**WE THOUGHT WE HEARD THE ANGELS SING**  
  
THE COMPLETE EPIC STORY OF THE ORDEAL AND RESCUE OF THOSE WHO WERE WITH EDDIE RICKENBACKER ON THE PLANE LOST IN THE PACIFIC

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**Chapter One**

Our big liberator bomber rocked gently in the brilliant October sunlight, high above the South Pacific. Only the deep-throated roar of the four motors and the singing of the wind suggested our great speed.

Looking down through rifts in the drifting clouds we could see the ocean far below, spread out like a vast blue floor. From 5,000 feet it appeared cool and inviting and I remember thinking it a beautiful sight.

That was on October 18, 1942. Now, three months later, I wonder how I ever could have seen anything of beauty in that shark-ridden waste of mountainous swells and scalding heat. It took the life of one of my companions and clutched at the rest of us, who were saved only by the intervention of God and two divine miracles.

On that sunny afternoon I was being sped at 200 miles an hour toward the greatest adventure any man can have, that in which he finds his God. But there was no presentiment of what was to come as we bowled along above the clouds.

The nose of our ship was pointed toward Hawaii, San Francisco, and home. Tailward lay one of the greatest theaters of war the world has known.

We had picked up our bomber out there and were assigned to set her down on Hickam Field, Honolulu. After that, we were to return to the mainland with another ship. This meant brief leaves from duty for all of us and visits home for me.

There were five of us, all members of the United States Army Air Corps, Transport Command. In rank we ranged from Capt. William T. Cherry, Jr., our pilot and commander, to Private John Bartek, our engineer, who was also the youngest.

Bill Cherry is a sturdy, drawling Texan, who comes from the town of Quail, though his wife and little girl, 3, live in Fort Worth. Bill entered the army as an aviation cadet at the age of 23 or so and after winning his wings he joined American Airlines as a pilot.

His experience on the big passenger liners made him a natural for handling the heavy, four-motored bombers in the Transport Command. And in appearance he is everything you would expect of the American flying man: broad shouldered, steady blue eyes, and deliberate in speech. As co-pilot, I have flown thousands of miles with Bill Cherry and I've never had a better partner.

He is calm in crisis, stoical in adversity, and possessed of a drawling humor that saved many a situation in the blazing days to come. I never have known him to be intolerant - except of sharks. But we will get to that later.

The other officer who was on our ship, in addition to me, is Second Lieut. John J. DeAngelis, our navigator. DeAngelis is 24 and comes from Pennsylvania. He was attracted to military life while attending the celebrated Citadel School and enlisted for artillery service in the army.

After having been commissioned, however, he transferred to navigation school and eventually was assigned to the Transport Command. John was counting the minutes on our way in aboard the Liberator. He was married in Los Angeles two days before we headed out into the Pacific on Oct. 4.

Another of us who had romantic reasons for hurrying home is Staff Sergeant James W. Reynolds, the radio operator, a smiling fellow of 26 from Oakland, Calif. He had become engaged during the intervals of his six flights across the Pacific with the Transport Command. Reynolds's time passed slowly as a rule because there is little radio transmitting done on these hauls of ours. The Japs have a habit of listening in.

Johnny Bartek is a serious kid of 20 from New Jersey; red haired and freckled. Next to the pilots he probably was the busiest man on the plane. His duties as engineer required that he keep constant watch on the gasolines levels, attend to switching from tank to tank during flight, and make certain that the landing gear was down and set properly.

Johnny Bartek had many other duties, but he always found some time to read from a little khaki covered New Testament, of which you are to hear a great deal more later. In those days, however, the sight of that little Bible and Johnny's serious face as he read from it invariably handed me a chuckle.

I then was within a month of my 41st birthday and was the oldest man on the plane. After leaving the navy in 1922 at the age of 21, I knocked around a while and began flying in 1927. I haven't been without a plane of my own since 1930. By 1935 I was in the building contracting business. As soon as I could wind up my affairs after Pearl Harbor I got into the army and was commissioned a second lieutenant.

Because there was no chance for me as a combat pilot I was assigned to the Transport Command. By serving here, however, I free a younger man to fly a fighting plane and that is almost as good as flying one myself.

It is these young men who fly our attack and pursuit ships and the big Liberator and B-17 Fortress bombers on their raids over enemy territory. Our ship's bomb bay was empty now, but the time soon would come when it again would be dropping death and destruction upon Hirohito's forces in the Pacific.

Bill Cherry took over the controls and I walked back through the ship. Johnny Bartek was reading his Testament. I made an amusing remark, which he ignored.

When I returned, the beautiful island of Oahu was rolling up over the rim of sea and we were nearing the end of the first leg of our trip toward home. As we headed down, the hangars of Hickam Field emerged out of the landscape. Bill Cherry set us down smoothly at 4:30 P.M.

We carried our gear from the plane to the quarters assigned us, then took the night off. The next day we were directed to ferry a [B-17 Flying Fortress](http://www.military.cz/usa/air/war/bomber/b17/b17_en.htm) to a destination on the mainland, taking off the following evening.

The fellows spent the day in various ways. I went into Honolulu and bought a flowered Hawaiian silk dress for my wife. I wrote home to my son, Thomas, 19 who is in the navy and stationed at San Francisco, and to my daughter, Shirley, 16.

I also made some entries in my diary. If that little book could have known what we were about to go through together, it probably would have jumped out the window and disappeared into the shrubbery. I still have it; that is, my wife has. Its pages still are encrusted with salt and the writing in it, toward the end, is very, very bad.

We spent the night of the 19th at the field and whiled away the next day. Shortly after 5 P.M., we collected our gear and started out toward the hangers, where our Fortress stood on the line with its four motors warming up.

We were a carefree bunch, homeward bound. The weather and our Hawaiian surroundings did nothing to detract from our spirits. It was hard to believe that 10 months earlier, hell had rained from the skies upon this peaceful airfield.

As we reached the plane our supplies were going aboard; sandwiches, oranges, thermos jugs of coffee. We were about to follow when we were hailed and learned shortly that our plans had been changed.

We and our Fortress had been reassigned to carry the world-famous Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker and a military aide upon a secret mission for the War Department. We were keenly disappointed. There's no two ways about that. But an order is an order.

Then, after we had thought about it some we found the prospect stimulating. Before long we were looking forward to our new venture. There was not one of us who did not know all about Eddie Rickenbacker, America's No. 1 ace of World War I, who knocked down more German war planes than any other American.

Further, instead of dropping into obscurity after the war, he had continued in the cause of aviation, eventually heading a great and successful commercial airplane. Mostly though, I think, we all wanted to meet the man who had survived so many thrilling escapes from death both in war and in civilian life.

Being a flying man myself, I think I was most thrilled by his courage while lying pinned beneath a wrecked airliner in Georgia, seriously injured and soaked in gasoline, yet directing the rescuers. Gasoline covered the ground and the wreckage in which other persons were trapped. For hours Rickenbacker lay there, advising the rescuers and warning all newcomers:

"Don't strike a match! Don't strike a match!"

And he had come back from this one and many others to perform magnificent feats - many yet undisclosed to the public - for his country in its new conflict.

We talked it over animatedly as we walked over for supper. We knew that when Rickenbacker wanted to see something he usually got close enough to look at it. And this meant that we, too, would have a chance to see some new territory.

Our new takeoff time had been set for 10:30 P.M. You may be sure that we were at the line well ahead of time, getting everything ready while the B-17 was warmed up a second time. We rechecked all the controls and instruments and stowed the additional food supplies that were arriving. Two cots had been placed in the bomb bay.

We found also that we were to have a third passenger. He was a rather pale looking youngster, Sergt. Alex Kaczmarczyk, who was to rejoin his regiment out somewhere in the southwest Pacific. Only a short time before he had been discharged from the hospital where he had spent 48 days suffering from yellow jaundice. Because of his rating as an engineer he had been signed on as our engineer; Private Bartek acting as second engineer.

About 10 P.M. we topped off the gasoline tanks, replacing the fuel consumed during the warm up. By 10:20 we were all in our places. Capt. Bill Cherry was in the left cockpit seat and I in the right.

Lieut. DeAngelis was in the nose compartment, below and forward of us. This ordinarily is used by the bombardier, but as no bombing was on our schedule this night, DeAngelis utilized the bombardier's table in charting our course.

Sergt. Reynolds was in the radio compartment, aft of the bomb bay tanks and forward the bomb bay itself - about amidships. Johnny Bartek stood in readiness by the generator controls, while young Kaczmarczyk waited in the bomb bay.

"Well," Cherry remarked, "we're ready whenever he is."

At this moment the lights of a staff car approached our ship.

Then the plane rocked slightly as our passengers came aboard. There were footsteps behind. At 10:29 I felt a hand on my shoulder and a voice said:

"My name is Rickenbacker."

**Chapter Two**

I took Capt. Rickenbacker's hand and introduced myself, then introduced Cherry. The man with Rickenbacker introduced himself. He is Col. Hans Adamson, of Washington, D.C., a friend from World War I days. Rickenbacker had chosen Col. Adamson after the War Department had requested that a military aide accompany him.

Cherry announced all in readiness. Our passengers seated themselves, Rickenbacker behind Cherry and Col. Adamson behind me. They strapped themselves in.

I fired up the four motors and two minutes later we were at the runway. To take advantage of the longest one it was necessary that we take off slightly cross wind. We therefore had to use the wheel brakes to hold us straight on the strip.

I ran up all four engines and we were on our way to the first of a series of baffling misadventures that were to dog us for three weeks. Halfway through the takeoff and rolling at about 60 miles an hour a brake expander tube let go, partially locking one wheel.

The big ship plunged off the runway and shot toward the hangars. To miss the buildings and also avoid running off the airfield, Cherry groundlooped her at about 50 miles an hour. This spins the plane in tight circles until momentum is lost.

It was a terrific strain on the tires, but they held. When we stopped rolling we were back on the runway. A masterful piece of work on the part of Bill Cherry.

Just before the groundloop and while we were bounding wildly toward the hangars, Rickenbacker half rose in his seat and appeared about to speak, but sat back again without saying anything.

When we came to a stop, Rickenbacker spoke to Cherry:

"Good job. Mighty fine job. But I thought for a minute the tires never would hold." Cherry laughed ruefully.

"You and me both," he said.

While a truck was towing us back to the hangars, Sergt. Kaczmarczyk was straightening up the confusion in the aft part of the plane. A brief inspection showed repairs that night were out of the question, so a second Fortress of much later type was rolled out and was started warming up.

The cots, Rickenbacker's and Adamson's luggage, several sacks of mail bound for our forces out in the Pacific, and our own gear were transferred over. During this I saw DeAngelis critically examining his octant.

The octant is an optical instrument, similar to the sextant, but provided with a graduated arc of 45 degrees. Like the sextant it is employed in navigation in the air and at sea to measure angles and angular distances and to observe altitudes to ascertain latitude and longitude.

"Anything wrong with the gadget?" I asked.

"Doesn't seem to be," DeAngelis replied. "It got an awful wallop, though. During the groundloop it shot across the table and banged the side of the plane. I couldn't do anything about it. I was holding on for all that's good."

He carried the octant aboard the new plane. I wouldn't have wanted Johnny's seat there in the nose during the groundloop. If a wheel had caved - which could easily have happened - Johnny would have been on the ground, the plane on top of him.

We fired up our engines at 1:29 A.M. of Oct 21 and one minute later were shooting down the runway.

I adjusted the DF (direction finding) set to the Honolulu tower's frequency for takeoff instructions. We climbed straight away from the field through a haze and cloud ceiling into clear air.

DeAngelis then came up from the nose compartment and gave Cherry and me the necessary navigation information. Cherry swung us on to our course.

Rickenbacker and the Colonel sat awhile and talked. It was a pleasant night, with a fair-sized moon. Eventually, Col. Adamson suggested turning in and Kaczmarczyk made them comfortable in the bomb bay.

Our immediate destination was Island X, about 1,700 miles southwest of the Hawaiian group. We knew Rickenbacker's interest lay in our air combat units, so it was not hard to guess that we might go on to Guadalcanal and other island groups where there was action.

We droned along at from 8,000 to 10,000 feet, high above the cloud bank until 5 A.M. when Cherry said he guessed he would try for a little sleep. I took over the controls.

DeAngelis came up to say he had got some exceptional position shots just at half dawn, while the stars were still out. These had shown us to be directly on our course. He had found almost no variation in drift from his original plotting, he added.

In an hour or so Cherry returned from the tail, saying it was too cold to sleep. At 10,000 feet it makes little difference whether you are flying over the equator or over Chicago in January.

I remained until Rick - as I came to call him - returned to the cockpit. He asked how things were going and we told him all was well. He asked if we had spotted anything since daylight. We told him no; nothing but overcast.

"Would you like to take her awhile, Captain?" I asked. Rickenbacker holds a colonel's commission in the reserves, but I had heard somewhere that he prefers to be called "captain" if he is to be addressed by any title. He came out of World War I with this rank after shooting down 26 enemy aircraft. Rick grinned.

"I've probably forgotten how to fly by instruments," he said.

Rick took the controls, however, and held us dead on course. I went back to the tail and returned with some rolls, fruit juice, pressed ham sandwiches and hot coffee from the thermos jugs.

Rick and Bill Cherry were trying to compare the relative merits - if any - of the World War I bombing planes and our Flying Fortresses. But there wasn't much common ground. In the discussion of those flapping crates of 26 years ago Rick soon had Bill out of his depth.

"I give up," Cherry said with a laugh. "I wasn't there."

And he certainly wasn't. In the days of the Handley-Pages, the Caponis, the Gothas, and the others Bill was crawling around his family's home in Quail, Texas. Again it struck me as amazing and wonderful that a man who was in the thick of it then could be back in the air and on the job for his country in a new and more terrible war. I thought of those World War I bombs - mere eggs.

Then I looked back at the bomb bay of our Fortress - dark and yawning like a cavern in the morning light. And I thought of the monster cylinders of death she had been so lately launching upon the little monkey men of the Pacific - and traveling thousands of miles to do it. I was thankful not to be one of the little monkey men.

While I mused, Bill Cherry had been turning up the radio and tinkering with the DF control to get a bearing on the radio compass. This works as follows: A recognized station is tuned in and the hand of the instrument indicates the direction the station lies from the plane.

"Jim," he asked, looking puzzled, "did this thing work okay during the takeoff this morning?"

"Sure," I told him. "I connected with the Honolulu tower all right. What's the matter now?"

"It won't budge an inch now."

It should be explained that in order to locate stations, there is a directional loop, up outside the fuselage. This is turned by means of a crank which extends downward into the cockpit. I tried turning it and found it would move only a few degrees of the circle it was supposed to describe.

I continued to try while Cherry took the controls and started nosing us down from our 10,000 foot altitude. We were nearing our ETA (estimated time of arrival.) The crank still refused to turn.

This became a minor worry, however, when DeAngelis came up, looking worried. Our ETA actually had passed. We were down below the overcast now and there was no island in sight. It was impossible that we could have overshot it, because we had kept careful check on our speed and tailwind ever since the takeoff.

