

REPORT OF CAPT VAROFF CREW RESCUE

This story is taken from the XXBC S-2 Bulletin #14, dated 3/22/45, on EVASION & ESCAPE, pages 11-26, which was obtained by William A. Rooney from Reed Sass who worked with him in Bomber Command at APO #493, Kharagpur, India. It was edited by Harry M. Changnon for inclusion in his writings about the 40th Bomb Group.

On December 7, 1944 (3rd Anniversary of Pearl Harbor), the 20th Air Force and its XX Bomber Command ran Combat Mission #19 against the Japanese against the ARSENAL AND AIRPLANE FACTORY at Mukden, Manchukuo (Manchuria). Among the 27 B-29 airplanes airborne from the 40th Bomb Group from the Advance Airbase (A-1) near Hsinching, Chengtu Valley, Szechwan Province, of China, was #42-63363. It was flown by the following men: Capt GEORGE D. VAROFF A/c, 1/Lt LOUIS V. HAMIL P, 2/Lt GEORGE SZAFRANSKI N, 1/Lt CURTIS BUSH B, 2/Lt JOHN S. INGHAM FE, Sgt WILL-IAM W. WOOD V, S/Sgt FRANK L. BROUSSARD R, Sgt MITCHELL ZIEMBA CFC, S/Sgt ROY L. TETER RG, Sgt CHARLES N. GRAHAM LG, and T/Sgt JOHN P. QUINLAN TG.

They flew in the 2nd formation over the Primary Target, composed mostly of 40th BG planes which was led by Maj John C. Eigenmann in #582, who dropped their load of 500# bombs at 08:47 CST (0147Z or Greenwich Time). At time of "Bombs Away", they were flying either as Lead Plane in "C" Flight or in the #4 (slot) position of "A" Flight with #322 (Bleiler) on their left wing. The author was flying with 1/Lt Robert A Winters in #276 adjacent to them off their right wing. There were 14 planes in the formation.

Prior to reaching the Rendezvous Point, Varoff told the gunners to test fire their guns. It was discovered at that time that Quinlan's tail guns had developed a malfunction, and they remained inoperative for the mission. Bad icing conditions were encountered as they climbed to join in formation with the other Superfortresses with ice forming on and in the airplanes. The ice built up on the nose windows in the cockpit making it extremely difficult for Varoff to follow the lead element. Despite de-pressurization and individually going on oxygen, the ice formed heavily on windows and gunners' blisters.

As they approached the target at 22,000 feet, a large number of fighters attack-ed at various times, especially after bombs were dropped. Some enemy planes even flew through the formation. It appeared that the Japanese were using every plane they could get into the air: NICKS, TONY'S, ZEROS, and even "wheels down" VALS. Most of these attacks were made frontally. Bush had trouble scraping away the ice from his bombardier nose window in order to sight both target and enemy fighters. The gunners were bothered by ice on their blisters and Quinlan's guns remained inoperative. During the turn away from the target, Graham, the LG, shot down a fighter at this time.

The attacks continued for at least 15 minutes after bomb drop against the formation. The #1 engine on #363 had been struck in the oil cooler, and another shell had exploded and cut the feathering line. There were holes in wings, fuselage, and one through the CFC blister missing Ziemba's head by three inches. The #1 engine was losing oil rapidly as Varoff, Hamil, and Ingham tried unsuccessfully to feather the prop.

At a point over the Chichi Gulf, 30 minutes away from the Target, Varoff had to give up staying with the Formation. Two planes, #729 and #276, fell back to help B-29 EDDIE ALLEN STORY
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protect the crippled bomber. Varoff had pulled back his RPMs as low as it would go, cutting back #1 altogether, allowing it to drag. By the time they reached the China Coast, #1 engine was completely dry of oil, and then it appeared that they would have a runaway engine for the RPM mounted up on #1

to 2800 where it remained for at least three minutes before dropping down to 2400. They reached the China Coast at an altitude of 16,000' and found they had consumed all of the oxygen having been on it for about two hours both before and after the PT.

