of money in those days by the way. At any rate, I went ahead and cut the chute strap from my leg with my knife. I always carried it in my pocket. Okay, the chute flowed down with the current in the Yangtze River and probably went by this Jap held city and probably past that airfield. At any rate, I was able to make it to the island. I was off maybe 20 or 30 feet from the island, because the wind had drifted me off and I headed for the center of it.

Okay, here it was drizzling. I headed for what I thought was the center of the island and then I went to the west just as fast as possible and hit the end of the island. Well, nothing happened that day. It was drizzling all day long and I cut some bamboo sprouts to make a bed for myself.

I'll tell you, the funniest thing that happened though, I looked back and it is still hard for me to believe, but never once was I ever frightened when I was on that island. I should have been, but I wasn't. I also thought, well gee, here I am, I will be rescued in nothing flat and I can get out of here. Well, things didn't work out quite that way.

Okay, the second day came and oh I'd say about 10:00, well here came a low flying Japanese fighter plane. It went back and forth over this island for I'd say about 15 or 20 minutes. Of course, I stayed real low during that time. I hid myself in some bamboo and I stayed real low.

One of the things that made it rough was that somebody had taken the D Ration (a candy bar, like chocolate) out of my bailout kit that I had in my chute pack. So basically, I didn't have anything to eat.

While I was on this island, I had very little to eat. I tried bamboo sprouts. They were terrible. I had two dragonflies and on the fifth day, I had part of a water snake. That was not good whatsoever either.

During the fourth and fifth day, I'd found some logs that were in a tripod effect and I imagined that the Chinese used it to string cable across this main shipping channel next to this island. I was putting this raft together using these logs and my pocketknife that I got in India. I was able to take the loose barbed wire that was holding the logs together and fashion a raft. Now if I stood exactly in the center of the raft, I was all right, but if I moved from side to side, well, the raft would start to capsize. It made it a little bit

rough.

Anyway, by this time, I was starting to have illusions. One time I thought I saw a group of Chinese at the end of the island and I went over after them and they weren't there. I tried swimming off the island three times, because I thought there was a Chinese Junk over to the side one of the times and then the other two times I thought that well, just to get off that island to try to get going would be the thing to do. Luckily, and I mean luckily, I wasn't able to get off the island. I darn near drowned all three times, but I had to go back to the same island.

I got this raft pretty well made and the fifth night I had it all figured out. I was going to go down stream on the Yangtze River. I was going to hit the mountains, after I passed that Jap held city, and then I was going to make it home. Something happened that screwed it up and absolutely saved my life. It was such that the fifth night at approximately about 2 or 3 in the morning, I heard this chug-chug-chug go by. I thought, oh boy, that's gotta be a friendly Chinese boat. Well, I took my trusty pistol out and I fire in the air one shot and I hollered "meg wifitichi ting how". Well basically, that means American flyer good. Some character on the boat hollered "meg wifitichi boo how" which means no good. Then I heard them trying to start an outboard motor so they could try to come over on this island. They couldn't get it started, luckily.

Well, at any rate, after firing into the air and this conversation, I was putting this 45 caliber automatic pistol back in the holster and the holster had swung over in front of me instead of to the side. Well, consequently, my finger was still around the trigger and as I put the gun in the holster and "boom". It fired and put a hole through my instep on my left foot. Boy, I thought, "You dumb jerk. You're going to be here forever now". Well actually, it worked out to save my life.

Now, I thought "Well, you'll never get out of here anymore and consequently, you won't be able to get over to the main land and walk home or anything else." Anyway, on the sixth day, I was in and out of it all the time. I even had a conversation with King Tut. Now why King Tut, I'll never know and what I was saying, I don't really remember. I caught myself thinking "Oh you dumb jerk. Here you go. You're off your rocker".

Well then, the seventh night came and I was pretty darn weak. The sixth and seventh day I'd probably slept probably 3 or 4 hours for every half hour I was awake. The seventh day, in the afternoon, I should judge it was about three o'clock in the afternoon, I looked up and gee I saw this sampan with four individuals in it. When I'd look up they would quit paddling. Then when I would go to work on this raft again, well they would paddle and when I would look up again they would quit paddling. I am sure they thought, well gee, maybe he'll take a shot at us or whatever. Finally, I thought, well, nothing ventured so I got up and started to go toward them and I collapsed.

The next thing I knew, they were feeding me rice out of this bowl and they put me in this Sampan. Well, things really went well from there. I got my shirt that was on this

raft, because I had made a sail with my shirt and we started going. They were really paddling like the dickens. We ended up finding, at just about dark, a Chinese junk. While we were going back to the junk, one of the Chinese that was in the Sampan wrote in the back of my pointy talky book (a book that has English on one side and Chinese words on the other side with blank pages in the back). Anyway, he wrote of how I was rescued.