Only one explanation remained: We had missed the island, passing either northeast or southwest of it. Then we remember the octant which has smashed against the side of the plane during groundloop. Undoubtedly it had been thrown out of adjustment and consequently had showed us as being dead on course while actually we had been veering away to the right or the left.

There was nothing to do but face it and Bill Cherry put it into words, in his forthright Texas fashion.

"We're lost," he said - just like that.

When we thought we were drawing near Island X, Sergt. Reynolds had been in communication with the wireless station there. So, with Rickenbacker standing by, Cherry prepared to set up "lost plane" procedure.

That is done in this way: The ground station takes two bearings, 15 minutes apart, on the plane's sending. This gives a cross bearing on the plane's course and is known technically as a '"fix." On a map, lines are drawn to the station from the two bearing points on the course, then are projected beyond, enabling the station to plot the ship's true position and provide a new course for it.

This didn't happen in our case, however. In reply to Cherry's request, the island replied it did not yet have proper equipment for lost plane procedure.

"That's cute," Cherry remarked and told Reynolds to try for other stations. Several minutes passed. Reynolds said something to Bill and his face lighted. It seemed we had a station equipped to help us out.

Everyone felt better. In the days that followed I thought many times of the carefree interval that came then. Those were the last carefree moments I was to have for many a weary day.

I saw Cherry's face grow glum. He told Rickenbacker:

"That tears it. The station is about 1,000 miles away."

"How much fuel have you?" Rick asked.

"Enough for about four hours," Bill replied. This was enough to get us only a little more than three quarters of the distance we would have to go.

**Chapter Three**

There now began a brief phase of our imminent ordeal that has left me with an admiration that will be lifelong for the the clear thinking and cold courage of two men - Bill Cherry and Eddie Rickenbacker. I put Bill first because it is to him we survivors owe our chief gratitude for being alive today.

Never have I seen any airman perform more masterfully than he did when the supreme moments came. And Rickenbacker's clear foresight and thorough preparations undoubtedly averted casualties.

For that matter, my admiration extends to all the other members of our crew. They behaved as a good bomber crew should. In bombing raids the men become part of the plane and, with the plane, they are a machine that is an impersonal, relentless team.

I like to think we performed that day as expertly and as smoothly as ever any crew did while dropping a load on Tokyo or Berlin. The responsibility for the safety of us all in our plight rested upon Bill Cherry, and he met it coolly, as one of his fellow Texans might meet a charging steer.

"What do you expect to do now?" Rickenbacker asked.

"We'll try the box procedure first," Cherry replied. "There are a couple of other things that may help also."

In the box procedure a lost plane flies a course that describes a square. This enables the crew to scan a vast area lying inside and outside the box. At 5,000 feet we were 2,000 above the overcast, which now had broken about 50 percent, giving us a good view of the ocean below.

Cherry figured that if we should fly 45 minutes on each leg of the box, we still would have about an hour's fuel when we finished. As we went into the first leg, he ordered Reynolds to raise Island X again.

When Reynolds got them, Cherry asked that they begin firing anti-aircraft shells timed to explode at 8,000 feet. We now climbed back to 10,000, both to see farther and to be above the bursting shells.

Island X replied that the firing would begin at once and that planes would clear as quickly as possible to search for us and to lead us in. Our men were posted at all windows and ports to watch for the bursts and planes. Rickenbacker and Col. Adamson assisted in this.

In the cockpit, beside Bill Cherry, I strained my eyes for the grayish black bursts which might resolve themselves into planes.

I searched the far rims of the cloudbank, the blue vaults of sky above us, and the watery blue floor far below. Never have I seen a world so ominously empty.

We completed the first leg and the second. We drew to the end of the third. We banked into the fourth and final leg, still without seeing either shell burst or plane. Rickenbacker's countenance - what I could see of it - was inscrutable. The homefolks in Quail, Texas, would have been proud of Cherry's poker face.

As the last of our three hours ticked off, putting us back where we had started, Bill summoned Reynolds.

"Go on emergency frequency and start pounding out S O S" he said. "Someone will hear us and get a bearing on our course." Bill then gave Reynolds our direction and speed. Then he turned to me.

"Jim," he continued. "We will have to set her down in about an hour. Let's talk about how we are going to do it."

So far as either of us knew then, no four-motored land plane ever had been set down at sea without casualties. In many cases no member of the crew had lived to tell about it.

When a plane is put into the ocean against the wind, it meets the waves head on. If it touches on a crest, the nose will be plunged into the next wave and cave in. Further, the ship probably will not float an instant, but will continue its dive through the water.

If the plane hits the first crest too hard, it breaks in two and the parts disappear almost immediately. It is inevitable that the crew will be stunned for a few instants by crash landing and in such a case Davy Jones has ample time to snatch them down.

I suggested, therefore, that we come in cross wind and set the ship down in a trough - the valley between two waves. Bill said this sounded like sense and added:

"I think we ought to do it while we've still got gasoline in the tanks. A power landing is always better than an uncontrolled one."

This, in turn, seemed logical to me. Rickenbacker, who had sat in on part of this talk, then took over disposition of the crew and started making those arrangements I spoke of earlier; the preparations to which we owed our whole skins.

Rick led everyone except Reynolds to the compartment aft of the bomb bay and had them lie down, their heads toward the tail and their feet braced against the bulkhead. Mattresses from the cots were used as padding. Rickenbacker stationed himself at a port near the forward bomb bay.

Bill pushed the wheel forward and our big olive-drab warbird began nosing down toward her last landing. I made some preparations of my own. I took the cushions from the two seats behind us. Bill and I put them across our stomachs and fastened the safety belts over them. I turned to Cherry and stuck out my hand.

It's sure been swell knowing you, Bill," I said. He gripped my hand briefly.

"You're going to know me a long time yet, Jim," he answered. "It's going to keep on being swell!" He looked at me an instant with those direct Texas eyes, then glued his attention to the water, which was leaping up swiftly now.

We didn't know how much fuel was left and, needing it all, we cut the two inboard motors at about 500 feet and feathered the propellers to prevent them turning in the wind. Meanwhile, Rick had got the aft deck trap open and, aided by the others, was dropping equipment and his luggage out to lighten the lane. This was for two reasons: (1) to lessen our weight, reducing the force of impact and (2) to lessen fuel consumption.

The cots went out also and I believe the mails sacks did. Most everything was gone when next I looked in that direction. Just now I was keeping my eyes on Cherry who was staring at the waves. In a rolling sea it would be his job to know just where our trough would be when we needed it. At this instant we heard the voice of DeAngelis who had come up behind us.

"Do you fellows mind," he asked, "if I pray?"

"What in the hell do you think we're doing?" Bill Cherry snapped without lifting his eyes. DeAngelis returned to the others and in a moment Rickenbacker's voice sang out, clear and calm:

"Fifty feet!" and almost immediately: "Thirty feet!"

I recall a feeling of intense irritation then at DeAngelis' suggestion of prayer. I thought what a hell of a time to talk about praying when we needed all our wits to save our lives! How often and how ashamedly was I to remember those brash thoughts in the days to come.

"Twenty feet!"

It was strangely still in the plane. The muffled roar of the two outboard engines seemed far away. There was a faint whooshing of wind against the fuselage. The whine of Reynolds' radio rose above it, sharp and insistent.

Sharp and insistent, yes: but how thin and small it sounded in that vast and empty world, stretching out ahead, above, and on all sides of our cockpit windows. We were to learn in the blazing days to come that voices infinitely weaker can be heard if directed to God in adversity.

"Ten feet!"

Young Johnny Bartek raced forward from the stern and loosened the lugs holding down the escape hatch over the cockpit. The lid whipped off and was gone in an instant. Bartek paused in the bomb bay, freed the hatch there, then sped back to his station on the floor.

The wind was a roar now, howling into the open traps. We were coming in at 90 miles an hour with the landing flaps and wheels up so there would be nothing to snag in the water. You can't realize the will power it takes to put a plane into the sea with even a teacup of fuel in the tanks.

"Five feet!" Rickenbacker shouted. "Three feet! . . .One foot!"

"Cut it!" yelled Bill.

I pulled the mainline switch, killing every electrical connection in the plane. Bill hauled back on the wheel, hooking the tail into the water. The fuselage went down into the trough and lunged, but did not leave the surface. The waves rolled up about us. We were in. From 90 miles an hour we came to a full stop in a little over 30 feet - about 10 steps.

The shock and pressure of that landing is almost indescribable to a person who has never been through one. Despite the cushions, the safety belt seemed to be slicing me in two. A taste of bitter vinegar filled my mouth.

My eyes seemed to spin around like already taut springs winding up to the snapping point. I couldn't see. I thought I was losing consciousness.

A final slash of the safety belt and the pressure inside my head reduced swiftly. My bursting eyes began to unwind. I don't remember leaving my seat, but the next I knew I was up, yanking the rip cord that freed the forward one of two five-place rubber rafts above the fuselage. Rickenbacker was freeing the aft aft.

DeAngelis and Kaczmarczyk were shoving the tiny, three man raft up through the escape hatch over the bomb bay. Rick had assigned them together because they were the smallest and lightest of our company.

Bill Cherry was scrambling out of the pilot's seat unscathed. Blood was streaming from a cut across Reynold's nose. He had stayed at his key, pounding out S O S until Rickenbacker called: "Three feet!" Reynolds doesn't know yet what he struck. I heard Col. Adamson calling out as though in great pain that his shoulder had been wrenched. I had a slight arm cut.

I don't know the order in which we left the ship. Uppermost in my mind was the knowledge that for probably the first time in history a four-motored land plane had been put down into the ocean without serious casualties. And I wanted to keep it that way.

We got out fast. Water already was gushing into the plane from broken windows and also, I suppose, from breaks in the fuselage. I noticed only that Bill Cherry was the last one out. And this was proper and typical of the man. You'll remember, Bill Cherry was our captain. He conducted himself accordingly.

**Chapter Four**

When I had hoisted myself into the brilliant sunlight I saw that Rick and Bartek were on one wing and Col. Adamson was on the other. The Colonel's face was twisted in pain and I wondered if he had been injured internally.

One or two others were on the fuselage when I emerged from the escape hatch over the cockpit. My first thoughts were of the rafts - and for good reason.

This ocean, which from 5 and 10 thousand feet had looked as smooth as a ballroom floor, actually was a heaving waste of rolling blue hummocks, 8 to 12 feet high. And they were giving our plane hell. She was rolling from side to side, skidding into and off crests, and being washed by deluges of blue water. I wondered how long she could last.

Everyone was having difficulty keeping his footing, Adamson most of all, because he was handicapped by pain. The two larger rafts were inflated and floating. As I glanced around, DeAngelis and Kaczmarczyk blew theirs up.

And now, since those rafts from here on are to be as much a part of the story as ourselves, I will tell you something about them, their good point and their bad ones. To dispose of the good point first: I will say they were serviceable and rugged. They held up well; better than the men riding them. And now for the rest.

When the ripcords are pulled inside the plane, the two rafts carried beneath the fuselage hatches are ejected and fall usually on the wings, uninflated. They are kept from floating away by stout cords that moor them into the compartment from which they came.

The men emerging to the top of the plane break these lines, then give a sharp jerk.

The jerk opens a valve in the neck of a metal flask containing compressed carbon dioxide gas, which inflates the raft. The cord is retained in the hand, keeping the raft near the plane until the men are aboard.

The smaller raft, carried inside the ship, is inflated when the carbon dioxide flask valve is turned by hand. The small craft must also be launched by hand from the top of the fuselage.

Bulwarks or gunwales of all the rafts are of rubberized canvas and when inflated are about 1 1/2 feet thick. Inside these are two rubber innertubes. The decking - flooring - is three ply rubberized canvas, one-eighth inch thick. In the larger ones there are two pneumatic seats of rubberized canvas, containing innertubes. These do not inflate with the gunwales of the rafts, but must be inflated by hand. Pumps are part of the equipment and must be used daily as the air seeps slowly out of the gunwale innertubes.

It's like a slow leak in a tire except it is faster. In the days that followed, incidentally, those pumps grew stronger and stronger, it seemed. At first, one man could do the job in 15 minutes. Then it took 30 or 40. Finally, it was all two men could do to master those things in two hours. There is other equipment that will be listed in its proper order.

The rafts' undersides are painted blue to blend with the sea and not startle the larger fish, which might attack and puncture them. The gunwales, inside and out, and the floor surface are painted a brilliant yellow so that as seen from the air they are conspicuous against the sea.

The characteristic which contributed most to our misery during our stay in these rubber boats was size - or lack of it. Outside measurements are 4 by 7 feet; inside 2 1/2 by 5 1/2 feet. The smaller rafts are INFINITELY smaller.

The designer was evidently thinking of pygmies when he specified that the larger boats were for five men. I am not regarded as a big man. I stand 5 feet 9 inches and weigh 185 pounds. Cherry is practically the same height and build. We can wear each other's clothing. Jimmy Reynolds is much lighter and an inch shorter than either of us. Yet only by wrapping ourselves around one another could we get into our boat.

The little raft, which we called "The Doughnut," was too small for one man. Yet it was designed for two.

As I have said, DeAngelis and Kaczmarczyk blew up their doughnut almost immediately after I emerged from the plane. One of them got in and the other upset it trying to get aboard. That put them both in the water.

Rickenbacker and Bartek were having their troubles, also. Col. Adamson was to ride with them, but he could be of no assistance because of pain and difficulty staying on the wing. They got in at last, however, and picked up the Colonel.

DeAngelis and Alex Kaczmarczyk still were in the water as Cherry, Reynolds and I boarded our tub without mishap and started to their assistance. Alex looked weak and almost helpless as he clutched at the raft amid the rolling swells. I was thankful that our own had not upset. I was the only member of the party who could not swim a stroke. I had removed my shoes because I had heard somewhere that it was the thing to do. This I had cause to regret more than once, later on.

It had been just 4:30 P.M., Honolulu time, when Bill Cherry had set the big bomber down. As we all shoved away from the derelict plane my watch showed it was 4:32. It had been good, fast going from the moment we hit until the moment we got free.

My watch, incidentally, was the only one still running at the end of our three weeks' ordeal. This and one other survived the landing. Two of those that stopped had broken mainsprings. Rick's watch stopped in a day or two.

When we were clear of the plane, we unshipped our aluminum oars and got the rafts together. Rick had some line, which we used to fasten them together, it being the consensus it would be wise to stay together, for the time being at least.

As we lined them up, our raft was put in the lead, because Bill as captain of the plane was still in command. As co-pilot I was second in command. Jimmy Reynolds helped make fast the line to our boat.

In those seas, however, the arrangement worked both ways. The little raft at the far end might as well have been the lead one. When this was pointed out, someone said:

"Well, Captain Eddie, one thing's certain; you're in the middle."

"I think we're all in the middle, for the moment," Rick replied.

Having strung our craft together, we took stock of ourselves. We were eight men in three rafts. Our equipment included airpumps for the rafts, two sheath knives, three Very pistols with 18 flares - half of which were duds - two .45 caliber pistols belonging to Adamson and Cherry, the sets of aluminum oars, and some fish hooks and lines. These last were brought off the plane by Johnny DeAngelis who had salvaged them from the cushion kit of a parachute.

