

STATEMENT

I was on the October 21st flight to Ceram for a strike on shipping in Ambon Harbor. Ceram was the outer limits of our range and we always returned to Noemfoor with a limited supply of fuel.

This was our first afternoon flight to that target, since we had been limited to morning strikes, with the weather usually turning bad in the afternoon. On the way back from the target we tried to top and skirt the weather that had socked in the entire area. When these efforts failed and fuel tanks were nearly empty, we had no choice but to ditch. We were over the ocean at the time, with land to the south. I called Odren, who was leading the flight, and told him I was showing empty and I was going in. He said the rest of them would be following. I recall it was sunset and I dropped down on the deck heading for land. I wanted to ditch close enough to land that I could hopefully make shore, I cut the throttle and glided in for ditching, cut the ignition and leveled off just above the water. I hit a hell of a lot harder than expected and knocked myself senseless for what seemed to be a few seconds, When I came to, the nose of the plane was sinking, so I unbuckled and jumped out onto the wing but before I could grab my life raft the tail came up and I slid off the wing into the water. My plane sank like a rock. So I ended up with my life vest and my '.45', which wasn't worth much at that point. By the time I got oriented I could no longer see and I spent the night floating around with my thoughts, and believe me I had some wild ones including a thought or two about sharks! I also thought about how handy my life raft would have been about then, At one point during the night I actually fell asleep while floating. (Bob had flown a four-hour weather reconnaissance mission on the morning of the 21st). The ocean was not perfectly calm butt kinda bobbed up and down in the shallow swells. When morning came I developed another problem, the Co2 had gone down in my 'Mae West' and no matter how hard I tried, couldn't get the air tubes unscrewed to blow air into the vest. As I lost

buoyancy I had to tread water to keep afloat.

With daylight I could see land and started swimming toward shore but I wasn't able to close the distance. I was concerned about wasting my energy, so I gave up swimming since my more pressing problem was to stay afloat. Later in the morning I saw a four ship flight of P-47s searching the area to the northwest (I think) of me. I prayed they would come near enough to see me but no such luck as they flew off in the opposite direction, A short time later a two ship flight flew directly over me, but again no such luck. By this time I was completely exhausted from trying to stay afloat I began to think this was it! Now this next part is hard to believe but so help me it is true. I was looking out across the span of water toward the horizon when I noted a bird, sea gull size, sitting on the water. I thought I must be seeing things but, sure enough, there it was! Then I saw the bud was sitting on what looked like a tree branch my God, it was a tree! I amazed myself with the strength I mustered to swim to the object and it was a tree about 40 foot long. Only the Good Lord could have put that tree in the ocean at that time. I climbed on and straddled the trunk of that baby and thanked the Lord. About what seemed to be an hour or so later, another two ship flight of 47's came in sight. I took off my life vest, swung it in the air and hit the water. The second plane peeled off and came straight for me. It made two passes, rocked his wings, and then circled. About ten minutes later a PBY arrived, landed, taxied over and picked me up at what turned out to be about 10:30 AM. I was so elated over the rescue I didn't feel the exhaustion until I returned to base. I recall the back of my legs were like raw beefsteak from my pants rubbing them during the long swim. Steve Benner and Kenny Crepeau reached Batanta Island and found each other on the beach.

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