Okay, the thing is that one of the Chinese that was paddling in this boat was originally a Chinese army man and he thought he had been the one to shoot me down. He wasn't. It had to be machine gun fire. At any rate, probably as I was flying over, he saw smoking coming out of my plane after he shot and he thought that he was the one. As we were getting towards the Chinese Junk, he had this nickel-plated Japanese rifle and nickel-plated bullets on a bandoleer that he tried to give to me. I looked it over and then handed it back. At first he wouldn't take it and then finally he did.

Well now the following morning, just about daylight, they came with the sampan and they had a sail on it and two of them were paddling. We started taking off like mad. For about two hours they paddled. I don't think they stopped whatsoever in that two hours. In one spot we came upon some of these water mines that had the spikes sticking out and so on and there were 10 of them in this area to keep out shipping. I suppose that Chinese put in there years ago or whatever. These guys had an awful lot of respect for these mines and even though there's only about 6 inches on each side of the sampan to clear, and they watched themselves very very carefully and finally we got through.

We went again just as fast as they could possibly paddle for a little while and the wind was helping a little bit with the sail. We went all that day, all that night, and the following morning until approximately 3 or 4 in the morning I should judge.

We looked up in front of us and there were all these torches lining up the entrance to this lagoon or river or whatever it was. At any rate, this was the entrance that would take us into the friendly Chinese headquarters. How on earth they knew that we were coming, I'll never know. Their communications were wonderful. They knew we were coming and knew about what time we would be there. Well, what they did, they cheered as we came in and then we went directly to the guerilla general's headquarters. I found out the guerilla general had gone to San Francisco University in 1937 and he was there in China operating the guerilla army since. At any rate, they knew everything that the Japanese were doing.

Well, I stayed there that night. There was an older Chinese man that had a beard and I should judge he was probably in his 80s. At any rate, he was the leader of the little city there. Through an interpreter, he would ask me questions. There were several kids between 12 and 15 years of age that supposedly could talk English. They got their training from the missionary schools, but it was very very difficult for me to understand them. I came to the point where I said, "Well, do you speak American." At any rate, some I could understand better. Actually, the guerilla general I could understand better than any of them.

We were there that night. I finally was able to rest a little bit, even though my foot was hurting like the dickens. They brought in what they called a doctor and I don't know if he was trained or if he just called himself a doctor, but he stuck a bamboo probe through my instep where I had shot myself to see if there was any infection. I couldn't believe it, there was no infection of any kind. I felt that because I had wrapped my foot in tape from my bailout kit on that island, that it protected it while I kept my foot out of water.

So at any rate, I stayed there at that guerilla headquarters that day and then that following night, probably about 3 or 4 in the morning. The general came in and said, "Well Lieutenant, I hate to disturb you, but the Japanese know you are here and we have to get you out." Boy, I jumped off the bed that they had there, and I said, "Okay, let's go." "Oh, no hurry, they're at least a half a mile to a mile away yet." To me, that wasn't very dog gone far. They put me in what they call a sedan chair, because of my injured foot. They made me two Chinese uniforms, one blue and one black (which incidentally I still have). I wore the blue uniform with a Chinese hat and dark glasses. The idea was, the general said, "Be sure that when you go, that you don't open your eyes if there are any strangers around." I tried to follow his advice. Well, just at the crack of daylight, we started out on this sedan chair (now that's a chair that's strapped between two large bamboo poles and there is a coolie in front and a coolie in back to carry it). So, here I go. Now at that time, I only weighed about 120 pounds. I had lost an awful lot of weight.

So the first little city we came to, well, there was loud cheering and everything as if I was a savior of China. The same as firecrackers going off in the city that we left where the guerilla general is located. Then we came to the second city. Well, here at the second city, a Chinese popped out from in back of a building and in a rush of Chinese language and so on, pointing to me and then finally the guerilla captain, a 19 year old kid that was escorting me out with a couple of other guerillas, lowered his rifle in this guy's stomach and marched around a building. I heard a loud bang. The guerilla captain came back laughing like the dickens and away we went.

I can't tell you how many days it has been now, but we came to a Chinese Army Camp. It was really just a barracks where Chinese soldiers had been. At any rate, we stayed there that night. About 12:00 p.m., there was this sampan that they put me in and at nighttime now, no moonlight or anything, a Chinese woman pulled me either up a lagoon or up the Yangtze River. It was so dark that I couldn't really tell, but she could barely see. I was instructed not to make any noise of any kind. There were Japanese in that area and that's why they took me this way.

As we went up the lagoon, at daylight, we finally arrived at a particular spot on the Yangtze River. There, my escort, the 19-year-old captain, and some of the others were there to meet me. We went a little ways with the sedan chair again and then we were able to board a steamship that went up the Yangtze. Now this was a two-engine steamship and it was such that would go "chug chug chug chug". The first day went real great. The second day, as we were going up the Yangtze, the rapids were just as fast as

the dickens. Real stiff rapids and we were making a ground speed of maybe one or two miles per hour. Suddenly, the rudder chain got caught in this large bamboo rope made out of bamboo pieces that they spliced together to make a large rope. This is what the coolies used to tow these ships up the Yangtze River. This big bamboo rope got caught in the rudder chain and jammed the rudder chain. The captain with ringing bells was signaling to the engineer down in the engine room and the engineer would either go forward on one engine, reverse on the other, or forward both of them, or reverse or whatever, and was able to guide us out of those rapids and over to the side.