We also had our Mae Wests, those bulbous life jackets. There were personal possessions also. Besides my watch I had my diary and pencils. Our cigarettes had been ruined by the water. There was money of course and this later caused a number of sourly humorous remarks.

The things we lacked, however, were food and water. One of our party had been assigned to bring our some provisions that had been assembles, but in the excitement he had forgotten them. And he can't be blamed for that.

The only food was four anemic oranges which someone had brought off the plane in his pockets and which we found floating in the water. There was nothing else. After taking stock of our other worldly goods, we handed these over to Col. Adamson after deciding on a ration of one-eighth of an orange a day per man.

Then, suddenly, all of us were violently ill. I often have wondered about that. It could hardly have been seasickness because no one was sick again during the entire cruise. I have come to the conclusion that the shock of our crash landing must have done it.

Rick maintained with a perfectly straight face that he was not in the least upset. I am under the distinct impression, however, that I saw three heads bent over the gunwale of the raft occupied by Rick, Col. Adamson, and Bartek.

I had no time to think it over just then, as it turned out. A swift movement beside our raft caught my eye and I turned for a better look. I saw something that had so far escaped the notice of us all and the shock I got was almost as severe as the one during our crash landing.

The water about the raft fleet was alive with the triangular, dorsal fins of sharks.

**Chapter Five**

They were all about us. Mostly they kept their distance, but they were there all the same. I had a good look at some of them and when a wave would break just right I could see they were greyish on top, white underneath, with greenish-yellow stripes down the front of the head. This established that some of them at least were [tiger sharks](http://www.underwatercam.de/tiger_sharks/tiger_sharks.htm) which I had heard would not attack a living person.

There were others I wasn't sure about. But most all the sharks were longer than our rafts, some measuring up to 10 feet and 12 feet. Any one of these could upset us if he chose. And even if there were no man eaters nearby, there were plenty of other little playmates in those waters that could cause plenty of misery to a man overboard.

The sharks didn't choose to attack, yet at least, so for the time being I relaxed. We were to get better acquainted with these fellows later.

There was some talk now about going back to the plane for our food and water jugs, but it was decided that the sea water in her probably had ruined everything. There was danger, too, that the man who re-entered her would ride her to the bottom of the ocean.

She was still afloat after five minutes, so perfectly had Bill Cherry set her down. But she was sitting very low in the water with the wings under.

As the rafts drifted away I watched the big Fortress riding the waves in all her war plumage, the stars in circles on the wings and fuselage glistening with water. I was seized by a fit of melancholy that was almost physical as she struggled with an element for which she never had been intended. I thought the old gal deserved better than this.

Our raft plunged into a deep trough. When we came up I was busy for a minute with our line. When I looked up again our plane was gone. I am glad I didn't see her go.

Those giant swells hadn't looked so bad from high up in the air, but down among them they were mountainous. When we were down in a trough we were cut off from the world, even from the other rafts, our taut line disappearing into the heart of a wave. From up on the crest we could see the other boats, stringing deeply downhill into the next trough.

And it was good to see them. With the Fortress gone we all realized how alone we were and how empty and desolate an ocean can be. Our minds were kept from dwelling too much on this thought for the present by the spray which dashed annoyingly against our faces and bodies. And annoyance was our chief reaction just then. We wanted the planes to hurry to our rescue so we wouldn't have to spend a night in those pesky, undersized rafts.

"I'll give $100 to the first man to sight the plane or ship that rescues us," Rickenbacker yelled. The younger fellows cheered and we all began searching the sky anew. Most of us stared at the sun which was setting like a crimson ball.

"Red sun at night, sailors' delight," someone quoted. But no planes flew out of the west.

In a few minutes the sun had disappeared. It was as if an electric light had been snapped off, so quickly did the equatorial dusk descend. The three quarter moon appeared and we could see from one raft to another quite easily.

It was apparent now to all that we could not expect rescue that night. We played one long shot, however. Bill Cherry fired off a flare and we watched it rise high, a dazzling crimson that momentarily blotted out the stars and paled the moon.

When it had burned out we tried to make ourselves comfortable for the night. We hadn't looked forward to too much comfort and that is well because what actually occurred would have been an even greater trial.

In Rickenbacker's raft, Col. Adamson was given one end to himself. Rick and Bartek lay fore and aft in the other with their arms about each other to keep from falling out. This arrangement also utilized space to a good advantage and enabled the two to keep warmer than they would have otherwise.

In our boat we started out with me in the stern, leaning back against the seat; Cherry on the bottom, leaning back against me, and Jimmy Reynolds in the bow, curled around the seat.

The arrangement in the doughnut made us all laugh at first, but it became an agonizing ordeal for DeAngelis and Kaczmarczk before it was over. There was only one possibility. They had to sit facing each other, each with his legs over the other's shoulders. This was during the day as well as the night.

We found very quickly that we were not going to get much sleep. To avoid the spray, one had to lie in the bottom of the raft - in five inches of water. There always was that much, no matter how much we bailed.

We tried a different arrangement in our raft after a time. We all lay fore and aft. And that was no better. One man had to be in the middle, in the water. the chilling spray splashed down the backs of the two lying along the bulwarks and they were grabbing constantly at the middle man to keep from falling off the raft to waiting sharks. I don't know why the cold didn't affect us as much that night as it did later. Probably because we still had food in our bodies. Nevertheless, we didn't sleep.

Dawn of the second day broke clear. We stretched as best we could in our cramped positions to work off our grogginess. We soon found that, in addition, we had been working up terrific appetites. And there was no food. The entire party began scanning the sky, the younger fellows hopeful of winning Rick's $100. Cherry fired a flare in the hope it might be seen by a plane on dawn patrol.

"We'll be picked up today, I'm sure," Rick told us. "They couldn't have missed hearing our S O S. And if they heard it they got a cross bearing on our course. It's just a matter of time. The planes probably are taking off right now and that $100 is still up.

As the sun rose higher, Rick gave some good advice to us all. The first thing was to protect our heads from the direct rays. This we did with undergarments - those of us who had no hats or caps. Rick advised us to move around as little as possible, thus conserving energy. We talked as little as possible to avoid drying our mouths.

It now was time for breakfast. Col. Adamson served both as chef and waiter. He took out one of the four little oranges and peeled it. Each man got a segment. Except for the pleasant taste, we might as well have not had anything.

The value of Rick's advice became obvious about 11 A.M. when the sun neared the zenith. We were in equatorial waters and the rays beat almost straight down. They felt like molten metal.

We had been using our undershirts and shorts as sunbonnets. Now we wet them in the salt sea water and draped them over our heads. This made us sweat and Rick warned that we were losing valuable body salt through perspiration. After that we held the garments up like sunshades. The salt water felt good at the time and we continued to wet our heads and necks with it, not knowing how we were to suffer later for this brief respite.

While the heat was at its worst, between 11 A.M. and 4 P.M. the wind began banging the rafts together, bringing out the first displays of temper. They may have been justified, because those sharp aluminum oars could easily have punctured a raft air chamber.

After the snapping had gone on a while, Cherry said:

"Oh, pipe down, you fellows. Let me see if I can't fix it."

He ripped his undershirt down the back and rigged a sail, using the two oars as masts. He sat with his back to the bow, so that his body held the oars upright. There was enough wind to send our raft out ahead, stringing the others behind us in a line.

"That's fine, Bill," I said. "Now see what you can do about the heat."

I shall not quote his reply.

When the terrible heat had passed, we sat about in a sort of daze. So great was the relief that we almost forgot our hunger. Our craving for water, however, was becoming more and more insistent.

The sun now was slipping rapidly down the slope of the western sky. During those weeks I often thought of the sun as the car on a roller coaster. In the mornings it started into the sky at a great rate, reaching the 11 o'clock heat wave mark almost before we knew it - just as the coaster car is pulled rapidly up the incline by a power cable.

Nearing the zenith, the great copper ball would move ever more slowly, almost stopping at the top. Its descent toward 4 o'clock and relief was not much faster. It seemed it never would gain speed. But when it did it plunged toward the horizon. You could almost see it drop. And when it disappeared, our relief was at an end; the chilling night was upon us.

As I sat there that evening of our second day adrift, I noticed that Johnny Bartek was reading his Testament. Something - I didn't know what it was then - kept me from heckling him.

It was almost like a premonition. Too, it was strangely comforting. We all saw Johnny reading his Bible that night, his freckled face solemn as an owl's and the sun glinting on his red hair. No one kidded him. Maybe we all had a prescience of how much that little book was to mean to us.

It was pocket sized, khaki bound, and had a zipper arrangement that made it waterproof. That last feature saved the little book for us through many a watery day and night to come. I think it would be a great thing if every soldier and sailor boy could be provided with one of those indestructible little volumes. Thousands of our youngsters have pocket Testaments, but war conditions make it difficult to keep them readable. And there are times in this war - in any war - when those kids need something more than just themselves to hang on to.

Whatever consolation Johnny got that evening he was to need it when night came on. At dusk the wind blew hard, roughening the sea and drenching us all. And it was cold.

This amazed us. In daylight the wind, the sea, and the spray were too warm. Now we were chilled. We huddled together with teeth chattering. The gale grew so strong there was real danger of upsetting among the sharks, which seemed to mind neither heat nor cold and were much too fond of our company.

Sleep was out of the question. Jimmy Reynolds shot off the night's flare. It was a dud. This angered, then depressed us and we settled down to make the best of a miserable night. None of us as yet, however, felt any apprehension.

**Chapter Six**

We welcomed the rising sun of October 23 - our third day afloat - even though we knew it soon would be roasting us alive. Our shark escorts seemed to welcome it, too. They were out in force. During the entire three weeks there wasn't a time when at least one dorsal fin wasn't cutting the water about the rafts.  
  
They were good-humored beasts in their uncouth way and as playful as a pasture full of calves. We thought then it was their anticipation of a food meal that made them so frisky. We didn't mind the little ones, but the big 12 foot fellows had a disturbing habit of scraping the barnacles off their backs on the bottoms of our boats. They would start at the end raft and make all three.  
  
After a dash to gain momentum they scooted under us, rubbing their backs and giving a flip of the tail as they left each boat. The man sitting on the canvas floor got a wallop that jarred him to the teeth.

We thought once of killing a few with our sharp oars. Then we speculated that quantities of blood in the water might excite the survivors and provoke them to attack and upset us.  
  
It was a passing and fairly listless discussion. Our thoughts of water and food had a way of blotting out everything else at quickly recurring intervals. Col. Adamson dealt out our ration that day with fingers that trembled. Poor Alex Kaczmarczyk appeared to be drooping. I had the thought he might have left the hospital too soon.

None of us felt any too well, however. We were red and were sunburning despite our efforts to protect our skins. The reflected glare from the water was partially responsible. Windburn had a share in it too, I suppose. And the salt deposited upon us by spray was beginning to sting us.  
  
In our weakening condition we felt the sun's heat that day more than on the day previous. We sat with lowered eyelids and baked from 10:30 A.M. until 4 in the afternoon, then we sagged in a stuporish state until sundown.  
  
I remember the sunset of that evening because the sweep of colors was so fantastic no one would have believed it on canvas. But sunsets are not edible nor drinkable, no matter how magnificent. I remembered the expression: "He drank in the sunset." I wondered how it had tasted. The red could be strawberry, the yellow would be lemon - or grapefruit. I decided I would take lemon. The orange, of course, was obvious. The purple could be either grape or raspberry. I decided that if ever I should drink a sunset I would have plenty of ice in it. And on second thought if anyone would hand me a few cubes of ice he could have the sunset.  
  
That night we got some sleep, in snatches. I say sleep; it could have been mere stupor. Such was our exhaustion.  
  
The fourth day found our hunger agonizing. The fish hooks Johnny DeAngelis had brought along were useless because we had no bait. The fish could not be tempted with bare hooks.  
  
Those hooks were all that remained of the jungle packs we should have had. All bombers in that region carry these packs, zippered into the cushions of parachutes. Each is supposed to contain a flashlight, jungle knife, fish hooks and lines, hard biscuit, and chocolate. Mechanics and others around airfields are always pilfering them, however. I remember hoping that whoever had taken our hardtack and chocolate might someday be as hungry as we were then.  
  
When we had stretched ourselves, Col. Adamson produced our next to last orange. We got no physical benefit from our tiny segments, but they moistened the mouth and we had come to look forward to the daily dole.  
  
As I considered that tomorrow we would have our last one, I began to weigh the possibility that our situation might be desperate. We had seen no sign of ship or plane. This indicated to me that we must be literally hundreds of miles from any America military installations, because patrol planes cover vast areas, alert for Japanese submarines and surface craft. The younger fellows still watched for them daily, their hopes high each morning.  
  
Rickenbacker and Cherry were noncommittal. I definitely was uneasy. Col. Adamson appeared to have lost hope, but kept his own counsel. Alex by this time was sick beyond caring. There had been some speculation about whether Cherry's undershirt sail would take us to an island. I thought not; not soon, anyway. Our progress was obviously very slow. And we had seen during our box flight that there was no land in the area covered. I estimated this as being about 165 miles square, based on our speed and the distance we could see on either side of our line of flight on each of the four legs of the box course.  
  
These thoughts were interrupted by the start of a discussion as amazing as any I ever had sat in. Bill Cherry had baited a hook with a bit of orange peel, but the fish still were not interested.  
  
"Do you suppose," he asked, "that we could use fingernail parings or something like that for bait?" Johnny Bartek overheard and replied:  
  
"Naw. The only thing we've got for bait is our own hides." This presented a startling possibility.  
  
"What part would you use?" I asked.  
  
"The lobe of the ear," he said promptly. "You don't need it and you wouldn't miss it."  
"How about the ball of the little finger?" I suggested. "A quick slice wouldn't cause much pain and there would be very little chance of infection."  
  
"I think a piece of toe would do it," Jimmy Reynolds cut in. "That way nobody would ever know you'd been disfigured."  
  
Remember, we were deadly serious, grotesque as this talk may seem now. We were growing weaker and all realized there would have to be food soon. Someone asked Rickenbacker's opinion.  
  
"Flesh would serve as bait if it should become necessary," he said, but would make no suggestion as to the form the butchery should take. Just when and whether we would have begun carving ourselves up for bait I don't know and never will. Because just then there came a startling interruption.  
  
A moment before, the air above us had been empty. Now there was a loud flapping of wings. Without warning and as natural as anything, a sea swallow alighted on Rickenbacker's head.  
  
We held our breath.  
  
The bird, about half the size of a seagull, looked curiously at each of us in turn - as well it might. Rick's hand moved up slowly. He rubbed his chin. He caressed his nose. He smoothed an eyebrow. Then, with a swift snatch, he made the bird prisoner.  
  
Rick carved him up. I got a leg. And let me say here and now that I will have to be starving before I ever taste sea swallow again. Not only is the flesh rank, but the muscles are like iron wires. I will say, however, sea swallow plumbing makes excellent bait.  
  
We dropped the hooks over the side, I using my ring as a sinker. In another minute I had hauled in a fish about the size of my hand. While I was getting him off the hook, someone else hauled in another about the same size.  
  
