

28 SUB RESCUE  
Chester Kiesel/Co-pilot/Crowe Crew  
Bill Pitts/Aircraft Commander  
Robin Stevenson/Co-pilot/Pitts Crew

KIESEL

We had been shot down by a Japanese fighter around 0900 on 26 June 1945 during a raid on Nagoya.

The fighter hit our right wing tanks and set the entire right wing on fire.

As we bailed out, the airplane disintegrated. Crowe, Shaw, Westphal, and Ryer were lost. Seven of us were picked up by submarine about 32 hours later.

Late in the afternoon of 27 June 1945, the USS TREPANG appeared on the horizon and was guided to our location by a Super Dumbo B-29.

The B-29 had stayed on "Lifeguard Station" way beyond his fuel reserves we were later advised by the TREPANG's commander, Cmdr. Faust.

If the B-29 hadn't done this, we would not have been picked up by US forces because the geographic coordinates that had been given the TREPANG were off by eight nautical miles from where we were picked up.

A sub's maximum range of sight for a man in a life raft is one mile.

We were rescued just before dusk. The next morning, the area was teeming with small Japanese fishing vessels.

The TREPANG was only one week out of port and just beginning a 60-90 day combat cruise when it picked us up.

The US Navy, as a result, had us transfer in the dead of night from the TREPANG to the USS DEVILFISH just off Tokyo Bay. The DEVILFISH was on its way back to Guam.

We were on the TREPANG three or four days and on the DEVILFISH six or seven days.

We had the best food of our entire military careers.

Before we left the TREPANG, she engaged a small Japanese combination troop carrier/cargo vessel in a surface fight. The Jap was firing a small deck gun, but it ended with the TREPANG sinking the vessel.

About 300 young Japs in life vests were forced into the ocean. Cmdr. Faust attempted to rescue two as prisoners, throwing them rescue rings, but none took them. The Jap captain was shouting orders to them.

They were several hundred miles from safety and probably all perished.

An interesting war related movie "OPERATION PACIFIC" with John Wayne was made after the war and used film footage taken by the Navy when we were rescued.

Lt. Col. Hugos, who was an observer on our airplane, was also rescued, but by a different submarine, the USS Springer.

#### PITTS

We were shot down on the same mission as Crowe's crew and came back from Japan on the same submarine.

The mission took off from Tinian the night of 25 June 1945.

The 504th was the Lead Group of the whole XXIst Bomber Command on this mission and our crew was Lead Crew for the 504th!

The target was the Nakajima Aircraft Plant in Nagoya, and, as I recall, we had a force of about 1200 B-29's.

We took off and proceeded to an assembly point off the Japanese coast, formed up in groups, and proceeded to the IP (Initial Point) and target, then withdrew out of fighter range from whence we returned to Tinian separately.

I took off first (around midnight, I think) and flew to the assembly area only to find out we had a bad weather forecast and it was socked in so there was no possibility of assembling the formation.

I then broke radio silence and broadcast on our Group frequency the weather conditions and directed all planes to proceed to attack the target individually. I then departed the assembly point on course to our IP, a peninsula that stuck out of the eastern shore Japan due west of Nagoya.

As we coasted in South of Lake Buia, we broke into a hole in the clouds and spotted a Japanese Jack 11 fighter coming out of the clouds at our 12 o'clock direction and at our altitude. He rolled inverted, firing as he rolled and dived beneath us.

It was over in five or so seconds, but his burst wiped out the glass in our nose and hit our number two and three engines. It also killed our Bombardier, Bob Finn (Glen Martin had transferred Bob to our crew because of his lead crew potential).

I shut down both number two and three engines because of fuel and oil leaks, jettisoned our bombs and took up a course to Iwo Jima.

As we coasted out, a fire broke out in number three engine. I then asked Ted Romak, our Navigator, for a course to the nearest life-guard submarine and had Steve Stevenson, our Co-pilot, pull the switches for both fire extinguisher bottles on number three engine, but we couldn't get the fire out. I then tried to blow the fire out by diving almost vertically.

