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HEADQUARTERS 40TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP
Office of the Intelligence Officer

APO Number 631
8 June 1944

Narrative of Ditching by Crew of A/C #282

B-29 aircraft #282 of the 395th Bomb Sq took-off at 0003Z 4 June 44 from APO #631 in accordance with FO #2, 58th Bomb Wing, dated 2 June 44. On returning alone from mission the ship was forced to ditch at approximately 0950Z at position 21 46' N – 91 53' E. Mechanical failure of fuel transfer system necessitated ditching when gas supply in wing tanks were exhausted.

At time of ditching combat crew of the aircraft consisted of 11 men, 7 of whom were rescued and 4 lost.

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name and Rank</u>	<u>Status</u>
Pilot	Capt J.N. SANDERS	Rescued-Uninjured
Co-Pilot	2 nd Lt. W.C. BURROWS	Rescued-Uninjured
Bomb Nav	2 nd Lt. W.E. ECKELMAN	Rescued-Uninjured
Nav Bomb	2 nd Lt. S. FISHMAN	Dead
Flt Eng	2 nd Lt. C.H. MOORE	Rescued-Uninjured
Radio Mech	S Sgt C.A. MACK	Rescued-Uninjured
Radar Mech	2 nd Lt. W.S. PLATTENBURG	Dead
Senior Gunner	Sgt J.J. DRENK	Rescued-Uninjured
Right Gunner	Sgt D.H. CAPSHAW	Rescued-Uninjured
Left Gunner	Sgt C.A. BAKER	Dead
Tail Gunner	Sgt N.A. BROTHERS	Dead

At time of ditching combat crew of the aircraft consisted of 11 men, 7 of whom were rescued and 4 lost. Five (5) of the surviving combat crew members returned to APO #651 by airplane on 8 June 1944 and were interrogated on landing. Sgt. CAPSHAW remained in the RAF hospital at Chittagong with a hip injury and 2nd Lt. C.B. MOORE had remained at Chittagong to identify bodies that had been found. The following are individual narratives of the five crew members interrogated.

Pilot – Capt J. N. SANDERS

At the time of the ditching the sea was very smooth and the aircraft slid into the water with no jolt or jar. It slid along for perhaps 10 seconds and then came to a sudden stop (little or no crash effect was noticed by the Pilot, but other crew members reported severe shock). The Pilot looked around to see if other crew members were OK and since everyone in the front of the plane seemed to be uninjured and moving he crawled through his window out on the top of the fuselage. He noticed that the rear hatch behind the radar compartment was not open and ran back to it to try to get other crew members out of the aft part of the plane. He encountered considerable difficulty in opening the hatch, but was

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finally successful. He found the life raft inflated and blocking the exit so that Sgt DRNEK whom he could see below was unable to get out. He was able to cut the life raft loose with his trench knife and pull Sgt. DRNEK out. The Pilot reported looking in but could not see anyone. Water was within a few inches of the hatch. He noticed that although the front of the plane was higher in the water than the rear that the tail gunners compartment was well above water and that the water was only up to the top of the horizontal stabilizer.

The Pilot could see Sgt. CAPSHAW'S head up in the top blister and noticed that Lt BURROWS and Lt MOORE were trying to remove the blister. As they were starting to work on the blister Capt SANDERS noticed that the left life raft which Lt MOORE had gotten out was floating away so he told Lt BURROWS to work on getting the blister off and he jumped in the water, secured the raft and brought it back to the plane and tied it. He then found Lt BURROWS and Lt MOORE had removed the blister with the aid of the trench knives and by kicking it out. Sgt. CAPSHAW could not get through the opening and was in terrible pain from his hip injury. They tried pulling him through, but this evidently so aggravated the pain that CAPSHAW went temporarily berserk and fought violently. Capt SANDERS observed that CAPSHAW had on his belt with canteen, knife, first aid packet, etc., attached and that his Mae West was inflated, all of which was preventing his getting through. They managed to get the belt and the Mae West off CAPSHAW and pull him through although CAPSHAW continued to fight violently. The Pilot noticed that the plane seemed to have settled a little more in the water and was afraid it was nearly ready to sink. They put Sgt. CAPSHAW in one life raft and Capt SANDERS got in with him. The four (4) other crew members got in the second life raft which had been pulled over on the same side and paddled away from the ship. They were in the rafts for about 45 minutes when they were picked up by a high speed launch from the ASR station at Chittagong.

While still on the ship they noticed two (2) "Spitfires" circling overhead, one of which departed and led the launch to the plane. Just as they had gotten into the launch the Pilot, Capt SANDERS, noticed a "Spitfire" buzz the plane and looked over to see Lt ECKELMAN coming out of the top blister. Capt SANDERS and LT MOORE returned to the plane in a dingy, taking several axes with them. They chopped holes into all compartments in order to make sure no one else was left alive; since no one else was found they returned to the launch with Lt ECKELMAN.

Co-Pilot – 2nd Lt W. C. BURROWS

When the plane stopped he felt a severe shock and noticed bomb sight had snapped off its supports. He unfastened his safety belt and started to abandon plane. He noticed that the pressurized door into the bomb bay had burst open when the shock came and water quickly poured in. It was about 6 inches deep around his feet before he could get out. The radio operator asked him if he should pull life raft releases and Lt BURROWS told him to

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do so and climbed out the on top of fuselage. He has noticed that Lt MOORE was already out of the plane.