We pulled the rafts together and handed our catch over to the Colonel. Never was a man watched so closely as Adamson while he carved with one of the sheath knives. Each of us received a fish steak about an inch square and just a little over half an inch thick.  
  
This is about the size they are in some of our better restaurants. We, however, didn't have to pay $1.75 for ours. There was no strengthening effect in our meal that I could detect and afterward I was even thirstier. Perhaps I should blame that on the sea swallow leg.  
  
My thirst increased as the sun drove higher toward the zenith. During midafternoon my craving for water seemed to grow unbearable. I was able to forget it for a while after the heat had passed; that is, until the sun's nightly show. Then I got to thinking about strawberry, raspberry, lemon and grape again - with plenty of ice. Just as I had driven these things out of my mind, Cherry fired the evening flare. Its red glare made me think of strawberry once more.  
  
The night was cold and miserable. We had to do some bailing because of choppy, sloshing waves. And, as usual, I found myself welcoming the morning sun, although I knew I would be swearing at it before many hours had passed. At half light Cherry sent up the flare, a dud. I was half pleased; the red glare could have brought back my cravings, I thought. The damage was done, however, by the sight of the thing and I soon was thinking of strawberry sodas again.  
  
While we were sitting there miserable and depressed, an ill-advised school of minnows swept past; I should say some of them got past. We scooped up enough to allow each of us about three 2 1/2 inch, semi-translucent fish. It was the first time I ever had eaten live hors d'oeuvres. All I needed to follow them was a good meal.  
  
The others may have been thinking along the same lines, because the talk turned to food and nearly drove us all crazy. Bill Cherry said that when we were rescued he would take us to eat at a famous restaurant atop a San Francisco hotel.  
  
Then he played waiter. Pretending to have a pad and pencil, he started taking our orders. Most everyone started out with about a dozen kinds of chilled fruit juices; pineapple, orange, grapefruit, apple, tomato, and others. For some inexplicable reason, everyone wanted strawberry.  
  
Then came the steaks, roasts, chops, turkey, and heaping platters of cold meats with jellied consommé - ice cold - and plenty of lemons. No one wanted fish. Finally I yelled that I would brain the next man who mentioned food. There was silence for a while.  
  
I think it was Johnny Bartek who started talking about the luscious hamburgers you can get back in New Jersey. We were off again. We decided that our previous menus had been too elaborate and agreed to settle for malted milk - strawberry malteds, of all flavors! This is genuinely odd, because few of us ever had drunk anything except chocolate malteds. But the craving for that particular drink - and flavor - stayed with me torturingly for many a day to come.  
  
At last Bill Cherry remarked in his Texas drawl that he guessed he'd gather all the food we'd dreamed up and trade if for a big frosted pitcher of water with ice cubes floating in it. We all bellowed at him to shut up.  
  
While this was going on, the rafts had been strung out in a line, pulled along by Cherry's undershirt sail. Everyone now felt pretty blue. At length Bartek got out his Testament and by common consent we pulled the rafts together for a prayer meeting. We said the Lord's prayer. I should make it clear that the others said the Lord's prayer. I only knew a word here and there.  
  
I was exposed to religion and Bible teaching in my two boyhood homes, Cape Girardeau, Mo., and Pueblo, Colo., but I lost it all knocking around in the years after. My feeling that day on the raft was a considerable modification of my impatience when DeAngelis had asked to pray as the plane was heading down into the sea.  
  
I didn't have the least notion that this open-air hallelujah meeting was going to do any good; neither did I resent it. I simply felt it couldn't do any harm. In addition, it probably would be good for morale. I observed that Rick seemed to encourage the suggestion and appeared inclined to take part.  
  
Col. Adamson was reading from the Testament. Suddenly Cherry stopped him.  
  
"What was that last, Colonel?" he demanded. "Where is that from?"  
  
"It is from the Gospel According to Matthew," Col. Adamson replied. "Do you like it?"  
  
"It's the best thing I've heard yet. Read it again, Colonel."  
  
Col. Adamson then read from the 31st through the 34th verses of the sixth chapter of Matthew:  
  
" 'Therefore, take ye no thought, saying: What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For these are things the heathen seeketh. For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' "  
  
I was somewhat impressed and said so. Then I was a little surprised at myself and added that the evil certainly had been sufficient unto the the last two or three days.  
  
Cherry explained that these verses did not mean tomorrow literally, perhaps. They meant soon. I thought of these words during the wet, dreary night that followed. I dismissed them finally with the decision I would believe when I saw the food and rink. I was destined to see something startlingly like proof the following night.

**Chapter Seven**

As the coppery sun shot into the sky on our sixth day adrift we all began to realize the gravity of our situation. It had been almost 120 hours since our Flying Fortress had disappeared beneath the waves.

During that time each of us had had three minnows, one morsel of raw fish, and a fragment of sea swallow in the way of solid food. We also had moistened our mouths with three segments of orange. If you ever have to try it you find there is mighty little nourishment in such a diet. We had drunk no water since we left the plane.  
  
As we pulled the rafts together for a morning Scripture reading I scrutinized my companions. They all were haggard. I suppose I must have been, too. I felt haggard, certainly. Alex looked a little better I thought. Col. Adamson looked like a man who has resigned himself to the inevitable.  
  
I didn't know it until afterward, but the Colonel's ordeal was far greater than ours. He was suffering from an ailment that required daily injections of a medicine he did not have with him.  
  
At the end of our service and while the rafts still were drawn together, Col. Adamson divided the last of our four oranges. We had gone without the day before because of the minnow catch. Again we moistened our throats and again the tangy juice accentuated our thirst.  
  
My own reaction to lack of water, however, was not so much thirst as dryness. It seemed as though all the water in me had been baked out. The wet trunks about my head and neck helped some, but salt water, after the first day or two, stings and burns the body. I didn't want merely to drink water. I wanted to wallow in it. It seemed that I could soak it up by the gallons through my pores.  
  
Everyone knew by now we were out of the way of either ships or planes; in one of those culs de sac of the Pacific that may go years without a visit from ship or plane. The hopes stirred within me by last night's prayer service had vanished in the face of what I was fond of calling "hard reality."  
  
The rafts were back in line by this time and we were waiting for our daily beating from the sun. Those days of merciless and heat and nights of chilling cold; those days of thirst and hunger and sharks would only be a blur in my mind now I suppose if it hadn't been for my diary. I wrote in it every day except six on that cruise.  
  
Almost every night the dashing spray would soak it through and the next day I would dry its pages in the blazing sun. It puts me back out on those to read some of those entries. Our sixth day was much like the others had been, except that it was the worst - up to that time.  
  
When the cool of evening finally came it was quite a while before we could summon the energy to assemble the rafts and open our prayer service. As Col. Adamson began to read from Bartek's Testament it appeared ridiculous to me that men as practical as we and as hardboiled - and some of us were pretty hardboiled - could expect a mumbling voice out on that waste of water to summon help for us.  
  
However, I joined passively in the prayers. I found I was learning the Lord's prayer. I could start with the rest and finish the first two lines. And, of course, I could join in on the "Amen." There was a general prayer for food in which I joined, still passively.  
  
Cherry repeated his favorite passage about food and drink on the morrow.  
  
"Always tomorrow," I thought bitterly. "What is this; a come-on game?" But we were approaching an experience that was to make me wonder greatly.  
  
Cherry finished his verse from Matthew. His voice went on. I realized with a start that Cherry was praying. He was addressing the Lord as "Old Master." He was saying it with deference and reverence; simply and directly. It was obvious he was deeply in earnest:  
  
"Old Master, we know this isn't a guarantee we'll eat in the morning. But we're in an awful fix, as You know. We sure are counting on a little something by day after tomorrow, as least. See what You can do for us, Old Master."  
  
This is the way we all came to talk to God; just as we would talk to anyone we respected and from whom we craved a boon. We made it simple. There were no "thee's" and "thou's." There was nothing irreverent or kidding about it. Men don't kid when the chips are down.  
  
Cherry finished his talk to God. Then he fired off our evening flare in the hope that something might happen. And it did! Though it was nothing any of us could have forecast.  
  
The flare's propulsion charge was faulty and the flaming ball rose 50 feet or so into the air, then fell back among the rafts. It hissed and zigzagged around the water, blazing a brilliant red. One contact with a raft airchamber would have meant the finish of somebody. The dazzling red light illuminated the ocean for hundreds of yards and in the depths we could see barracuda playing havoc with a school of fish attracted by the glare.  
  
Two fair-sized specimens, pursued by the barracuda, broke water and plumped into our raft. We had just time to grab them when the flare sputtered and died. The moon came out and shed a ghostly light on the ocean. Fish were for breakfast, but I was too puzzled to sleep.  
  
It was Rickenbacker, as I recall it, who carved up our fish tidbits on the seventh morning. They were moist and dampened our parched mouths, but even in normal times fish makes one thirsty enough to drink a quart of water. And we didn't have a drop.  
  
Our mental state grew lower. Col. Adamson seemed worse off in this respect than anyone, even including Alex. I saw Rickenbacker looking sharply about him, especially at the Colonel. I thought once he was about to speak. He changed his mind, apparently.  
  
Col. Adamson sat, head bowed, in a sort of sorrowful daze. Then, in midafternoon, when the heat was at its worst, he suddenly raised himself over the side of the raft and slid into the water.  
  
Quick as a flash, Rick had him. We hurriedly pulled the rafts in close and helped push the Colonel  
back into his boat. Looked at broadly, it was a brave thing he tried to do. He thought that if he were out of the way there would be more of everything and a better chance for the others. But it made us all pretty mad at the time.  
  
It was then that Rick took over. I will not put down all the things he said. They would scorch this paper. But from then on, woe betide the man who appeared about to turn quitter or who did anything to lower the morale of the others. That man Rickenbacker has got a rough tongue in his head. And he's not bashful!  
  
The afternoon seemed longer that seventh day than ever before. The swells heaved our rafts around and the broiling sun glinted on the blue water - so cool looking and inviting. The sharks about us looked sleek, cool, and happy. Sharks could drink salt water; why couldn't man?  
  
It was unavoidable that now and then a dash of spray would catch someone with his mouth open and the few drops of sea water that passed our lips were bitter as well as salty. the spray had left crystals of salt on our faces so that they prickled and burned as irritatingly as did our bodies.  
  
So it was that on this night we prayed for water rather than for food. Except in the verses from Matthew, I don't think food was mentioned. We were so nearly done that we didn't even fire a flare before starting on our wet, miserable night.  
  
There is little to tell about the eighth morning and afternoon. My diary for the first part of that day, Oct. 28, contains chiefly my own thoughts and they must have been pretty rambling. I note that the day was a smooth scorcher. And that means it was the old routine.

A great ball of a sun, rising briskly to get about the business of putting a nice, crisp crust on us. (We were already browned to a turn.) Wan, whiskered faces lifted to the sky in the vain hope of seeing a plane. Watery, bleary eyes trying to study the horizon in the equally vain hope of a ship.  
  
Ten o'clock. The heat increasing to oven intensity. Noon to five - blessed stupor. Then, a gradual return of our sensibilities and our consciousness of misery, pain and thirst.  
  
But the events of that day from late afternoon can never can be driven from my memory. The time came for the prayer service and it was a chore to haul the rafts alongside one another.  
  
I joined more wholeheartedly than ever before in the prayers. It may have been because of my terrible need or it may have been a growing conviction that no human agency, acting alone could save us. I don't know.  
  
I found now that I could say half the Lord's prayer without stumbling along behind the others.  
  
"Our Father, Who art in Heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name . . ."  
  
Johnny Bartek's voice rose youthful and clear above the Colonel's muttered words and Bill Cherry's Southwestern drawl.  
  
"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,  
On earth, as it is in Heaven. . ."  
  
I could hear my own voice, mumbling along sometimes past the places where the rest paused.  
  
"Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us."  
  
Here I was forced to drop out while the other voices went on. From the little raft came DeAngelis's voice clear enough, but Alex's was a mere whisper. Jimmy Reynolds sat beside me, his head bowed, speaking distinctly but very low. Rickenbacker's words, though uttered reverently, were forceful and audible throughout the prayer.  
  
"Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil,  
for Thine is the kingdom, the power  
And the glory, forever . . ."  
  
I came in on the "Amen" as usual. When the group prayer had been completed, Cherry addressed the Lord in his forthright fashion:  
  
"Old Master, we called on You for food and You delivered. We ask You now for water. We've done the best we could. If you don't make up Your mind to help us pretty soon, I guess that's all there'll be to it. It looks like the next move is up to You, Old Master."  
  
I think now that that prayer, despite its informal wording, has just about everything in it a prayer should have. It presents a petition to God and at the same time expresses resignation to God's will. Finally, it implies the belief - the faith - that the petition will be granted.  
  
We said the Lord's prayer again. Cherry hoisted his undershirt sail and the rafts strung themselves out into a line.  
  
While we rolled and wallowed over the crests and into the troughs I was thinking that this was God's chance to make a believer of Jim Whittaker. If there was indeed a God and He could ignore a prayer like that, then he must be a pretty heartless being.  
  
My thoughts went on in this vein for some time; I don't know how long. I do know that eventually I became aware something was tugging insistently at my consciousness. I looked over to the left. A cloud that had been fleecy and white a while ago was darkening by the second.  
  
While I watched a bluish curtain unrolled from the cloud to sea. It was rain - and moving toward us! Now everyone saw the downpour, sweeping across the ocean and speckling the waves with giant drops.  
  
"Here she is!" Cherry shouted. "Thanks, Old Master!" Another minute and we were being deluged by sheets of cold water that splashed into our parched mouths and sluiced the caked salt off our burned and stinging bodies. We cupped our hands to guide the life-giving rivulets down our throats.  
  
For a time we could think only of the blessed relief of the moment. Then the more practical minds began turning toward the days ahead, which might hold as much privation as had those just ended. We looked about for storage facilities.  
  
The only reservoirs immediately available were our Mae Wests. As the valve openings into them were very small, we hit upon this plan: We soaked and wrung out our shirts until ass the salt was washed out of them. Then we saturated them again and wrung the water into our mouths. It was easy in this way to deposit it into the life jackets, closing the valve afterward.  
  
Not as sanitary as it might be? In our predicament you don't think of those things; I didn't until weeks afterward.  
  
The rain lashed down nearly an hour, soothing our bodies and quenching our thirst. Then, as though the Lord wanted to remind us that He can take away as well as give, a giant wave swept up from nowhere and capsized our raft. We lost our four remaining flares and all three Very pistols.  
The only articles saved were one empty flare shell and Cherry's Mae West, which fortunately took in no salt water. Our hoard of more than a quart of fresh water was safe.

**Chapter Eight**

Faith is a fragile thing and elusive. It is all too easily shattered or lost.

As the sun rose on our ninth day adrift the opinion was fairly general among our band that we all would die in our rafts out there on the Pacific. This was in the face of the life-saving rain of the evening before and which I had regarded as a pretty convincing answer to prayer.

