

## **AS I REMEMBER - October 25, 1944**

The Bailout of #42-6281, Capt. Jack C. Ledford, Aircraft Commander  
Written by Russell Elwell, Left gunner/electrical specialist.

After the bomb run on Omura, the airplane suddenly lost cabin pressure, indicating we had been hit. I still don't know whether by flak or fighter. At some point after we fell out of formation to fly separately, I was called to take over the flight engineer's position as both he, Harry Miller, and the pilot, Jack Ledford, were wounded. At the engineer's panel, and having no hands-on experience, I realized I didn't know enough to be helpful and so got Jack Halpern, tail gunner, there as he had experience in other aircraft. Apparently, we lost fuel and would not be able to make it back or maybe not get past the Japanese lines in China and so proceeded to throw out anything we could . get loose with an ax to lighten the plane and extend our fuel.

We were able to bail out in friendly China. The crew in the back of the plane, Lt. Bill Gardener, Gilbert Rodencal, Jack Halpern, Tom Clark, Wilmer Pasley, and myself, bailed out a little sooner than the crew in-front, thus separating the crews by a mountain range. I don't know who made the first jump out the aft side door, but I remember the CFC gunner, Tom Clark, stepping into the door opening and having the slip stream pin the door jam between his body and backpack chute and not allowing him to jump or move back in. Since I was behind him, and anxious to jump, I gave him a push and then dove out myself. As I rolled face up and saw the tail assembly pass over, I pulled the ripcord, still in the slip stream, the chute opened with a hard impact, straps slamming against the back of my head. I believe I was knocked unconscious, as there is a time period I don't remember. I also had cuts on my neck and head.

The next moment, I remember floating down not far from Tom Clark and trying to make conversation, but not saying much.

After our 10,000 foot fall, Tom Clark landed safely on the tile roof of a peasant house with his feet going threw and straddling,a rafter. I landed some distance away in a garden.

I will never forget the old, bent-over Chinese farmer, with white goatee and clay pipe, appearing from around the corner of the house, looking up to see what was on his roof and then disappearing only to return with a bamboo ladder and then disappear, unconcerned, as though this happened every day.

Within a short time, all six of us got together and arranged to spend the night in the shed of a house nearby. As I understand, Jack Halpern was hung-up in trees dangling next to a cliff of rocks. After swinging, and with the help of a Chinese, he was able to get down. Bill Gardener; bombardier, landed in a small rocky riverbed, injuring his knee. The others had no problems, as I remember.

During the night, a Chinese secretly took one of our jungle packs, as proof we were there, and traveled about 20 miles to the village of Poa-Kang for help. The next morning, upon hearing commotion outside, there appeared 15 Chinese soldiers with guns drawn. After some pointe talke conversation with their leader, the Chinese set about cutting bamboo plants and building litters. Since Bill Gardener was limping, they wanted to carry him and also the rest of us. No roads in this area, only foot trails. For extra manpower, the soldiers drafted the peasants from their gardens and homes as bearers. If they refused, they got a rifle butt in the back. About halfway through this day, as we went over a steep rise in the trail, a bearer put down his end of the litter and took off up the mountain with two soldiers in pursuit. A little later, we heard a gun shot.

Along towards the end of the day, as we approached the walled village of Poa-Kang, Hudeh, the path leading to it was lined on both sides with villagers, boy scouts, girl scouts, a band, waving flags and clapping for the great "American heroes." A delegation of village fathers approached, a young Chinese put out his hand and said, "Hi ya Joe, am I glad to see you." This person, Chany Ching Yang, stayed with us for the next several days as interpreter. He apparently learned English at one of our air bases. He also was traveling behind

Japanese lines to Shanghai, so he said the inside lining of his jacket was stuffed with bribe money to get through the battle lines.