At 9,000 feet, we had two separate explosions in the right wing, so I levelled the plane and ordered the crew to bail out through the forward and aft bomb bays.

All of us got out and had good chute openings except Bpb Finn, of course, and Jack Carr who was to bail out right behind me. About ten to fifteen seconds after my chute popped, the plane blew up and the biggest parts to hit the water were the four engines.

By jumping out of both bomb bays at the same time, we were clustered in fairly close proximity so that, when we hit the water, I was able to get the crew together and lash the one-man dinghy's together. Of the ten of us who bailed out, I assembled only seven in the water.

We were about twenty five miles south of Ise Wan (Nagoya Bay).

I should note, at this point, that no one knew we were down as the fire had shorted out the electrical system and we were without radio communication.

We had shot down the Jack 11 fighter that had hit us and later as I was diving to put out the fire, a Tony fighter closed on our tail and O'Grady, our Tail Gunner, shot him down. He hit the water and started burning.

This fighter event was very important, because, after we heard all the raid aircraft go in to the target and then heard them withdraw, it became very quiet.

Then we heard the drone of an aircraft and spotted a B-29 Super Dumbo orbiting the burning Tony fighter wreckage, but it was circling away from us.

I later learned that they, spotting no sign of life, were about to depart the area and return to the Marianas, when the Co-pilot recommended to the the Aircraft Commander that they make an orbit on the other side of the fighter wreckage.

We had saved a couple of parachutes and had draped them over our hand paddles from the one man dinghy's and were waving them in the air. Suddenly, the B-29 came out of its bank and came straight at us at about 100 feet.

The B-29 was from the 73rd Wing on Saipan and we later learned he had contacted the life guard submarine that we had been heading for and in about thirty minutes that WONDERFUL SUB slid up alongside us and took us aboard.

In less time than it take to tell it, we were stripped naked by the sub crew, clothes, underclothes, shoes, shoe laces, insignia, "45" pistols, the works which the crew wanted for souvenirs.

We were then taken down inside the sub and were given Navy fatigues, etc. to replace our clothes. I, then was taken up to the Conning Tower where the Skipper, a Commander Fe Bauer, was directing a search for the rest of our crew.

Right after I arrived at the Conning Tower, we spotted Steve Young, our CFC Gunner, swimming in the water. His dinghy would not inflate and neither would his Mae West, so he had been swimming for about 4 1/2 hours.

Although a Japanese Gunboat had come into the area, Fe Bauer kept cruising through our wreckage trying to find the other two crew members whom I had seen in chutes. They were DeMerritt, our Radio Operator, and Wilburn, our RH Gunner.

We never found them and I have always thought that they got tangled in the parachute shroud lines and drowned. Both were very poor swimmers.

Because of the Japanese Gunboat, we submerged and didn't surface until later that night.

We were shot down about 1000 hours, 26 June, picked up about 1430 to 1500, and resurfaced at about 2100 to 2130 that night.

Commander Bauer got off a message to Guam that he had picked us up.

I later found out that a bunch of my buddies had, when time ran out on our return to Tinian and/or Iwo Jima, with no word on us, figured that we had been lost on the mission and knowing that I had a case of 7 year old Bourbon in my foot locker, broke it open, and started a WAKE.

Halfway through the WAKE, the 504th got word that we had been picked up and they proceeded to kill the other half of the case in a celebration party.

Although I didn't know it, I had been made Major on that mission and I had been saving that hooch for a promotion party.

Two days after we were picked up, we rendezvoused with the USS TIGRONE at the mouth of Tokyo Bay with one other sub and the two B-29 crews and two P-51 fighter pilots from Iwo Jima were transferred to the TIGRONE, which already had a B-29 crew aboard.