I was stronger and much more encouraged that morning. I am sure Rickenbacker did not share the general gloom. Rick and I were the oldest of the crowd and we both had been in some tight places in our knockings around. I think a man can tell whether it's his turn or not. I didn't think it was mine. I was glad, too, that Eddie Rickenbacker was along, because he is "the man who always comes back." I figured that if he could come out of it, so could I.

We started the day with sips of water, rationed by Bill Cherry. Each of us got 1 1/2 inches in the bottom of the flare shell - about 1 1/2 jiggers. And during the morning, the Lord provided something more in the way of food.

Among our shark escort was a little fellow about two feet long. He kept wheeling around our boat while the big sharks scraped off their barnacles by scooting under.

Cherry got to teasing the little guy with an unbaited fish hook. He must have been young and curious because to our surprise he swallowed the barb and hooked himself. Cherry hauled him over, speared him with a sheath knife, and yanked him into the raft.

The fight was on and it was a rouser. That little devil jumped and slashed and whipped about with his tail. This was at uncomfortably close quarters.

When there are three men in one of those emergency rafts there is little room for a wounded and enraged two foot shark. Our boat careened, took water, and once almost capsized.

At length Cherry got one leg over the shark and drove his knife through its head. The battle was over, but the blade had passed through the fish and pierced the canvas bottom of the raft. now a geyser of water shot up.

Cherry kept it plugged with a finger until it occurred to us that we could use a cartridge from one of the .45 caliber pistols which thus far had been useless to us. It was an exact fit and for several days served the purpose admirably.

Meanwhile, we passed over the shark's carcass to Col. Adamson for butchering and rationing. The steaks that resulted were raw and rank, of course, but we imagined we felt better. As I have said, we were beyond craving food now. As usual, our thirst was intensified by the fish and we were glad to get our next ration of water in the flare shell; glad also to rid ourselves of the taste.

Few people realize how much the human body can take and still come through. Fortunately, not many have to find out the hard way. Physicians have told me since that just a few bites of food and a little water can prolong for days the life of a starving man. It may be that the oranges, fish, minnows and shark provided just those bites we needed, though all the good we had in that period could be put into an ordinary teacup, with room to spare.

At prayers after our scalding ninth day, I joined feelingly in the worship. I know this: I wanted to believe. Yet, in all honesty, I must confess that there remained enough of my old and false pride to make me say to myself: "Let's not overlook any bets."

During the night it seemed that the fellows were more restless and slept less than usual. It was true. A new trouble had come upon us.

The rising sun of our tenth day disclosed that all the men except me had fallen victims to the scourge deep-water men dread - salt water ulcers. Salt from the spray first had dehydrated, then chapped their skins. Two or three days before the ulcers developed rashes had appeared.

Eruptions and ulcers followed in rapid order. There was constant danger of infection, but it was the pain that held attention just now. To touch one of them was like touching a boil - which is about what they were.

There was much beefing as the fellows inadvertently rubbed against one another. As the hot day wore on tempers flared. There were some near physical clashes. Because I had escaped the scourge I acted as peacemaker and I had to be a heavy handed peacemaker at times.

Cherry handed out the last of the water that morning. We doubled and twisted the life jacket to get the last drop out of it and looked longingly at the dampness that remained inside the flare shell. There was an extra dole for Alex, who now was much weaker than rest of us. Even Col. Adamson appeared robust in comparison - and he was far from well.

The waterless afternoon in the equatorial heat seemed to take something out of us, physically and mentally. That evening Bill Cherry led the Lord's prayer, which I knew pretty well by now. Then each fellow prayed individually.

I could tell more about those prayers; the promises made to God to lead new lives if He should spare them. But it wouldn't be right to identify the men with their supplications. I guess we who were in those rafts know more about one another now than our mothers ever did. And I think is just as well that the mothers didn't.

One of us pledged to be a better husband and father if he were spared. Another promised to provide for those dependent upon him. There were open confessions of past sins. I don't mind acknowledging that out there on that empty ocean I made resolutions. And I am keeping them.

For example, since the rescue I made up with a brother to whom I hadn't spoken in 15 years. Four months ago I couldn't be with anyone 15 minutes without having an argument or a fight. I could see little good in anyone and believed chiefly in Jim Whittaker.

Now, I am willing to accept anyone as being decent and good until he proves himself otherwise. A few of my friends still treat me as though I might be a time bomb, likely to go off at any second. But my new outlook is going to be part of me to the end of my days.

On the tenth evening, Bill Cherry again spoke to the Lord, in behalf of us all, addressing him as usual as "Old Master." After acknowledging that Providence had saved us more than once, Cherry put it this way:

"You wouldn't have let us live this long if You didn't intend to save us after a while, would You, Old Master? We need some more of that rain in the worst way. How's about it, Old Master?"

One man, when his turn came, prayed that God would kill him and end his sufferings. Rickenbacker jumped right down his throat.

"Cut that out!" he yelled. "If you want to pray, pray that the help that's coming will hurry and get here. Don't bother Him with that whining. He answers MEN'S prayers, but not that stuff!"

When Rick prayed, he always addressed the Lord as "Our Father." He asked oftenest that those who had herd our signals be guided to our rafts while we all still lived. He asked also that we be led to a landfill where we might find the food and drink that would strengthen us sufficiently to help us help ourselves. Once he added:

"You, Our Father, know we are not asking You to do it all. We will help ourselves, if You will give us a chance."

Rickenbacker never has professed to be a religious man, as such. But out there in those rafts I think we all learned that he has the kind of practical religion that makes this world better to live in. Here are his own words, spoken after he was rescued:

"No," he said in answer to a question, "I am not a religious man in any formal way. But I did have enough faith to hold me in this experience. I can say truthfully that I never doubted that we would be saved."

"I do have a sort of religion of my own; I hold to the Golden Rule and I believe most firmly that if a man just follows what he knows and feels is in his heart then he can't go far wrong and is possessed of religion enough to get by in any man's land."

After that evening's service we felt somewhat refreshed spiritually. I had a feeling that something good would happen soon.

**Chapter Nine**

Throughout the late watches of the chilling night I sat sleeplessly thinking over our condition and the state of my own soul. It was not a pleasant line of thought

I had been an agnostic; an atheist, if you will. I am not sure I am using either term correctly. I imagined that I doubted the existence of such a being as God. I reasoned further, when religion was mentioned, that God never had done much for me in my life, so why should I go through the motions of worshipping Him? The most I could salvage was that I at least had never been a hypocrite.

I pondered that night on an expression I had heard somewhere out in the Southwest Pacific: "There are no atheists in the foxholes of Guadalcanal." I can tell you now that there can be no atheists in rubber rafts amid whitecaps and sharks in the equatorial Pacific.

I was finding my God in those watery wastes and we were meeting as strangers. I don't deny that there was still a reluctance, somewhere deep within me. After 40 years and more of indifference and selfishness, it would have been strange indeed if I hadn't felt something of the sort.

We might have remained strangers, had it not been for Him. He soon was to send the two divine miracles that twice more were to save my life and change the way of it about as completely as a life can be changed.

My thoughts now shifted to the physical state of our little band. It seemed years since we had eaten Bill Cherry's baby shark. but somehow that didn't matter. I wasn't hungry anymore. The thing I felt I must have before another day had passed was water - and lots of it. I prayed. I began to believe we would have the water; He would send it.

But I had a feeling also of apprehension. In more than ten days of helpless drifting with thirst, hunger, heat, and the ever-present shadow of death as my companions, I seemed to have become strangely psychic. We had endured the first three. Now Death was ready to strike at our little band.

The sun rose behind a bank of threatening clouds on that 11th morning. As it grew brighter we could see rain squalls dotting the ocean. The clouds we drifting low in the distance would open up without warning and that deep blue curtain we had so often prayed for would descend to the sea.

While we watched, a heavy black cloud floated over us and the bottom seemed to fall out of it. The rain flooded down on our rafts.

We were wise this time and used every facility available for catching and storing water. I have spoken before of the rubber seats that we inflated by hand, separately from the raft itself. We now cut one of these out of our boat and used it as a rain catcher, storing the water in Bill Cherry's Mae West. We slaked our thirst. And again the sheets of cleansing and cooling water washed our bodies free of the caked salt. This was a grand relief for the men who were suffering from salt water ulcers.

We had put away four quarts of rain water when a squall hit our area and we were kept busy bailing the rafts and keeping them from going over. The two bigger ones weathered the blow. the wind was too much, however, for the doughnut in which DeAngelis and Alex Kaczmarczyk were riding. Just as the rain was ending, the little raft went over.

We soon saw that Alex was unable to get back in alone. DeAngelis was trying to help him. DeAngelis was weak also and it was too much for him. We all helped and after a struggle got Alex back into his place. It was obvious that he was in a bad way.

Thirst, hunger, exposure, and exhaustion had dissipated the little store of strength he had mustered after his discharge from the hospital at Honolulu. DeAngelis now told us that Alex had been drinking salt water during moments of delirium.

Alex was delirious now. He didn't recognize us. His head felt hot. Every now and then he would call out some meaningless remark. Rickenbacker spoke to him sharply, trying to snap him out of it. Then realizing the Sergeant's true condition, Rick ordered that he be put in the larger raft. Johnny Bartek was sent over to ride the doughnut boat with DeAngelis.

During the day Alex was given regular doles of water. If there had only been nourishing food to give him! All that night Rickenbacker held the boy in his arms to protect him from the spray and to keep him warm. He appeared improved at dawn of the 12th day, but it was the last dawn he ever was to see.

Alex remained rational during the morning, becoming delirious only after the sun had driven the clouds away in the early afternoon. He rallied again when it got cooler and just at dark he said he felt well enough to spend the night in his own raft. We all were greatly relieved. If he could hold out just a little longer!

DeAngelis now moved into Rickenbacker's boat and Bartek remained in the little raft with Alex, who was able to whisper his part in the saying of the Lord's prayer at our service. The rafts strung out again in line and for a time all was quiet except for the slap and slosh of the ocean.

Alex's delirium returned late in the night. The things he said and talked about I haven't the heart to repeat. They concerned his mother and a girl. Sometime after midnight his voice dropped to a mumble. At 2 A.M. Bartek called to us:

"Hey, you fellows; I'm afraid Alex is dead."

We hauled the small raft up so that it lay between the two larger ones. Rickenbacker examined him and asked that Cherry and I do the same. It was true. Rickenbacker said we could do nothing until daylight. The rafts were allowed to string out again.

When our 13th dawn came up, I saw that Johnny Bartek had been holding his little Testament in his hands, although it was too dark to read. The east flamed up in spectacular shafts of red, purple, and gold. the sun seemed to leap out of the sea into the sky.

With the fleet reassembled we said the Lord's prayer. Then Lieut. DeAngelis recited as much as he could remember of the moving Roman Catholic burial service. Both he and Alex were of that faith. I remember a little here and there:

"O God, great and omnipotent Judge of the living and dead! Before Whom we are all to appear after this short life: Let our hearts be moved at this sight of death, and as we consign the body to the sea, let us be mindful of our own frailty and mortality . . .Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord, and may eternal light shine upon him."

Johnny Bartek fastened the zippers of Alex's flying suite. We said the Lord's prayer again and put him into the water. I could see him there for a long time. Nothing bothered him.

We held our usual morning prayer service, then we were quiet for a long time. Alex had been a good boy. It was maddening to think we lacked the food and medicines that would have saved him. We had done all we could.

The burial service took our minds off ourselves for a time. The blazing heat was not long, however, in bringing back our thirst and intensifying the agonies of the six afflicted with salt water ulcers. I think I was more depressed than at any other time. It was hard to keep from seeing in Alex's fate the precursor of my own.

I couldn't know, of course, that the first of the two miracles was almost upon us. The thing that happened was miraculous then and it grows in proportion as I think of it now.

This 13th day adrift had burst upon us as a scorcher. Just after 10 o'clock a rain squall blotted out the sun. Our hopes rose. the familiar blue curtain of rain moved toward us across the sea. We prayed aloud for it to reach us. It was less than a quarter of a mile off when a perverse wind shunted it away.

Somehow, my faith did not die. For the first time I found myself leading the rest in prayer. Like many of the others, I didn't know how to address God properly. I talked to him, therefore, as I would have to a parent or a friend.

"God," I prayed, "You know what that water means to us. The wind has blown it away. It is in Your power, God, to send back that rain. It's nothing to You, but it means life to us."

Some of the others had given up. Someone said in disgust that the bloody wind would blow in that direction for another 40 years. I took my cue from this and continued:

"God, the wind is Yours. You own it. Order it blow back that rain to us who will die without it."

There are some things that can't be explained by natural law. The wind did not change, but the receding curtain of rain stopped where it was. Then, ever so slowly, it started back toward us - against the wind!

Maybe a meteorologist can explain that to your satisfaction. One tried it with me; something about cross currents buffeting the squall back. I tell you that there was no buffeting. It moved back with majestic deliberation. It was as if a great and omnipotent hand was guiding it to us across the water. And for my money, that's exactly what happened.

We caught a great store of water and luxuriated as the cool deluge flooded down our bodies. Many of the men had shed skin three or four times by now. There were raw spots where they had chafed against the walls of the narrow rafts. In addition, the ulcers were growing worse hourly.

Those men will know until the end of their days what it means to have salt in a wound. the cool rain that came from the skies was their only relief.

The rain that came that day was a Godsend. I use the capital G intentionally. Without this relief I don't know how we would have goth through the four days of doldrums that were just ahead and which were to be the most terrible part of our ordeal.

**Chapter Ten**

In our days of drifting along the equator we had had our share of the rains and sudden squalls that mark that section of the Pacific. And on the morning of the 14th day we went into the doldrums. There was no breeze at dawn nor did any arise during the day.

It was to be the worst period of the entire three weeks for more reasons than thirst and hunger. About me was suffering such as I had never seen before. Of the seven survivors I was the only one whose lower body was not a mass of ulcers.

And now our clothing was disintegrating. The violent sun rays were beginning to inflict serious burns. My socks had gone to pieces and my shirt was splitting down the back, the sleeves, and the front. I had left my shoes in the plane.

We had water, but the tiny daily dole in the bottom of the flare shell only made us thirstier. Hunger had so weakened us that the slightest effort was exhausting. We hadn't eaten in days, because the slat air had rotted the fish lines, enabling the sharks to snap them and carry off the hooks. Anyway, we had no bait. None of us could have stood a flight physical; or a Boy Scout physical for that matter.

This was our situation when our rafts drifted into the doldrums. It is not strange that all of us now had touches of delirium. It was while going through one of those balmy periods that I had my fantastic meeting with Davy Jones and his genial assistance, Jim Blood. Though this meeting was a product of delirium it is one of my most vivid memories, oddly enough. But more of that later.

In the doldrums there was no breath of wind to refresh us. The ocean was glassy and glaring as far as we could see. Our eyes ached in the merciless, blinding light.

One or two stanza from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" came back to me then and I thought it fitted our situation pretty well. I have reread it since, and except that we had no mast or deck boards, there are four verses that might have been written about our party. They tell it so graphically it puts me back in that raft to read them. These are the stanzas:

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down -  
"Twas sad as sad could be;  
And we did speak only to break  
The silence of the sea.

