

STATEMENT

The night where our seven ships bellied in at night is quite clear in my memory, we started out with eight but one snafued after takeoff and returned to base. I can't remember who it was. It was the longest mission any of us had ever flown, seems it lasted most part of the day and part in darkness. After completing our bombing and heading home I remember we made several strafing runs on some enemy shipping, sinking one, I'm sure we were perhaps halfway home when we ran into some extremely bad weather. Ody, being our leader, tried in vain several times to fly around or over it. With our fuel supplies running low it was decided our best action was to ditch together as close to one another as possible. I don't know how, considering the vast amounts of ocean we were flying over, but "Ody" found a small piece of land to ditch close to. By this time it was getting dark and most of us had our gasoline warning lights lit up.

Don Murrie was in the best shape fuel wise and "Ody" had him fly as high and as long as possible with his pip squeak turned on, before he joined us in the water. This land we were flying over had a coral reef stretching out into the water. It appeared phosphorescent and not too deep in the blackness. Here I thought I would go in. Ody instructed us to prepare to ditch, canopy open, straps locked, full flaps, gear up, and landing lights on. He wanted us down as close as possible and with landing lights on we were less apt to land too close. I remember him saying not to establish a glide down the steep beam of the landing light. I don't remember who went in first, but after seeing one or two splashes, I went in. The ship slid in real smooth and I was safely down. My first thought was to clear myself from the cockpit to avoid going down with it. I jumped on my wing root and shoved off. The plane sank at once. Even with my Mae West fully inflated I was rapidly becoming exhausted in my effort to reach shore. My .45 in my shoulder holster caused me a lot of discomfort so I flipped it away next came my shoes. After swimming, floating and dog-paddling for what seemed like

hours my feet finally hit bottom. I staggered ashore and collapsed, throwing-up and coughing up half the ocean. There, standing on shore above me and hale and hearty was Steve Benner, my flight leader. He told me later he thought I might be a Jap and was ready to blow me away. Because, I suppose due to his training at the Point and his ability to think early in an emergency, he had brought his entire bail-out kit ashore with him. I had left mine back in my ship with my chute. After helping me out of the surf he was very generous with his rations. He shared food, water and cigarettes with me. Also his shelter half. The shore was covered with crabs and in order to get any rest we buried ourselves up to our heads with sand and covered our heads with his shelter half, tent like. We weren't sure we had made shore on Jap held territory or not, so decided not to investigate until daylight. Very early the next morning a flight of 'Jugs' found us and gave us a good buzz job. I later found out they were 310th boys. Murries' late night signal had given them their search directions. Shortly after, an air-sea flying boat landed, taxied to shore and picked us up. We made one more pick up (Murrie). One of us had managed to attach himself to a large floating tree limb and stayed with it. I think it was Bob Powell. Later that night there was much rejoicing in our own area, knowing that all seven of us had been picked up safely." The hero of the disaster, Don Murrie, related his story of this mission and his rescue the next day.

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