Varoff continued to maintain as slow a speed as possible in order to keep the #1 prop from running away. They were bucking a terrific headwind and had a ground speed of only 120 knots despite indicating 165-170 mph. They were on a heading for SIAN in Shensi Province with both #729 and #276 escorting them when another fighter attacked them. The TONY made a pass at them from 10 o'clock high until he was within 100 yards before making a climbing turn away. No damage was done to any planes as the B-29s had turned into him so that all planes could fire at the Nip.

Just after they had crossed the Ping-Han Railway Line, which was recognizable beneath them, Varoff noticed a reddish glow from burning metal in the damaged engine. He immediately asked Ingham to come to Varoff's window to inspect it. In less than the half minute it took Ingham to look out, the reddish glow became white hot. Varoff then told Hamil to alert the rest of the crew for bailout. The nose wheel was lowered and bomb-bay doors opened. Varoff then called Wemple in #729 to advise him that the #1 prop might come off at any minute and the escorts spread out to avoid being hit by the whole prop or any of its four blades.

The navigators in #729 and #276 (Capt Robert Swanson and 1/Lt Arthur Macer) had been monitoring flight locations and reported that after flying over four hours on the return flight they were at 36°15'N and 113°30'E. In #363, Szafranski had told his crewmates that since they had just crossed the Ping-Han Railway they should be jumping into friendly territory despite being behind enemy lines. The time of bailout was approximately 13:30 CST. They would be landing about 15 miles SE of the city of LI-CHENG in East-Central Shansi Province.

The crew members bailed out in the following order: Quinlan TG from his tail section, Teter RG out the rear bomb-bay, followed in close order by Graham LG, and Ziembra CFC. Wood destroyed his radar equipment before he also jumped from the rear compartment. In the forward area, Szafranski N, was first out, and then Bush B, Broussard R, Hamil CP, Ingham FE, and lastly by Varoff, the pilot. The terrain beneath them was rugged mountainous country and they had expected to be able to land close together, but soon large mountains and valley separated them. The parachutists took some comfort in noting that the escort ships had circled until they reached ground.

The following narrative accounts by crew members is condensed from interviews made later on their return to India.

Curtis Bush was equipped with his jungle-kit, parka, winter flying pants, GI shoes and winter flying boots, and gloves. Unexpectedly, he struck the ground on the steep side of a mountain and rolled 50 feet down the slope before stopping. Upon impact with the ground, his jungle-kit ripped open, strewn contents into the snow. Bush was not wearing the C-1 Escape Vest because he could not get it and the parka to fit under his chute and he chose the parka. Within a couple B-29 EDDIE ALLEN STORY
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minutes seven men approached him slowly, stopping several times to hold up their arms above their heads. Bush did the same thing for them. The natives gathered up his chute and equipment and clustered around him, feeling his clothes, and staring at him. They discovered his pistol and took it from him before proceeding to their dwelling, approximately 300 yards away on the other hillside. There they built a fire to warm him, but the smoke became so thick he had to leave. He did not have his "Pointie-Talkie" as that was left in the C-1 Vest so he had no means to communicate with the Chinese who had been trying to talk to him.

The mountains were so rugged and endless that he realized it would be stupid

to set out alone to locate the others. However, in a short time a Chinese appeared at the top of the mountain and yelled to the others apparently about other crew members. Within two hours they brought in Lew Hamil and Roy Teter. Hamil had a Pointie-Talkie book (PTb) which was very useful, but extremely slow in exchanging thoughts. The three fliers spent the night in the hut and next morning set out for an 8th Route Army Headquarters.

Hamil was not warmly dressed, but had worn both C-1 Vest and the Jungle-Kit. His gun tore loose from the holster when the chute opened and badly dazed him when it struck him in the mouth. He landed on the summit of a hill, beside a deep gorge, and saved himself from sliding off by grasping brush. Hamil was chilled by the below freezing temperature and in snow, but was able to locate a shallow cave in which he could build a fire. Later he went down the hill with his chute and met up with three Chinese peasants who finally timidly approached. Hamil had remembered from the Briefing the words "May Gwaw Fay-Gee" (American Airman) and "Bah Lee Jun" (8th Route Army) which satisfied the natives who then took him to a village. At about 16:00, Hamil met up with Bush and at dusk, Teter was brought in and they were all fed.