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water everywhere  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.

It was during this period that Eddie Rickenbacker worked hardest at keeping up morale. How he would light into those who sagged! He kept the boys so furious at him they vowed they'd live just to spite him. This was especially true of two of the party.

Rickenbacker's keen ears seemed to catch every remark. If it was a discouraging one, he would jump right down the throat of the man who had uttered it.

"What's that? What's that?" he would yell. "So YOU'RE off again, are you? Why you blankety blank blank quitter! When we get out of this you'd better crawl home to the women where you belong. How did you ever get into the army anyway?"

One man who had provoked a particularly scathing call-down from Rick asked later to shake hands. Rick told him:

"I'm glad to shake hands with any MAN. When you've proved to me that you're one, I'll be tickled to death to put it there."

In those four days, he slung some mighty powerful plain and fancy cussing. I'm not much of a cusser, myself. I got out of the habit while my son was growing up. But I think Rick was using his vocabulary in a good cause. It certainly got results. And, I must say, it helped pass the time which was going so slowly I though once or twice my watch finally had stopped. All the rest had quit long ago.

Our prayer service ended the 14th day, which was of course the end of a fortnight adrift along the equator. This night we had a new prayer to present to the Lord; a pleas for wind to blow us out of the doldrums. We were being held helpless in one spot while our strength ebbed.

When the 15th morning dawned without wind, Bill Cherry announced he was cutting loose in the hope the three rafts would spread out and one of them would get into the wind and be blown toward help. He dropped our line, but nothing happened. The rafts stayed together. Eventually we tied up again.

It was that afternoon that Cherry had his bout with a 10 foot shark - and lost the decision. The big fellow was nosing around, at intervals scooting under our raft to scrape off his barnacles. Each time the shark went under he smacked the bottom of the boat with his tail, jolting Jimmy Reynolds, who lay there. Jimmy had been feeling very low.

Cherry started telling off that shark. He told him what he thought of him individually, his relatives, his ancestors, and sharks generally. When he had tired himself out, he dropped into a doze on the gunwale of the raft. Suddenly there was a terrific jolt and a roar of pain.

"My nose is broken!" Cherry yelled.

I looked around and was inclined to agree with him. The insulted shark had let go a might wallop with his tail, catching Cherry squarely in the face and knocking him into the bottom of the boat on top of Reynolds. Blood was gushing from bill's nose. I thought we would never get it stopped. A month later it was still sore and he was afraid a cartilage had been broken.

I will say to the reader no just what I told Bill Cherry then. If you have anything insulting to say to a shark, wait until you are safely back in San Francisco, then write him a letter.

There is no entry in my diary for the 16th day adrift and only one for the 17th. This reads:

"Still in doldrums. Water low. Hopes low."

It was during this period that I thought I met Davy Jones, the mythical keeper of lost sailors' souls. I am told it is unusual for a man to remember the creatures of his delirium. I know only this: That the things I relate now are more vivid in my mind than many that actually happened, even though these were delusions of a mind set off kilter by thirst, hunger, and suffering.

On one of those nights - it could have been either the 16th or the 17th - it seemed I heard a voice:

"This is Davy Jones, Jim. Come on down; down to my locker. I want to see you."

I remember thinking I had nothing to lose. So, it seemed in my delirium, I slid over the side of the raft, being careful Rick didn't see me go, and slipped down and down through the warm water. On the bottom I came face to face with Davy, a powerfully built man with a white mustache that curled down over the corners of his mouth. With him was his assistant, Jim Blood.

"Are you ready to come down here for good?" Davy asked.

I told him no. Jim Blood then began talking to me. I liked Jim better than Davy. He wasn't so austere. he was powerfully built also, but clean shaven. He was suave and genial and treated me about like the sales manager of an aircraft corporation would treat his best customer.

"Jim, we're all ready for down here," Blood told me. "You'd better stay. You don't belong on land. You belong with us. You're a sailor and all sailors should stay here. (I had been in the Navy from 1919 to 1922.) How about it?"

I thanked Jim, but I told him I wasn't ready yet; that I had things to do back in San Francisco and elsewhere. Jim laughed and said I'd be welcome any time.

In my delirious fancy I went back to the raft. Voices would call "Hello" to me across the stern. I answered and asked their names. These they always gave me.

I called several times for Jim Blood to come up to the raft and talk. He never failed me. Each time, though, he wanted to know if I was ready to back with him to Davy Jones' locker. I like that fellow.

On the 17th night, I think it was, it seemed to me that the raft was an open automobile and that we were traveling down a lane with night clubs and roadhouse on either side.

There was one handsome club at which I had thought we would stop. When we didn't I turned petulantly to Cherry, who I believed was driving the car. I said sharply:

"Bill, why didn't you stop at that big roadhouse with the neon signs:"

"There's a better one a little farther on, Jim," he said soothingly. here Jimmy Reynolds joined the conversation.

"He wouldn't have dared stop on that island anyway, Jim," he said. "I don't know whether I should tell you fellows or not, but they are drilling secretly for oil there. I saw the big condensers they use to get water from the sea."

"What's that? What's that?" This was Rick yelling over from the other raft.

"The oil is a secret," Jimmy went on, "but I think bill Cherry knows all about it."

"He's nuts," Cherry commented. "he . . ."

"Just a minute, now," Rick interrupted. "Let's get to the bottom of this. What island are you talking about? I want to know all about this!"

Later, in Samoa, Rick and I had a good laugh over it.

"I must have been balmy, too," he told me. "But I wasn't overlooking any bets that concerned islands with water condensers on them."

**Chapter Eleven**

Dawn of our 18th day found me in the stern of our raft brooding in a half wakeful stupor. Our morale, I was thinking, had sunk just about as low as it could go. Nothing could depress us further. And, as usual, I was wrong.

During that day, the day after, and the 20th day we were dealt such crushing blows that had it not been for the fortitude built up in hours of prayer I think we all would have abandoned hope. It was my newly found faith in God that sustained me. Of this I am sure.

As the dawn came up I waited for a stirring of wind that would tell me we were free of the doldrums in which we had been stuck more than three days while we grew steadily weaker.

No wind stirred; not even a breeze. The east flamed up like a fantastic forest fire, heralding another scorching day. I shouted imprecations at the sun before it even appeared. the sun and the glaring sea had begun to take on personality. I hated them both as I would hate a human enemy.

The sun peeped over the rim and paused a second or two to leer at us. then it bounded into the sky. the other fellows aroused in their rafts and stretched themselves weakly.

The morning water ration was handed around. An inch in the bottom of the flare shell. I notice the dole was growing smaller. I didn't care much at that writing. The water tasted like hell and only made me thirstier.

At the prayer service I reminded God of the miracle of the rain on the 13th day. I prayed as never before for rescue; not just for water or food, but to be picked up. Memory of the rain miracle seemed to bear me up. As the service closed with the Lord's prayer, which I often led now, something of my old fortitude had returned. I felt that rescue was coming. I prayed again that I might live to see it.

How that day passed I don't know. The sun climbed and the heat became almost unbearable. At noon the daily round of delirious shouts began. There were snatches of crazy song. By this time nearly all of us were holding long and serious conversations with people who weren't there. Jim Blood came up from Davy Jones' locker to talk to me a while.

I could hear his voice, but could not see him. He explained that in daylight and on the surface he had to be invisible. It was not very satisfactory. Then I heard a voice that made me jump. It was my son, Thomas, talking to me. When I left home he had been attached to a naval unit stationed in San Francisco.

"What are you doing out here, Tom?" I asked. When did you leave San Francisco?"

"I was sent to sea over two weeks ago, Dad," he said. "You see - we were sunk. And seeing I was out here I thought I'd just drop in and see how you are getting along."

I heard the voice no more and although I called out again and again I could get no answer. That incident of delirium bedeviled me from then on until I could communicate with my wife and family and be assured that everyone was well. I had heard of persons recently dead appearing to relatives or near friends. And in my abject state on that 18th day adrift I would have believed anything.

After an eternity of blinding agony the sun slid toward the western rim and the heat let up. And then it happened; the thing that almost wrecked us all.

We had had our evening dole of water and were sitting silent. I happened to be looking at Bill Cherry. Suddenly there was a sort of wild look in his eyes.

"I hear an engine!" he yelled. "I hear an engine! Hear it?"

We looked sadly at one another and said nothing. Then, in an instant, like jacks-in-the-box, we all were staring rigidly into the sky.

We ALL heard it; a deep toned roar, muted by distance. Rickenbacker and Cherry saw it at the same time; a plane silhouetted against a low cloud bank in the west and coming in our general direction.

It was a pontoon scout plane, resembling the United States Navy Kingfisher. It occurred to us that it might be a Jap plane. The Japs have one that at that distance resemble the Kingfisher.

But we nearly went crazy - maybe I should say crazier - just the same. It meant we were getting into the vicinity of an air base. Somewhere, not far over the rim, was an outpost of civilization.

The plane was coming fast and we soon could see that its course would take it past us at least three miles distant. You could feel the spontaneous thought: "The flares! Get the flares!"

The flares. It would have taken quite some getting to pick the four flares and the three Very pistols off the ocean floor where they had gone on the eighth day when our raft upset during the squall. Realization of this followed the thought with sickening sadness.

But we hadn't given up yet. We shouted and waved. Cherry wigwagged with his undershirt sail. We prayed. The plane droned on about five miles off. We knew we hadn't been seen.

If some of us didn't weep it was only because there was not enough moisture available in our bodies for tears. Tomblike silence and gloom shrouded our group. But it didn't last long. Rickenbacker was at least two jumps ahead.

I think the cussing Rick unleashed now was the masterpiece of his career. In about a minute he had most of the gang roaring mad. then he got under their skins individually.

He finished up with a broadside at the whole bunch. The psychological effect he produced was just what he had been hoping for. It didn't improve his personal popularity then, but that wasn't his aim. The morale of his companions was all that interested Rick.

With the blankety blanks deleted, here is what he said in effect: That if a plane had come once it would come again. That if there was one plane there were many. If we had moved this close to their base we would move closer. Good things were coming. A MAN would have the courage, the patience, the faith to wait for them.

As if to back up his words there was a puff of wind and then another. A strong, steady breeze followed. Bill Cherry hoisted his undershirt on the two oars. We moved. We were out of the doldrums.

In the morning - our 19th day adrift - it rained. It was not much of a rain and we couldn't store any water. We all got a good sluicing down, however, and we slaked our thirst.

And the rain served yet another purpose. DeAngelis and Bartek, it developed, had been driven to drinking salt water during their delirious sufferings in the doldrums, just as Alex Kaczmarczyk had done shortly before he died. Both now got enough fresh water to flush out the salt.

I am getting just a little ahead of my story here. The sight of the plane, coupled with the rising wind on the 18th night, made sleep an impossibility. I felt that the plane and the wind were signs from God that rescue was not far away.

So it was that I now reviewed mentally the things that God had done for me since that day so long ago when our gallant Flying Fortress disappeared beneath the waves. I thought of the answers I had received to prayer. But most of all I thought of the more important thing - that I had learned to pray. And that I had found my God and had not turned away from Him a stranger.

As I sat pondering, while the rafts slid over the luminous waves, I was drenched by chilling spray and for once neither noticed it nor minded when I found myself soaked through and through.

Our sufferings were not ended and I didn't try to kid myself that they were. I was weaker from hunger than I ever had been in my life. I was so thirsty my throat ached. Yet within me there was a lift that made these other things seem trivial. I prayed - a prayer of thanksgiving.

Jimmy Reynolds moaned in his sleep and rolled about at his end of the raft. That brought me back to "hard reality." the boy had been failing rapidly in the last few days. I hoped and I prayed he would not share Alex's fate; that the rescue would be in time.

Shortly after dawn of the 19th day the scout plane came over again. It was flying at about 1,200 feet and it missed us by three miles. The ship came back in the afternoon at the same height, but we were closer to its course this time. It was obvious now that it was flying regular patrol duty.

Each time it appeared we almost went out of our heads with excitement. Its pilot still failed to see us. And each time, before we could settle into black despond, Rickenbacker was right on the job, working the lads into such fury that the ship became a minor matter.

This was one of the occasions when I was sure the fellows were going to live if only to spite Rick.

**Chapter Twelve**

On the 20th morning, while we were waiting for the early patrol plane to pass over - and not see us - Bill Cherry spoke abruptly:

"Listen, you fellows," he said, "I think it's time we were giving Providence a little help. I'm taking the small raft and cutting loose by myself. If we all spread over a wider area we'll have a 3 to 1 better chance of being seen. When one raft is found they'll start a real search and pick up the others."

This sounded like sense to me, but to our surprise Col. Adamson forbade Cherry to go. He didn't think it wise at this juncture, he said, to separate the company. Why he took this view the Colonel did not explain.

Cherry, however, had made up his mind. He made no reply to the Colonel. Instead he brought our raft abeam of the little one and told DeAngelis to get in with Jimmy Reynolds and me. then he entered the small boat and roped its line.

"I'm telling you not to go!" snapped Adamson. "That is an order. I am the senior officer here."

"That's true," Cherry replied, "but you're not the commanding officer, by a good deal. I was captain and commander of the plane. I am the commanding officer of this party. I'm leaving."

Cherry was correct. Col. Adamson's status in the plane had been the same as Rickenbacker's. Both were passengers. Rickenbacker took no part in the exchange between Cherry and the Colonel. He had no place in it, being a civilian.

Bill had drifted about 100 feet away from us when the patrol plane came over. It was so low and so near we identified it easily as a United States Navy Kingfisher. Still the pilot did not see us. As the plane disappeared I untied our line and let it drop. I looked at Rickenbacker.

"So long, Rick," I said. "I'll be seeing you."

"Good luck to you, Jim," he replied.

"Same to you, Rick, and to the rest of you."

Col. Adamson also forbade me to leave. He repeated that he was the senior officer of the party and added that he was commanding me to remain. He was still wrong. As co-pilot and second in command of the plane I had succeeded to command of the raft party with Cherry's departure. I didn’t argue the point, however, Having already cast off I made no comment and the rafts began drifting apart.

Our boat took a slightly different course than Cherry's and after a few hours no raft was nearer than two or three miles to another. By late afternoon we could sight the others only by straining our eyes. the evening patrol plane roared across our stretch of sea and must have passed almost directly over at least one of our fleet. Again nothing happened.

There was little sleep in our raft that night. We were lonesome for the fellows in the other boats, for one thing. But there was something else. My feeling of the night before that something big was just ahead kept me wakeful. the feeling must have transmitted itself to Johnny and Jimmy because, despite their misery, they seemed expectant and hopeful. And for once we were not to be let down.

In the last hour before light I fell into a deep sleep - and slept through the most important dawn of the three weeks. I had strained my eyes in 20 dawns only to have the rising light disclose an empty ocean, an empty sky, an empty world.

I opened my eyes to our 21st day adrift to find DeAngelis shaking me as roughly as his failing strength would permit. He was gripping my shoulder and calling my name.

"Cut that out!" I yelled. "What's the matter with you?"

"Jim," he said, "I think you'd better take a look. It may be a mirage, but I think I see something."