Crowe's crew was aboard the other sub that had met the TIGRONE and Col. "Pud" Mundy's crew (he was Group Commander from the 314th Wing on Guam) was on board the TIGRONE. After the transfer, we set sail for Guam and seven days later which included being subjected to a bombing attack by a Japanese plane off Ha Ha Jima, we docked in Guam.

I was debriefed at XXIst Bomber Command Headquarters and the next day, we were flown in a B-24 back to Tinian where we rejoined the 504th.

I guess the message in all of this is that our system of submarine rescue of B-29 crews worked in spite of, in my case, no radio communication.

For instance, Crowe and Mundy made controlled bail-outs over life guard subs just the text book. We, on the other hand, survived because we shot a Jap plane down and had the good fortune to have a dedicated Super Dumbo crew perform their mission superbly and with their link to the subs, effect our rescue.

I can't say enough about the courage and professionalism of the sub crews who were on station off the coast of Japan for sixty days in a row.

You will recall that I mentioned a Jap Gunboat in our vicinity when we were being picked up. Turns out, another of our subs had surfaced and engaged the Gunboat in a firefight while our sub came in and got us.

Commander Fe Bauer kept his sub in the area looking for our two missing crew members that we didn't recover until a squall came up and we couldn't see past the bow of the sub, and I told him I thought further search was non-productive. Only then, did he tell me of the Gunboat and we submerged.

Back on Tinian, I was faced with a promotion party without the wherewithal.

Following a little intelligence work, I approached twelve stalwarts of the 504th Bomb Group and requisitioned one bottle from each (not seven year Old Charter Bourbon, but that junk we got from our liquor locker club).

Names of the guzzlers shall remain classified.

We had one helluva party!

Fond memories! Great companionship! A lot of dedicated and very professional flyers!

Maintenance personnel, administrative, and medical, in fact, all our 504th people were the finest!

#### STEVENSON

Our crippled B-29 was struggling toward the Japanese coastline, trying to escape enemy territory. Two engines were already feathered and both the remaining engines were damaged with an uncontrollable fire in number three engine nacelle. When the fire spread to the wing and then mushroomed, we were forced to bail out.

Just after I left the airplane, it exploded. I was the last one out alive. As I free-fell toward more breathable air (we were about 20,000 feet), one of the main wheels sailed past me about twenty five yards away. I remember watching it in fascination as it grew smaller in the distance below. I am certain that I saw the splash as it hit the water. That suddenly shocked me back to looking around for other debris. Well below me was an airplane wing rotating as it fell, almost like a spinning blade thrown by a giant rotary mower. I saw other big chunks.

Until that point, I felt suspended on a giant feather bed above a painted landscape. Shortly that began to change. I became aware of the roaring wind past my ears, and the the ocean seemed to begin moving toward me at an accelerating pace. I yanked at the D-ring (twice) and finally the parachute snapped open. As I looked around, I could see people moving on the beach at the entrance to Nagoya Bay. I counted nine other chutes. One at my altitude or above and a couple of hundred yards away, the others at least a mile away and far below. Two or three were already in the water, and another splashed down as I watched.

After hitting the water, I had no difficulty clearing the parachute, inflating the Mae West, and retrieving the one-man dinghy. Inflating the thing was not so easy. There was almost no inflating charge in the bottle, so I had to inflate it by mouth.

For a long time after settling into the dinghy and recovering my breath, I searched for companionship. The ocean swells were about eight to ten feet, with some white-caps and blowing spray.

I could see nothing but walls of water, except when cresting a wave--even then I could not see land or a clear horizon. After awhile I thought I heard a shout. Later, I caught sight of him--the tail gunner was about 100 yards away, but we could glimpse each other only when we both reached the crest of a wave at the same time. I started paddling furiously toward him. But the dinghy tended to spin easily as the cross swells tossed it, and with the sun hidden by the clouds, it was impossible to keep moving in a constant direction--I found myself paddling in the wrong direction. It must have been two hours or more after bailout before we got together.