Teter had landed on a small terrace on the mountain near a farmer who understood that he wanted to find his friends. The three airmen spent the night in a dwelling and the next morning, December 8th, a Chinese appeared who could read the PTb. By 10:00, they met a soldier from the 8th Route Army who had two cotton padded Chinese coats which he gave to Hamil and Teter, as Bush was warm in his parka. This man said they would have to move on as the Japanese were out looking for the fliers. At noon they met a Mr. Wei, who served as Interpreter, and met up with Quinlan. The party walked until 02:00 on the 10th when they arrived at a village where they joined up with Varoff, Szafranski, and Wood.

When Quinlan had jumped, his chute would not open and he fell perhaps 10,000' before he was able to reach around and rip it open by hand. He was immediately met by a farmer who took him to a village where he was fed and given a place to sleep. He met a representative of the 8th Route Army who guided him to others.

William Wood was the last one out of the rear due to his delay in destruction of his radar equipment. As he drifted down, he wanted to land near two villages, but the wind blew him away and into a small valley where he struck a mountain side and was knocked unconscious. When he awakened, he found that some villagers had picked him up and carried him to a dwelling. Shortly afterwards, a soldier from 8th Route Army (8RA) arrived and took Wood to a sub-district Army Post. He met several soldiers there who could read his PTb. Wood asked the soldiers to look for the other ten fliers. The next morning Szafranski and then Varoff were brought in to the Post. On the 9th, they met two Chinese who could speak English B-29 EDDIE ALLEN STORY
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fairly well. They started out for Colonel Ma's Headquarters where they arrived on the evening of the 10th. The next day the remaining four members, Broussard, Ingham, Ziembra, and Graham arrived there.

Szafranski had delayed pulling his rip cord and tumbled from the prop wash, but when his chute opened he counted eight other parachutes before the wind twisted him around. He was blown high onto a mountain on the edge of a crevice where he landed without injury. He pulled out his Blood Chit and PTb and showed them to half a dozen natives who approached him. They took his gun, chute, and equipment with them to a dwelling on the hillside where they built a fire. One of the men informed him by the PTb that both Japanese and Guerrilla Forces were near by, and that the next morning they would take him to the Guerrillas.

Captain George Varoff, the former World Pole Vault record holder at Princeton, was the last to bail out of the plane and could see eight other chutes below him as he floated down. He watched the unoccupied B-29 make two

large circles before crashing into a peak on the third time around, bursting into smoke and flame. As he approached the ground he tried to manipulate the shroud lines as the strong wind swept him into a rugged mountainside. He was not able to gain control and he hit suddenly where his head hit a rock, knocking him unconscious. When he did regain consciousness, he found that the snow about him was red with his blood. Fortunately his chute had tangled in the brush above him, for less than a foot away was a 50-foot sheer drop. He carefully pulled himself back onto the side of the mountain by the shroud lines.

He had noticed a deserted hut about a 100 yards away where he went and built a fire for his hands and feet which were almost frozen. Since his socks were wet, he was glad to find a dry pair in the Jungle-Kit and a pair of gloves. Later he went down the hill to a farm dwelling where he could see smoke. He was invited inside after saying "May Gwaw Fay-Gee" (American Airman) which was understood. Ten guerrillas showed up later who could read his PTb, fed him, and gave him a place to sleep. The next day he was taken to a village where he was given hot water, fruit, peanuts, and a mirror so that he could dress his head wound. Later he was taken to the Sub-District Army Post and met the others.

Frank Broussard, the radio operator, picked up a carbine just before he bailed out. He landed on the side of a mountain, some 50 yards from a farm house. When an old man appeared, he gave him the carbine as a friendship gesture as he also made the sign of the 8th Route Army which he had remembered from the Briefing. The native seemed to understand and led Broussard toward the valley below where he met Graham, the left gunner. While they were resting, a runner arrived and informed them that another American had been found on top a nearby mountain who turned out to be Ingham, the Flight Engineer. They remained overnight in a hut before starting out early the next morning, crossing several more mountains, for a village where they met Ziemba, the CFC gunner.