I rolled over in the raft and sat up. There was no need for him to point. And it was no mirage. Across the horizon stretched a line of palm trees about 10 miles long. At that distance, about 12 miles, I couldn't see any actual land. But I felt safe in assuming there would be something substantial under those palms. There was no sign of the other rafts.

At 6:30 A.M. of Nov. 11 I broke out our two aluminum oars and began what was to be a 7 1/2 hour pull to put dry land under our feet. My two raft mates were in pitiable condition. DeAngelis could still move about, and that was all. He wanted to spell me on the tow to the island, but a few minutes at a time were all he could manage.

Jimmy Reynolds lay prone in the raft. He was preciously near the finish. His eyes had sunk an inch and a half into his skull. His resemblance to a death's head was startling. Jimmy's normal weight is 130 pounds. He weighed 90 a few days later when Navy doctors got to him.

The poor kid exhibited the finest spirit I have ever seen. Though he could hardly lift himself, he kept saying: "I feel all right; just tired. I'll get up in a minute and help you, Jim."

During that long row to the island Jimmy lay down against the gunwale behind me and with the flare shell dipped water which he poured on the back of my head and neck after the heat began to bear down after 10 o'clock. Without I might have collapsed.

We had calculated to get in about noon and I was encouraged by the good time I made. Just before 12 o'clock we had reached a point less than 250 yards from the shore. I had opened my mouth to tell Johnny and Jimmy to start ordering their dinners. Then something happened.

The boat careened and went out of control. Another second or two and we were racing back out to see. Nothing I could do with the oars was any help. the wild current held us until we were far out; a mile or so, at least.

The long narrow island was moving slowly across our bows like a giant ocean liner, crawling out to sea through the Golden Gate. I realized, of course, that the island was stationary. We were drifting, though it seemed the island was leaving us, instead. We had started for the head of the island and now were more than half way down it.

If ever I have cried out in anguish it was then. I was done, finished, washed up. I called Heaven to witness that I was whipped. I could hardly hold on to the light oars. Yet there within reach was the land - and life. And while I watched, that line of majestic palms continued to move away, with terrible deliberation. If we were to reach land at all it would have to be now.

I looked at Jimmy, laying flat again. I looked at Johnny DeAngelis. He was sick and exhausted; bewildered by the thing that had happened to me. Before very long he would be as badly off as Jimmy. I tried to move my numbed fingers and aching arms.

It was no use. Only a miracle could set our feet on that island, I thought; only a miracle. A miracle! I remembered the miracle of the rain on the 13th day. I remembered other answers to prayer. I remembered my God!

I cried out to Him to give me strength. I shouted above the rising wind in the fear He might not hear. I caught a glimpse of DeAngelis's startled face. Still shouting I lifted the oars. I rowed.

Half an hour later I was still rowing - and making progress. When the treacherous current had shot us out to sea I had been powerless to hold the boat against it. Now I was overcoming that current.

I was overcoming it in the face of obstacles and hazards that hadn't beset me before. I have spoken of the rising wind. It brought a deluge of rain that all but blotted out the island. I turned about in the raft and adopted the fisherman's stroke that I might see ahead and better direct our course.

An oar jerked and turned in my hand. I glance that way in time to see a dirty gray form, 12 feet long, disappearing beneath the waves. As I watched, another shark surfaced, slashed at the oar, and slid under. These sharks were not the droll dullards that and plagued us earlier. These were man eaters. If they should attack the raft, we were gone.

The rain slackened and I could see the island, still moving away in the mist. I cried out my final prayer:

"God! Don't quit me now!"

I have described the miracle of the rain. I have told of the flare that went faulty and became the means of providing fish for us to eat after our desperate prayer for food.

The prayer I uttered that afternoon was more than desperate. It was an anguished supplication, shouted above the wind and the rain. It came from the depths of my soul. And there were no mental reservations this time. I was calling to my God, who alone could save us. The answer was immediate and miraculous; it was the second of the two divine miracles.

Strength surged back into my shoulders and arms. I slashed at the man-eating sharks with the oars. They wheeled as though about to attack. But I didn't care. I was rowing again. I was rowing and bending those aluminum oars against the white caps. I say it was I who was bending them. That isn't true. Of himself, Jim Whittaker couldn't have bent a pin.

As the raft rolled steadily through the foam I was not conscious of exerting any strength, Indeed, it was . . . *{missing pages}*

**Chapter Thirteen**

. . . *{missing pages!} . . .*down on the right oar. I wondered if Johnny and Jimmy knew how hard I was working to keep the landscape on an even keel so that the three of us wouldn't fall off it.

After several minutes of this I had acquired sufficient skill to keep the situation under control with light deft touches of the oars. Occasionally the island would give an unexpected heave, but I usually caught it in time and shoved it back to where it belonged. This was important, because I had observed that several pockets in the coral hummocks were full of clear water.

I believed this was rain water, uncontaminated by salt. Too much tipping and rolling would spill it out. When I thought I had our situation in hand I knelt down and tasted the water in one of the pockets. It was fresh. I called to the others. For the next few minutes we drank, caught our breath, and drank again. Until you have been through an ordeal like ours you will never know how good that clear, cold water tasted. We buried our faces in it.

When we could hold no more I staggered up and looked around. We were 30 or 40 feet from the sand and I thought we had better move the boat up to the beach. Johnny and I dragged it along while Jimmy crawled on all fours.

We were without shoes and had to pick our way carefully over the coral, which lay just beneath the surface. It was as sharp in places as broken glass. When we had hauled the raft out of reach of the tide we all gave thanks to God for our landfall and for our safe passage among the sharks, through the storm, and across the reef. Even as we prayed I could see an occasional gray hulk slicking around out beyond the reef. But those sharks would eat no men today.

The next thing was to find food and shelter. It was now that I began to realize that my own condition was not so good; it was not the island that was pitching and rolling. It was me. I could not walk without at least one oar. And my mind functioned only with the greatest difficulty, even after I had tried every device I knew to get a grip on my thoughts. This is illustrated best by the incident of Jimmy's pants.

The buttons had come off and the zippers had been put out of commission by salt water and salt air. The poor kid kept losing them as he crawled along. I though deeply and laboriously on what I might do for him. Earlier I had tied on my own trousers with cord, but it didn't occur to me to fix Jimmy up the same way.

Johnny sat and thought also, his chin resting on his hands, but he couldn't think of a remedy. Meanwhile, the sun was burning me through the rents in my shirt. I stumbled over to a tree and cut off a piece of vine which I used to lace up the torn places. I regarded this as a pretty ingenious piece of work. All the time I was fixing myself up, something like an idea seemed trying to break into my consciousness. It didn't succeed.

So, instead of tying Jimmy's pants on with lengths of vine, we gave it up. They continued to fall off him as he crawled along and Johnny and I kept putting them back on him. I think the Whittaker mentality was at its lowest ebb that afternoon.

The part of the island where we now stood was only a few hundred feet wide. We were very near the foot. If the Lord hadn't taken a hand when He did we would have missed it entirely and have been out there in the distance somewhere, bound for almost certain death.

The island ran north and south and we were in need of reaching it from the lee side for shelter from sun and rain. On the way, Johnny found some coconuts, which he rolled along with his feet. He had six by the time we found a suitable place. I set about opening them with the sheath knife.

They had been there a long time and the hulls were iron hard. In my condition it took 40 minutes to cut around the hull and into the eyes of the nut. When I miscalculated and missed the eyes, more long minutes of cutting were necessary.

The cocoanuts had little milk in them, but the pulp was fairly soft and it was nourishing. As we ate I noticed that some small rodent-like animals (the size of large rats) had come up to feed on the discarded shells. I crept up and killed a couple with the knife. The survivors scampered away. Apparently, however, they laughed it off among themselves because they soon returned and I killed again.

It was our first fresh meat since the night of Oct. 20 at Hickam Field. This and the cocoanut pulp made me feel just well enough to realize that I was violently hungry. Thirst returned.

I recrossed the island and collected a couple of quarts of water from the coral depressions, storing it in a Mae West. I made one last trip and hauled the raft across.

As it grew dark we bedded down, turning the raft over us for shelter. Then the rain came down again, flooding our bedroom. We got no sleep. I think we rested pretty well, however, despite the rolling and pitching of the island. It seemed to me, as I dug my fingers into the sand to hold on, that even in the roughest weather our tiny raft never had behaved so badly as that 10 mile island.

On the morning of Nov. 12 Johnny found more cocoanuts and we ate again. As a matter of fact we ate at intervals all day. Whittaker, the mighty hunter, killed more animals. the flesh wasn't the most appetizing in the world, but it was strengthening. Johnny and I felt much better. Poor Jimmy seemed to grow steadily worse. I had recovered sufficiently to be genuinely worried about him.

We decided against trying to move on that day. We told Jimmy it wouldn't hurt any of us to recuperate for a day. He nodded vaguely and lay down again.

He at least was in less pain now. The drenching from the skies had washed the salt out of his ulcers. They looked less angry and seemed about to start healing. Johnny was much happier, too, though his sufferings in this respect never had been as bad as Reynolds's. I had escaped the scourge; probably because my hide was too tough to be affected by such things as salt water.

I was beginning to lose some of it, though. Some of the men shed and grew new skin six and eight times in the rafts and now I was starting. My most peculiar after effect has been the growth of an entire new set of fingernails, halfmoons and all.

During the morning our friend the Kingfisher scout plane roared over. We waved, as usual, consoling ourselves afterward that the exercise probably had done us good. At 3 P.M. we saw five planes out at sea, flying in formation. We assumed they were looking for submarines.

On the contrary, they were looking for Rickenbacker, Adamson, Bartek, and us. Cherry's raft had been sighted the previous afternoon just about the time we were crossing the reef. He had been picked up shortly afterward and the search for us was on in earnest. All planes that could be spared from other duties were flying low over the ocean, looking for two rafts.

The five-plane formation moved closer in, but did not pass over the island. We were not seen.

As the sun sank, we rustled up more cocoanuts. It wasn't so difficult opening them now. I wished, however, we could get some fresher ones. There were plenty growing about 20 feet above our heads, but tree climbing still was considerably beyond either Johnny or me. The trees were too sturdy to be shaken and our aim was not strong enough to make possible knocking any of them down.

We thankfully ate those available and turned in. This night we abandoned our rubber bedroom and, sleeping on the sand about 30 feet away. Again it rained intermittently and we had a cold, miserable night. The island pitched less and that was a help.

At sunrise we thanked God again for our landfall and drank the last of the water. When I went for more I found that the depressions had been polluted by salt. High waves, whipped by the wind, must have caused this. At least we now had a definite task; that of finding fresh water to drink. Fortunately there were no weighty decisions to be made. We were so near the north of the island that there was only one direction in which to go.

A scout plane crossed about two miles to the south. We took to the raft and started in that direction. When we had rowed about half a mile I saw a native hut on the beach. Feeling sure we had struck a village or the outpost of one, we put in.

It was a single thatched hut and deserted at that, but it looked like lower Manhattan to me. There was nothing inside it except an unfinished boat.

We drank heartily of water that had collected in cavities hollowed out of the bases of coconut palms. It was full of wrigglers, but they tasted fine. At that writing I would have drunk anything smaller than me.

At 12:30 P.M. on this 23rd day of our wanderings, a plane passed directly over our heads, only 200 feet up. It roared at such an angle that it would have been impossible for the pilot to have seen us. We didn't care too much. We had found shelter. We were sure of restful sleep, which we needed now almost as much as we had needed water before. The chief reason I still was praying for quick rescue was that of medical assistance for Reynolds.

We sprawled out on the floor of the native hut and fell asleep at once. What awakened me I don't know. At 1:10, however, I sat up fully aroused. Looking out across the shimmering water I saw what I thought might be a task force. I thought I saw destroyers close in and other craft farther out. It was very bright and hard to distinguish the outlines of the boats.

I shook Johnny. He raised up and had a look, but apparently the sight didn't register. He lay back down.

"They're just barges." he said.

"Just barges!" I yelled as loudly as my voice would permit. "Just barges! What do you want? The Queen Mary?"

I stumbled out to the raft and launched it. I was beginning to see better. I concluded these were new model destroyers. I never had seen anything like them before. About a quarter of a mile out I saw what they were - outrigger canoes. The natives had seen me head out and now were coming in my direction. My sense were so slowed that it seemed to me they were making about 50 knots an hour.

When the boat drew near I observed that the features of the head man in the lead boat were strikingly Japanese in cast. This was not time for ceremony, so I called out:

"You Japanese?" All the men in the canoe shook their heads in unison. I relaxed. They cruised up, had a swift, appraising look at me, then flung over a line. I made it fast to the bow of the raft. I made them understand that there were two more men on the island. We headed shoreward.

The outrigger had four lithe paddlemen who certainly could make speed. For the first time I now saw a foamy bow wave under a rubber life raft. I was somewhat apprehensive at first. It seemed to me we were going too fast for safety.

I spoke to a man in their stern about our long fast and our present hunger and thirst. He spoke rapidly to the others. As the boat touched shore a young fellow sprang out, carrying a length of rope and a chopper made of a wooden stick and a metal blade. Assisting himself with the rope, he ran up a palm tree and knocked down some ripe cocoanuts.

By the time we had reached the hut he was there, lopping the tops off the nuts with the chopper. He fashioned them into rude drinking cups. We downed the milk - about a pint from each cocoanut - and ate the rich, white meat. These were about a thousand per cent better than the ones we had had during the previous 48 hours.

I now took a good look at the native's chopper and my hopes soared. The metal blade had been the tongue of a white man's wood plane. We were getting closer to civilization.

Our new friends appeared to be in a great hurry to get somewhere. They were assisting DeAngelis and carrying Jimmy out to the canoe. They made me understand that we were to go with them to their village. Johnny and Jimmy were stretched out on mats across the connecting supports between the canoe and the outrigger float. I got back into the raft and we were on our way - again at what seemed reckless speed.

We left the open sea, passing into a long, curving lagoon. Then the village came into view. It was a sizable one. Smoke curled up among the thatched, peaked huts. And what was that strange smell? I pondered. Ah, yes. Cooking!

We were greeted by what appeared to be the entire population. The women were clad only in lava lavas and smiles, but even with all that pulchritude before me I could think only of the savory aromas that filled the air.

The smiles quickly changed to tears - and I mean tears - when the women saw our condition. We were emaciated. Our hair and beards were long and straggly. Jimmy Reynolds looked like a dying man.

We unloaded. On the way to the guest hut I was informed that the island is owned by a friendly power which maintains a radio station there. Shortly before, a United States Navy plan had dropped a note, asking that the small garrison be on the lookout for us. That was why the natives happened to be out in force during the heat of the day. A runner even then was on his way to their headquarters, I was informed.

Two officers arrived shortly afterward. We were given our fill of fruit juices, then DeAngelis and Reynolds were put to bed on fragrant mats. I was asked what I would like to eat.

And this was no game, such as we had played in the raft that terrible day. These people were ready to deliver. I spotted some chickens taking their ease under a palm tree. It was their last siesta. I suggested boiling them down to make a rich broth. This was done, under supervision of a man from the garrison.

