

"4 March 1945" by Tech Sergeant Ed Matthews

We were awakened at 5am for the mission of the day. After breakfast we went to briefing. It was raining lightly as it had been for the last couple of days. The mission of the day was Zamboanga on Mindanao. The group had lost a plane a couple days before. Take off was about 7am and weather cleared up a short time out. We were to go up the gulf and the swing inland and hit the airstrip from the back. I didn't know how many SQ were to hit the target before us. We lined up abreast and came down the hill at about 100 ft., our plane was on the extreme left end. I took a position in the left window to protect our left side. Shortly my gun jammed so I stored it and went to the right gun. That is when I saw the right engine on fire. I alerted the engineer in the turret and sent him to get the tail gunner. The intercom was out and we couldn't let the crew in front know what was going on.

After throwing spent casings over the bomb bay they were finally alerted to the situation. It was then we broke the windows out and threw the waist guns overboard. We took our ditching positions and waited. Soon we felt the plane hit the water and bounce up and then come down. It wasn't too hard and the water came pouring in the windows. When we came to rest the tail gunner and engineer went out the left window as fire was on the water on the right. Fire was coming in the right window before I could leave so I splashed it out pulled the life raft release and made my exit only to find the life raft didn't deploy. I went to the area where the life raft was stored and the latch had opened but the raft didn't inflate. I grabbed the hatch and pulled and out came the raft. I took my leg knife and cut the secure line and towed it to the end of the wing where the rest of the crew were in the water in their Mae Wests. I held it steady while they got in and then jumped in myself and pushed away. We got about 50 to 100 feet away before the plane sank.

Two planes flew cover as we assessed our situation, who was injured, what we had in the raft and did the cover call Dumbo. The engineer had a bad gash in his leg and I had some small shrapnel wounds in my leg. We found the first aid kit and dressed the engineer's leg. The engineer started to get

sick so we put him in a one man dingy that we had and tied him to the large raft. Our cover stayed around as long as it could but had to leave because of fuel and we were alone. Time passed and no Dumbo and we began to worry keeping an eye on the coast expecting the Japs to come out. Suddenly we saw two silver disc close to land and figured they were coming. But as the disc got bigger we realized it was a PBY taxing in our direction. What a welcome sight. Soon they were alongside of us and we climbed aboard. The raft was deflated by a burst from a 50 cal gun and it sank. The blister was closed and we were settled for take-off. The PBY had picked up two other crews earlier that were down close to land so they had a pick-up of 17 men and were over loaded. One man of the other crews was lost. The first try of take-off failed and the guns and ammo were thrown overboard and they tried again with no success. Now they dumped what fuel they could spare and this time takeoff was a success.

We settled in and was checked by the medic on board and feed a good dinner. Soon we were back on Morotai and taxied to waiting ambiances. Each squadron's flight surgeon was there and ours gave each of us a 5th of whiskey and told to get in the ambulance. They took us to the hospital where they checked us and issued each a Purple Heart Medal. We were admitted to the hospital for a 3-day observation. Our engineer had to stay longer till his leg healed enough so he could walk on it. Then the publicity men came with their cameras and took pictures to send back to the states. Big story "PBY picks up 17 downed airmen." It was in the papers and on the radio. But our parents didn't get a telegram till 2 weeks later.

They gave us a plane and told us to take a week R&R to southern New Guinea. There wasn't much to do or see at Lea or Finschafen and at the end of the week we returned to Morotai. The group had left for Palawan but left one crew to wait for us. We cleaned up the area and settled in for the night with some cold beer. Just after dark the Japs came over and we spent most of the night in a foxhole. Early the next day we left Morotai never to return.