When on top of the fuselage he noticed Capt SANDERS working on the aft hatch and stopping only to pull off one of the doors of the right life raft compartment, went back to help him. He helped remove the top blister as related in Pilot's narrative. Lt BURROWS related that as they were getting Sgt CAPSHAW through the top blister he noticed a strong odor of gas which burnt his nostrils, eyes and skin. He assisted in putting Sgt CAPSHAW in the life raft and abandoned ship with the others.

Bombardier Navigator – 2nd Lt. W. E. ECKELMAN

Ditching station was in gunners compartment. At shock of impact the rear pressurized door burst open and water flooded the compartment. He was stunned momentarily and came to with his feet up in the air. He recalls Lt FISHMAN going though the door into the radar compartment hollowing "Come on out this way", and stated that Lt FISHMAN seemed to be uninjured and very calm. He heard Sgt CAPSHAW cry out that he could not get up so he reached over and pulled him to his feet, then started through into the radar compartment. He remembers that Lt FISHMAN went into the radar compartment first followed by Sgt DRNEK, the senior gunner, CAPSHAW tried to go through but could not get by the armor plate and the cots which were down and stepped back telling Lt ECKELMAN to go ahead. When he went through the door, he stated, both Sgt CAPSHAW and the left gunner, Sgt BAKER seemed to be OK, he had a hard time getting between the cots and the armor plate door and finally blacked out.

When he came to he heard the sound of an airplane engine (later identified as one of the "Spitfires" overhead). He was tangled in control cables and the smell of gas was very strong, burning his nostrils, eyes, and skin making breathing difficult. He pulled out his gun and fired 2 shots through the fuselage to attract attention, after which the gun jammed and he lost his clip with the remaining 5 shells in the water when he tried to fix it in the darkness. He then realized that he was caught between the armor plate doors and the cots but was finally able to work himself loose.

He turned and was able to see that the top blister was off. Finally he managed to open the armor plate and get past it into the gunners compartment and out the blister hole after removing his belt which at first prevented him from getting through. He climbed out on the fuselage and was taken off as related by Capt SANDERS.

Radio Mechanic S/Sgt C. A. MACK

Upon orders from the pilot Sgt MACK took his ditching position along side the flight engineer. The flight engineer had removed his escape hatch door and MACK took it, opened the pressurized door leading into the bomb bay and threw the hatch cover in. He had difficulty in securing the door again, but was positive he succeeded in locking it shut. He heard the ship slide into the water, saw the Flight Engineer threw the ignition key and push threw his escape hatch before the ship came to a stop. When the crash came the pressurized door into the bomb bay burst open and water flooded in.

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The dome on the upper forward turret dropped down, nearly hitting him. He was struck by various articles flying about but retained consciousness. He remembers asking the Co-Pilot, Lt BURROWS if he should pull the lift raft releases, and upon being told to do so he pulled the raft release twice and the left raft release once. He noticed that there was no water in the tunnel and he called for those in the rear to come forward but received no answer.

He returned to the Flight Engineers escape hatch and noticed Lt. MOORE, the Flight Engineer on the outboard side of the #4 engine on the trailing edge of the wing in the water. He got through the engineers hatch into the water and inflated his Mae West, than climbed up on the wing between the inboard engine and the fuselage. By this time he saw Lt MOORE getting out the left life raft so he proceeded to try and get out the right raft. He tried to inflate it but it only inflated a little; he tried again but wanly succeeded in inflating it a little more. He finally managed to tug it loose and found it was $\frac{3}{4}$ inflated. Lt BURROWS called for the raft so he put it over the side, jumped into the water and pushed it along the fuselage to the point opposite where Lt BURROWS was standing. They tied the raft and Lt BURROWS helped him up on the fuselage where he helped with Sgt CAPSHAW. After pulling the right raft over on the left side so all would be together and helping Sgt CAPSHAW and Capt SANDERS into one raft, he got into the other raft after Sgt DRNEK and Lt MOORE, and was followed by Lt BURROWS.

Senior Gunner – Sgt J. J. DRNEK

After the shock of landing Sgt DRNEK did not remember anything until he found himself caught by his belt on cots and armor plate door in the radar compartment. When he came to he went out through the door of the radar compartment into the unpressurized aft compartment where he could see Capt SANDERS tugging at the life raft blocking the hatch. Capt SANDERS pulled him out as related. Every thing was very hazy until he found himself on the fuselage.

General

ASR Personnel took the crew to Chittagong where they were all hospitalized and every comfort was provided. The following morning Capt SANDERS was advised that the B-29 had beached itself on a sand bar just off shore. It was not until 7 June, however, that, accompanied by Lt MOORE, Lt Col WILSON, Maj HAMMOND and the Wing Salvage Officer and Capt SANDERS returned to the ship. He found the ship broken in two at the radar compartment. He searched the plane for bodies but none were found. It was determined what would be salvaged and the loose equipment was picked up. A study was also made of what had broken loose on impact.

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Capt SANDERS reports the nose of the airplane unbroken and the wheel well doors intact. The Secret and Confidential documents were removed from the plane, as was the secret equipment. Capt SANDERS crawled through the tunnel which was still intact. In the gunners department the senior gunners stand was badly smashed, floor boards ripped up, but the bottom of the plane seemed intact. The upper turret cover of the aft upper guns was off. This is almost directly above where the radar operator and the tail gunner had ditching stations.

Conclusion

No one could explain what happened to Lt FISHMAN, last seen entering the radar compartment and evidently uninjured; or the left gunner Sgt BAKER, last seen uninjured in the gunner's department.

The radar operator and tail gunner may have been killed or rendered unconscious on impact through being struck by flying debris.

**Louis E. SCHERCK
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