We spent the night in a schoolhouse and there had our first meals. The next morning, so the village people could see how we came down from the sky, I put on my open parachute and paraded in a gathering area. It was at this village, I believe, that Bill Gardener was able to communicate by telephone with someone as to our destination. This day we also started our trail walk, complete with live chickens in a crate, donkeys, and several soldiers to our next destination, Shin-Ja Kong, a small village on a steep bank next to a river. We spent the night there. We boarded a sampan the next morning and drifted with the current most of the day to a sizeable town of Kucheing. Here, we rode rickshas into the town's main street and paraded on foot through crowds of people celebrating in our honor. The street was covered with exploding firecrackers and the smoke was knee deep, flags waving, etc. That night, at a tin-roof theater, a special show took place in our honor, complete with knife-twirling, fiery baton-twirling, singing, etc. The scouts sang an American patriotic song. It was a hot night and by tradition, they supplied steaming hot towels to freshen us.

Next morning we posed for pictures with a large group of VIPs and then rode rickshas to a house outside of town where we jammed into a small car, traveled to another town, boarded an old school bus, drove on to a ferry to cross a river (raft almost submerged) and on to the village of Lo-Ho Kau and a Norwegian mission near a field being used as a landing strip. We stayed here about three days waiting for a C-47 transport to pick us up. Each day they tried, they turned back as Japanese fighters were looking for them. One day the field was strafed; we took shelter in trenches. Finally, we were, picked up by a C-47 that hardly stopped and flew back to A-1 Chengtu.

I have enclosed a copy of the photo taken in China. I hope the crew members from the front of the airplane will fill you in with the rest of the story. However, I was told they used a shroud line from an extra parachute as a static line to open Harry Miller's parachute. He was knocked unconscious when wounded and later died on the ground. Jack Ledford, although wounded, jumped after Harry was dropped out and delayed his parachute opening so as to be on the ground before Harry.

BACK Row L-R  
Gilbert Rodcal  
Jack Halpern  
Bill Gardner  
Russ Stwell

FRONT Row L-R  
Tom Clark  
Wilmer Pasley



Our crew flew the first mission to Yawata, Japan in the 20th Century Unlimited and the last mission over the Battleship Missouri at the time of the signing of the surrender. Other missions flown --Mukden/Anshan, Formosa, Bangkok, Singapore Summartra from Ceylon (Shri-Lanka) (19% hours), Tokyo, and several other Japanese cities.

We also flew the Eddie Allen, 293 and the famous Bombing Buggie. I have pictures of these:

Another mission of interest was a photo reconnaissance to Singapore to check out the world's largest floating dry dock we had been trying to sink. As we came off our photo run a Jap zero with floats made a pass at us. Radio. operator, Duoyne McCullough, was wounded and the throttle cable to the outboard engine was cut. Now, a long way from home, with an engine out and tight on fuel.

The pilot made plans to land at a British fighter field near Rangoon. It's now getting near dark as we prepared our approach. The inboard engine on the same side ran out of fuel. The airplane started-a left turn. Then the flight engineer was able to transfer some fuel, got it started, allowing us to continue. This air field was nothing but a grass strip with British fighters lined up on each side of the runway area. Apparently, aware we were coming, they set out kerosine road flares to mark the strip. As this big B-29 with its big flaps down, its wing tips just missing the fighter planes, went down the runway, the flares were blown out. At the end of the runway and having the attitude of the airplane changed, the engines were out of fuel and we were unable to taxi.

I agreed to stay with the airplane that night, as the others went off to lodging.

There was a big party taking place nearby. A British movie star was present. A lot of music, laughter, and hooting in the distance. Pretty soon a Japanese bomber flew over, dropped a bomb on a fighter plane, setting it on fire. Shortly after, I heard an engine start up and a fighter take off in total darkness, no lights. As I watched the exhaust flame circle the airfield, it got in the line of anti-aircraft fire and was shot down. I was told the pilot bailed out and survived.

The next morning, a mechanic was flown in, the throttle cable repaired, and we took off for home, just making it over a pipe trench at the end of the field.

Russell Elwell