I had my first bath with soap in more than three weeks, then I sat down to wait for dinner. And it was torture. The aroma of chicken permeated the entire area. It filled the air. It was all I could do to keep from grabbing one of the birds from the pot and rending it.

My thoughts soon returned to Jimmy Reynolds. In the shadows of the hut he looked even more lifeless than he had in the raft. He needed the best medical attention and quickly. But even as I worried, radio signals were crackling through the air. Our friends of the garrison were on the job.

Chapter Fourteen

I have had a lot of soup in my day. Probably will have a lot more. But the soup I'll always remember is that broth the natives prepared for me on a palm covered Pacific Island, which for the present must be nameless.

I was wonderfully strengthened, as was Johnny DeAngelis. Jimmy, however, was in so advanced a state of starvation that his system could not absorb the nourishment the broth held for him. But help was on its way.

As we finished the last of the soup and were gnawing at chicken bones, a Navy scout plane boomed across our clearing, circled and landed on the water. In response to the garrison's message, the Navy had sent a physician, a Lieut. Hall. He lost no time in beginning the injections that were to save Jimmy's life.

He ministered to me also and treated DeAngelis and Reynolds for their salt water ulcers. Meanwhile, we chatted with Lieut. (j.g.) Fred E Woodward, who had flown Lieut. Hall to our island. He had first hand news of our friends.

It had been Lieut. Woodward's observer, Lester Boute, aviation radioman second class, whose keen eyes had spotted Bill Cherry's tiny raft on the afternoon of Nov. 11. We owe a real debt of gratitude to Boute because the rescue of Cherry led to the finding of us all - just as Bill had forecast when he cut loose on Nov. 10.

Rickenbacker, Col. Adamson, and Bartek were picked up by Lieut. William F. Eadie whose Kingfisher squadron located them. Lieut. Eadie is a real flyer and a real man. Here is how he rescued those three.

The scout planes' efforts to guide surface craft to the Rickenbacker raft were hampered by rain squalls. It was growing dark. There was danger the raft might be lost again during the night and that someone aboard it might die unless given immediate attention.

Lieut. Eadie saw only one thing to do and he did it. He set his Kingfisher down in the rolling sea beside the raft, 40 miles from shore. And remember, this was at dusk.

No medical skill was required to understand that Col. Adamson's condition was grave. Assisted by his observer, Lieut. Eadie lifted the Colonel from the raft and established him in the rear cockpit of the Kingfisher. There was no room inside for Rickenbacker and Bartek. They were lashed to the plane's wings.

Lieut. Eadie began taxiing the overloaded plane toward the distant shore. This was fairly rough on Rickenbacker who already had taken more than many men 52 would be able to endure and live. After 10 minutes of taxiing, Lieut. Eadie encountered a motor torpedo boat to which he transferred Rick and Bartek.

Because of his condition, it was deemed best to leave Col. Adamson in the plane, which Eadie now taxied the remaining distance to a Marine-manned island.

By the time I had learned these details, Lieut. Hall had finished with Reynolds and DeAngelis for the time being and was ordering me to bed. We all were transferred to the garrison, a short distance away. Three of the military gave up their bunks and remained awake to lend Lieut. Hall any assistance he might require during the night.

The island behaved very well that night, but the cot on which I was assigned seemed to have contracted St. Vitus' dance, or something. It dumped me onto the floor three times before daylight.

The next day, Nov. 14, was my 41st birthday. It was auspicious in many ways. To begin with, I felt 100 per cent better. Before long, delegations of native women began arriving, bearing gifts of mats, fans, shells, and grass hula skirts. We held court like native chieftains, DeAngelis and I. Jimmy still was bedfast.

There was much bowing and giggling. The translating was done by the father of Toma, the tall native youth whose outrigger had picked me up and had brought the three of us to the village. The father, a sub chief of the tribe, once had been a cook on a trading vessel, making several visits to San Francisco. Through him we told the ladies we never could repay the kindness and hospitality of their tribe. We assured them the great county of America soon would hear about them. They seemed duly impressed and thrilled for a moment. Then they started giggling again.

And now, I must tell about Toma. He is 19 years old, stands well over six feet, and is handsomely proportioned. He is about the color of honey and has lively, intelligent eyes. His English is pretty good; so good that I was surprised. He never has been far from his native island.

He seemed to take an instant liking to me. When we got better acquainted he wanted to know my name. He like "Jim" all right, but the sharp syllables of "Whittaker" apparently were not so pleasing to him. So Toma rechristened me "Jim America."

After we had finished our cocoanuts on the afternoon his men had picked me up, Toma wanted to know what else I wanted. I replied jokingly that a good, American cigarette would just about fix me up. I had hardly finished speaking before he bounded out of the hut and was heading for the palm woods in an easy lope. In a short while he was back, holding out his hand to me. In it lay a package of American cigarettes. I was thunderstruck.

"Much obliged, Aladdin," I said.

Then he told me, "My name Toma."

Eventually he made me understand that white warriors had given them to him; that he had buried them, and had intended digging them at Christmas time. This was the first I knew of the nearby garrison.

Just before we left, Toma presented me with a gift that really touched me. It was the scale model of the outrigger in which he rescued me. Let me try to make you understand the significance of this.

When a native builds a boat he also builds a scale model, as much like the larger craft as he can make it. He believes that so long as the model is safe the boat is safe. The model, therefore, is guarded closely. Usually it is hidden in some secure place. It is seldom indeed that a native will let such a model out of his own hands; to say nothing of allowing it to go out of his possession and protection.

It was the supreme compliment. Toma told me with great earnestness that I should keep it safe. If anything should happen to it, he assured me, the same disaster would befall the big outrigger. On the bow of the model he put my name: "Jim America" and "from Toma." He added the name of the island.

Toma's model occupies a place of honor in my home at Burlingame, Calif. And not far from it, mounted and polished, is that empty flare shell from which we drank our doles of water and with which Jimmy Reynolds sluiced my head and neck during our first effort to land on the island.

In the early evening of Nov. 14 we experienced the real thing in the way of rescue. A naval vessel, commanded by Lieut.-Comm Frank A. Monroe Jr., reached the island and took us aboard. The medical officer, Lieut. Richard W. Garrity, assumed charge of us and we said our good-byes to the natives.

Just before going, I asked Toma what he would like me to send him. He grew very shy and assured me he wanted nothing. I pressed him. I said I had accepted his gifts and that I should be grieved if he declined mine. Finally, in a low voice he said something about enjoying a cake of soap; or half a cake, if a whole one would be too much to manage.

By now, Toma is the owner of three suits of cottons, a carton of soap, and many times the number of cigarettes he gave to me. There are some other things, too. The store of worldly goods I sent him undoubtedly made Toma the largest property owner on the island. I hope he is a chief when and if I ever see him again.

The chief of the village accompanied us to the water, inviting us to return when the war is over and make our homes on the island. He said that to be sure we would like it there we might come for a short, temporary visit of say a year or so. Meanwhile, he would build an addition to his house so that we all might live together.

"Make chummy," he explained.

**Chapter Fifteen**

As our long grey ship steamed out to sea I stood at the rail and looked back on the island where God had seen fit to let me start a new life. I watched until the land had sunk from view and only that long line of palms remained. In the late evening light it was just as I had first seen it four mornings before.

I thought of the natives' their kindliness and their childlike friendliness. They had been instruments in God's hands. And it seemed then that these children of the South Pacific probably were much nearer God than many a race lighter than they and many times wiser, in the ways of the world.

My thoughts were interrupted by a voice at my shoulder. It was Lieut. Garrity, who had completed his ministrations to Reynolds and DeAngelis. He had been looking for me, it seemed.

"Trying to be an iron man, eh? It's to bed with you, my friend. Come along with you."

It was no use protesting. That Irishman was a good doctor and he meant what he said.

That must have been the start of the nickname that has fastened itself to me. "The iron man of the army" they called me on two of the islands we visited later. It is true that I spent little time in bed on the first island and didn't want to go to bed on the ship. But I simply hadn't felt like bed. Anyway, the beds rolled and pitched so that I couldn't sleep when I did turn in.

There were many times during those 21 days adrift in the Pacific that I was anything but an iron man. It was only that I happened to be in better physical condition than the rest that I happened to recuperate faster.

I obeyed Lieut. Garrity and when he had finished with me he told me that he thought Reynolds would recover, but that it had been touch and go with him. The glucose, which Jimmy was still getting, had fixed him up.

We reached our destination, an island known as X-2, during the night and stood off it until morning. DeAngelis was carried ashore to an emergency field hospital, but I insisted on walking. Still the iron man, I suppose. Or maybe I wanted to show off my whiskers. Marines, who manned the place, walked all the way beside me, ready to catch me if I should topple.

An official photographer, about 10 feet ahead of me, walked backward most of the way to the hospital, snapping photos every few steps. And speaking of steps, they all were sure I would have to be helped up the two or three at the hospital. Helping hands were extended, but I got up all right and was on my feet when I saw my former fellow travelers.

Just a few words about that hospital. It hadn’t existed four days previously. When news was received that Bill Cherry's raft had been sighted, Col. Lloyd Leech, veteran marine commandant of X-2, summoned the naval Sea Bees (CBs - construction battalion) and put them to work.

In 24 hours they had erected this fine little building with concrete decks, screens all around, and a corrugated iron roof overhead. These things usually are built after airfields and gun emplacements are in. But when they are needed, bang! they're there. That's the way our people do things in the Pacific.

In the outer room of the hospital I found Jimmy Bartek, still looking pretty wan. I guess the sea water he drank was a little too much - coming on top of his other troubles.

In the next room lay Eddie Rickenbacker. He looked much weaker and much sicker than when I had seen him last. He no longer was called on to serve as our morale officer and had allowed himself to relax. The same indomitable spirit showed in his eyes, however. I walked over and looked down at him.

"What's the matter, Rick?" I asked. "Been sick?"

He grinned and held out his arms. I marveled again at this man. The world knows him as a daredevil automobile racer who turned aviator and became the nation's greatest ace of the first World War. He is known as a genius at business organization and he is the head of a great air line. He is one of the greatest authorities on aviation.

Out on the trackless Pacific our little band met the Rickenbacker the world doesn't know; the human man, the undoubting leader. I, for one, hope that if ever I have to go through hell like that again, Eddie Rickenbacker or someone like him will be along.

During that afternoon I lounged around while the others rested in bed. Reynolds had been kept on the ship, Lieut. Garrity sent word that he was doing better than had been expected, but that he would have to stay aboard for several days.

Bill Cherry and Col. Adamson were transferred from their temporary quarters to the hospital a little later. The Colonel still was in misery because of salt water ulcers.

Bartek insisted he felt chipper and insisted on being photographed with Rickenbacker. The doctors told him he was not nearly as well as he imagined. The lad continued to ask, however. At length Rick, whom Bartek couldn't see, winked at us and turned loose one of those bellows we all knew so well:

"You stay right where you and are pipe down! Do you want to get me on on of my mads again? Well, do you?"

Deep silence from the next room. On the night Rick and Bartek were being carried ashore from the rescue boat, Rick had said to him:

"Better thank God for that Testament of yours, son. You see now what faith can do for a man."

I don't think there was a man of us who didn't thank God for that little khaki covered book. It led us to prayer and prayer led us to safety.

I since have heard that Johnny Bartek intends to become a minister after the war. No matter how many souls he saves from the pulpit, no matter how many lives he changes for the better, he can always remember his first pulpit; an elongated rubber doughnut, painted a bright yellow and tossing in the trackless Pacific.

I hope Johnny has large congregations after he enters the ministry. But I sincerely hope his future churches are not as crowded as his first one!

The next morning, which was the 26th day since we were set adrift and the fifth since DeAngelis, Reynolds and I landed on the palm-covered island, we were told that our carriages were waiting. The carriages were three navy PBY flying boats. Rickenbacker, Cherry, DeAngelis, Col. Adamson, and I went aboard.

Bartek, too weak to be moved, was left behind. Reynolds remained on the ship and I did not see him again in the Pacific. He returned to the mainland later with Rickenbacker, after the latter had again tackled - and this time completed - his mission for the war department.

The PBYs roared into the air and we learned we were on our way to a base hospital in Samoa. During that flight I looked down at the Pacific- - smooth and blue; cool and inviting. But Mrs. Whittaker's son James was not fooled. I knew exactly what it was like down there: Mountainous swells, stinging spray, murderous heat, and sharks.

In Samoa I found the medical authorities considerably more strict than those on the naval vessel or at X-2. In Samoa they put iron men to bed just as they do anyone else who seems to require bed rest. They kept me there two days before I could begin wandering off. And I had to go back a couple of times after that when they caught me - which usually was at meal time. We were getting steaks three times a day now.

We stayed in Samoa until we were completely recovered. We were royally entertained the while. They PBYs set us down near Hickam Field, Honolulu, on Dec. 3 and we set out to gratify a desire that had burned within us for many weeks. We wanted strawberry malted milks!

So keen had been our craving out there in the glaring heat that our thirst for strawberry malteds had been unblunted by the steaks and plenitude of other food and drink we had had since that day Cherry had played waiter. We headed for the officers' club. The soda fountain attendant had heard about us, however; and he made the mixture so rich that although I had intended drinking ten I could get way with only three.

I had only one more thing to do in Hawaii - replace the silk Hawaiian dress I had bought for my wife six weeks before. It went to the bottom of the Pacific with our Flying Fortress.

The Pan-American clipper landed us at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay a few days later. In addition to high army officers, my wife, Ann, and daughter, Shirley, 16, were at the pier to greet us. We picked up my son, Thomas, who thus far had escaped Davy Jones, in spite of my hallucinations. We all drove home to Burlingame.

Capt. Bill Cherry was ordered to Washington to assist in redesigning the life rats that will be carried by our bombers in the future. It has been announced that from now on the rafts will be known as "rickenbackers." I am sure they will have many improvements, but I hope and pray that I never have to try them out on a 21 day cruise.

When my 30 day sick leave had expired I reported back for duty and found I had been detached for 60 days longer to tell the story of our raft cruise before war production workers on the Pacific coast. During the weeks that followed I addressed hundreds of thousands of them. And my story was not about us so much as about our boys in the Pacific who are manning those tiny dots out in the Pacific.

Before this last trip I used to wonder what sort of people we had out there face to face with the Japs. They are the kind the Japs can never beat. They are doing a tremendous job in record time.

The navy scouting squadrons are operating under conditions they never were meant to face. The hard working Sea Bees are carving roads and airports on atolls that don't even have fresh water. And everywhere are the United States Marines, doing a magnificent job, much of it under fire. These men are building and manning a string of bases that points straight towards Tokyo.

How many men will be expended before the bridge is completed depends upon how well they are supplied and equipped. And that depends upon the people back home.

These are the things I told daily for weeks before armies of airplane workers, steel workers, and ship builders. And I told them the story of the rafts; how during those blazing days out there I found my God. I was having an audience such as I may never have again. And I told that story as often as I could.

I will tell it again and again, so long as I live. It was the greatest adventure a man can face. It is the greatest story a man can tell.

**THE END**