I understood that 16 days before this, the sister ship of this particular boat cracked up on those rapids. I know that I saw the leavings of a boat on these rapids, but I couldn't tell you how long it had been there. I was told it was 16 days.

The guerilla captain that was escorting me refused to go back on that boat. He absolutely refused, and from a saving face idea, well I went ahead along with him. So they carried me by sedan chair for many days up the Yangtze River.

Going up the Yangtze River, we came to a tributary that came into the Yangtze and this great big tree was the bridge. It was laid across this tributary and down below, about 100 feet, was water from this stream that went into the Yangtze. Just as we were getting over this bridge, the left rope on the sedan chair started coming loose. I started going over to the left toward the Yangtze River. The coolie on the back grabbed me by the nap of the neck on my Chinese clothing that I was wearing and dragged me to safety. Just about that time, the guerilla captain, the 19-year-old kid that was escorting me out, cocked his rifle and had it pointed at the coolie. I imagine he was going to shoot the coolie if he had dropped me.

There were lots of tributaries with these tree bridges and the other bridges worked out all right, although some of them were narrower and smaller than this big one. The Chinese had used this method for years I guess. Anyway, it must have taken 21 days to go up this Yangtze. It seemed like forever.

Finally, we came to some missionaries. It was really wonderful. There were catholic sisters and catholic fathers. They spoke a common language of Latin. These people were from all over the world. Some of them were from places I had never even heard of before. I stayed there for the dinner that night and gee, it was a fantastic meal. I don't remember if we had an awful lot or whatever, but it was good and the people were wonderful. That night I stayed there and they put me to bed in a room. I told the sister, I think it was, or maybe it was the mother or the father, or whoever I talked with, I said, "Well, I'm a protestant, I'm not a Catholic." They said, "Oh, don't worry about that. We'll see that you are taken care anyway."

The next day they got me over to a Presbyterian mission. There was a Reverend E. J. Bannon. Now Reverend Bannon originally was from Great Britain and he wanted to be a missionary since the time he was 17 years of age. He was 56 years of age when I met him there and he had been in China for 36 years. He treated me royally. I told him

about all the escapades and how I didn't have much to eat on the Tung Ting Lake and how I drank the water to keep my stomach full.

After four or five days, I said, "Well, Reverend Bannon, is there anyway I can get out of here? I have information I want to get back to the front." He said, "Oh yes, but I sure would like to have you stay for a while if you can." Well, another day went by and I asked him the same thing. He said, "Well, stay here with me. I have a replacement coming. I'd sure like to have you stay here until the replacement comes."

Well, this went on and then finally it was the 10<sup>th</sup> day and a jeep had come from one of the air bases, I think it was Changte. There had been a Chinese PT13, I think it was, that had cracked up and this jeep came to pick up the pilot. Well, they put me on this jeep and I went back to this B29 base. It was one of the roughest rides I'd ever taken in my life. It was terrible. I was put on a Norseman single engine airplane 650-horse power and they flew me to Liuchow where my squadron was located at the time.

When I went into the barracks, the first guy I saw there said, "Hey, you're dead!" I said, "No, I'm not dead. I'm still here." but here I was, 38 days from the time I was shot down to the point of getting back. These guys all thought that I had perished in this ordeal.

Well, I stayed there in the barracks that night. Would you believe that this was the only night in 32 days that the Japanese did not bomb. At any rate, the next night, this very barracks was scattered all over the place because it got hit directly by a bomb.

I was able to fly back from Liuchow to Kunming. I remembered I was interrogated by Colonel Tex Hill. Now Tex Hill was commanding officer of the 23<sup>rd</sup> fighter group and he also was one of the original Flying Tigers. I had a terrific amount of respect for Tex Hill. When he interrogated me, I told him that I had made this raft and what I wanted to do is go down the Yangtze River and hit the mountains to get back. He shook his head and said, "You'd have never, never made it. No way could you possibly have made it. You would have been picked up by the Japs. The Japanese didn't take prisoners, and consequently, you would have been killed."

So at any rate, I'm sort of glad that things worked out as they did. If I had not shot myself in the foot, I'd probably been picked up by the Japanese. Now here again, I feel that my guardian angel was looking over my shoulder.

Well, I went to the hospital at Kunming and stayed for about a week while they were looking over my foot and so on. They weren't too busy and it was one of those things where I got acquainted with a couple of the doctors, some of the nurses, and also some of the patients. Would you believe that the average age of the nurses at that time was 33 years of age. Now they had been over there ever since the flying tigers and the thing is that they were way worried as the dickens and wanted to be replaced. They wanted to get back home and I didn't blame them. But at any rate, they were very very nice people and all of them were older than me so I wasn't interested in any of them

particularly, but I sure became friendly with some of them. They were nice gals.