On the 9th of December, they set out with Chinese soldiers for the nearest Army headquarters as the Japs were reportedly searching nearby for them. Broussard and Graham went ahead as both Ingham and Ziemba were being carried on stretchers as they had injured legs in landing. They caught up with the rest of the Crew on the 13th of December. As they all said, they were wonderfully well treated by all people they met. The evaders were given food, even though it was not plent-iful, and even some luxuries such as cigarettes.
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Charles Graham, the second man out of the rear bomb bay, landed easily, looked for habitation, but there was none in the vicinity. He walked an hour before he met two small boys who called him "May Gwaw" which he remembered meant American. They returned to his landing spot and gathered up his parachute and he was then taken to a cottage where he found Broussard. The village leader informed Graham and Broussard that another foreigner was on a nearby mountain which turned out to be John Ingham, the Flight Engineer.

Ingham landed hard, injuring his feet, about 25 yards from a native dwelling. He hopped around and called out "Ding Hao" which meant nothing to the natives who came with spears and clubs. They took his gun, E&E equipment, and bound him with a loose rope. He was otherwise well treated, especially when they could see he could not walk. They built a fire for him and fed him while trying to converse in sign language, to no avail. When Graham and Broussard arrived, Ingham was given back his possessions as the Chinese had decided they were friends. The men spent the night in the dwelling, wrapped in their parachutes. Ingham stated that from the time he landed until they reached Col Ma's Headquarters, he was unable to take a step unassisted - yet he reached safety without discomfort while they were evading Jap patrols.

Mitchell Ziemba, CFC gunner, landed on the side of a mountain in rugged terrain, badly spraining an ankle which made walking difficult. Some two hours after he had landed four Chinese appeared who were friendly, and as he was in no condition to move about, they carried him and his equipment

to a dwelling where he spent the first night. He had used the Pointie-Talkie to tell the natives he wanted to be taken to the Guerrillas which they did.

The entire crew of eleven fliers were reunited at Colonel Ma's Headquarters on December 13th from where they went the next day to the headquarters of Chang Ker Wei, the Minister of Production. They stayed there for ten days when they were moved to Headquarters of General Li of the 8th Route Army where they stayed over Christmas and New Years. During this time they learned of a secret airfield that had been constructed of packed material that was now frozen to a hard surface. They were informed by telegram that a plane would arrive on January 25th to make a food and clothing drop, but which was delayed by adverse weather until the 28th. They were resigned to having to walk out of occupied China until they had a call to meet the plane on February 6th. This B-25 took them to Sian and again flew them the next day back to A-1. Finally on February 9th, they arrived back in India at their home base at Chakulia.

The Varoff Crew were upset about missing their rendezvous on January 28th with Capt Kunz in the B-25, but welcomed the parachute drop kits and free fall drops of rations. They received bed rolls, winter mechanics' jackets, medicine, and food. Of great help to the evaders was the fact that they were briefed a week before their ordeal by L/Col William Savoie, from the 468th Group, who had survived with four of his crew on a similar walkout following the Yawata Mission of August 20th. Savoie and his men had spent three months in the hands of the Communist New 4th Army and had information about the 8th Route Army soldiers. It was important to make early contacts and have confidence in the Guerrillas.

Captain George Varoff and his fellow crew members were flown back to the USA in War Weary B-29s. They left Chakulia, India on Washington's Birthday, February 22 1945. It was a policy of the Military that men who had escaped from the Japanese B-29 EDDIE ALLEN STORY MSN #06: MUKDEN: 12/7/44

or areas they occupied would be returned home. They had done their duty!

This space and additional pages will be filled by comments from surviving crew members from letters and interviews with Changnon, especially on what they can recall about the two months spent with the Communist Chinese before they were flown back to A-1.

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