We tried to lash the dinghys together, but the cresting waves put such a strain on the cords that we were afraid the fastening tabs would tear out, sinking one or both. So we spent the next few hours maintaining position by paddling as necessary, while discussing our options (there weren't many).

We glimpsed a B-29 flying low but far away. Finally, it flew by again, this time less than a mile away. We waved the paddles and tried to light a flare, but it was gone. I thought I saw it bank right and left as it disappeared, but it did not return and we did not know whether it had seen us.

Several hours later, the submarine, USS SPRINGER, seemed to suddenly materialize beside us. Two seamen jumped into the water and brought a couple of lines to us. They explained what our part of the rescue operation would be, then one of them was pulled on board to demonstrate. He failed his first attempt, which I don't think was part of the plan. There is a knack and careful timing involved in this maneuver. The rescue must be close along the hull at the bottom of a clean trough. As the wave rises, the deck crew pulls frantically to bring the victim in over the buldge of the ballast tank and alongside the deck the instant the wave crests. If they can't reach the victim and pull him on board at the right moment, it is a roller coaster ride down the buldge and try again. I made it on the third try. It is an E ticket ride and doesn't cost a cent.

Once on board, we were hustled below to a preliminary medical check by the Pharmacist Mate for injuries needing attention--then we were reunited with the other six members of our crew already on board.

They urged us to make it an early priority to request instruction in the intricate art of operating the Head (toilet to you land-lubbers). Shortly, I asked a nearby seaman if he could show me, and he was most eager to accommodate. He led me down the passageway and into the appropriate room. There, he pointed out the various valves and levers involved--told me all I had to do was follow the step by step instructions posted on the wall, and then left. I noticed part of one instruction had been taped

over, but otherwise found it straight forward to follow the rest. As I pulled the last lever, I was drenched by a blow-back from the lower toilet reservoir. I emerged sputtering into the passageway to be greeted by the cheers and laughter from a group of crewmen who had materialized--my indoctrination was a success.

The Skipper then called the aircrew together (Zoomies they called us, for victims rescued from a life-raft) and announced the next entertainment on the agenda. Since the SPRINGER had just arrived on station, we could not be accommodated for the sixty to ninety days the expected to be off Japan. So, he arranged for us to be transferred that night to the submarine, USS TIGRONE, which had expended its torpedoes and was about to return to base. That was good news--bad news situation. We would soon be on our way back to Guam, but we were due for another dunking during a night transfer through the rough water.

As it turned out, we did not transfer that night. As we approached the rendezvous point around midnight, sonar detected an unidentified vessel in the area. It seemed to know we were there and kept following us no matter where we dodged. The Skipper then went to the bottom to wait until the ship left.

When I woke up and went to the control room about six a.m., the Skipper was at the periscope taking bearings. As he finished, he let Capt. Pitts and me take a look. Through the murk of the early morning mist, I could just make out the shoreline, less than a mile away. As my eyes adjusted, I could see what looked like an airplane begin to taxi. I told the Skipper, and he took over the scope to look. Shortly, he ordered "down scope" and dive while heading out to sea. He told us we were off the end of the runway of an airfield, and that there were two or three airplanes moving into position for take-off. In a few minutes, we felt the first explosion as several depth charges were dropped in rapid succession near us. I felt as though I had my head inside a giant bell--the clanging was almost deafening. We sustained no damage.

That morning's coastal survey was used to update our position. Our sub had cruised for a week under cloudy skies without a star or sun shot, with uncertain ocean current data and a possibly drifting inertial navigation system, and had built up an error of twenty miles or so. The result was that we had played cat and mouse with the USS TIGRONE all night. We did eventually rendezvous with her later in the morning. The seas seemed to be appreciably rougher than yesterday, but finally our transfer was accomplished. Talk about dunking! I learned what its like to play human submarine! The two subs were about one hundred yards apart, both pitching and rolling significantly. We were pulled, one at a time, hanging in a sling under a cable strung between the subs. As the cable went slack or taut, we were alternately dragged through a wave or snapped up fifteen feet or so above a trough.