

# **Ditching Report**

***A-11, Southern Belle, William Campbell Crew***

**1 June 1945**

**869<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 497<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 73<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing**



**HEADQUARTERS  
73<sup>RD</sup> BOMBARDMENT WING  
APO 237, c/o. Postmaster  
San Francisco, California**

**21 July 1945**

**373.2 AKOPN**

**SUBJECT: Emergency Rescue Report No. 30 (Bailout)**

**I. BASIC DATA**

1. Mission No. 75, 1 June 1945. Date of Report, 12 July 1945.
2. Wing: 73. Group: 497. Squadron: 869. A/C Aerial No. 42-24741.
3. Cause of Bailout: Complete loss of control of the aircraft by the airplane commander and the co-pilot.
4. Trouble: The emergency developed immediately after takeoff. The engine temperature on No.1 engine reached 140 degrees. The airplane commander tried to feather No. 1 engine but was unsuccessful. Fire broke out in the engine but the altitude could not be maintained. The airplane commander observed a convoy of ships and decided to bailout in the middle of the convoy. He contacted Condor Base and told them he was going to bail his crew out at 2000 feet and gave his position.
5. Bailout, 0350K, 2 June 1945, position 16—00N—145—00E (approximately 60 miles northwest of Saipan).
6. Rescue 0430K, 2 June 1945, same position. Rescue performed by US Navy surface craft.
7. The crew:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Last Seen</u>
AP Com	Campbell, William J	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt.	0724517	Rescued
Co-Pilot	Abbot, Orville L	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt.	0771648	Rescued
Navigator	Roach, Joseph H	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt.	0695969	Rescued
Bombardier	Gilmour, Hugh B	Major	0412938	Rescued
Engineer	Fesq, Howell K	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt.	0864732	Rescued

Radio Op	Steiger, Charles A	S/Sgt.	19015227	Rescued
CFC Gnr	McKenzie, Gordon D	T/Sgt.	11136404	Rescued
Right Gnr	Schnecker, Clayton A	S/Sgt.	35791315	On descent
Left Gnr	Mayer, Martin F	S/Sgt.	37469486	Rescued
Tail Gnr	Martin, Robert E	S/Sgt.	33496159	Body Recovered
Radar Opr	Zimmerman, Richard E	S/Sgt.	13095305	Rescued

8. The interview was arranged by Capt Stewart (Group S-2) and Captain Fetteroff (Group PEO). The interrogation was conducted by Lt. Ayers (Wing ASR).

## II. NARRATIVE REPORT

1. Development of the Emergency: Narrative by the Airplane Commander). The emergency developed after takeoff when I noticed that the oil temperature on No. 1 engine was exceeding the limits. The engineer went back and changed fuses but this did not help. The temperature rose to 140 degrees on No.1 engine and after checking our switches to ascertain the cause, we decided to abort.

We turned on a heading of 250 degrees to get to west of the course. I attempted to feather No.1 engine, which was pulling 2300 RPM. We dropped our bombs at an altitude of 3500 feet and then turned on a heading toward Saipan. No. 2 engine was backfiring and cutting out momentarily. We were maintaining 2335 RPM on No. 2 engine but it continued to backfire. We had rated power on No. 3 and 4 engines and continued at this rate for fifteen minutes after turning on a heading for Saipan. Then No.1 engine ran away and shortly thereafter fire broke out in the engine. We pulled the fire extinguisher and pulled the power back on No. 1 engine. We were at an altitude of 2000 feet and the plane was gradually losing altitude.

Just as soon as the emergency developed we got on our emergency IFF and sent distress messages according to standard operating procedures. At 2000 feet I instructed the men to put on their chutes and standby to abandon the ship. I contacted Condor Base and told them we were bailing out in five minutes and gave our approximate bailout position. I lowered the landing gear at 1700 feet 1500 feet I gave the order 'bailout'.

The first man left the aircraft at 1500 feet; the last man left the aircraft at approximately 600 feet. The crews position on bailout was as follows: the navigator, engineer, radio operator went out the front bomb bay, the remainder of the crew went out the rear entrance door.

I was the last man to leave the aircraft. Just before bailing out the plane gave a lurch and I was thrown against the co-pilot's seat. I finally managed to get up to the nose wheel wall and bailout. As I went out the hatch, I barely missed the nose wheel wall. I pulled my

ripcord after leaving the aircraft and the chute opened. I heard the aircraft explode and noticed a fire on the water.

As I hit the water the chute pulled me straight out of the water up to my chest. I saw that the wind was blowing me away from the fire so I stayed in my harness. I let the chute pull me until I was a good distance from the fire and then I got out of my chute and inflated my Mae West and dinghy. I looked at my watch and saw that it was still running. The time was exactly 0335H.

I saw a destroyer escort coming toward me after I had gotten into the raft. I held the parachute over my head to attract their attention. The DE made one pass at me and threw me a life vest but I couldn't get it. I was finally taken aboard the ship at 0430 H.

**2. Narrative report of the surviving crew members:**

a. Co-pilot's narrative: I followed the bombardier out the nose wheel well first and pulled the ripcord immediately after clearing the aircraft. A little while after the chute opened I saw the aircraft hit the water and explode. The plane was about two miles away when it hit and it threw up smoke to about two thousand feet.

When I hit the water I was facing the wind. The parachute pulled me out of the water and along the water on my back. I finally managed to get out of the parachute harness but in the process I lost my dinghy. I inflated my life vest and then yelled three times to see if anyone was near. Receiving no answer I started to float, planning on receiving no help until daylight. My Mae West supported fairly good but I did have to do a little swimming. About ten minutes after I hit the water I saw a destroyer escort headed in my direction. I did nothing until I could see the entire deck of the DE. Then I flashed emergency flashlight several times. Almost immediately a searchlight found me and stayed on me for about five minutes. It was turned off but about five minutes later it was turned back on me. A few minutes later the DE pulled alongside and threw me a ladder. I was taken aboard the destroyer escort at approximately 0420H.

b. Navigator's Narrative: I was the first man to bail out the front bomb bay. My chute opened satisfactorily and I had time to unbuckle my leg straps before hitting the water. My parachute dragged me along the top of the water for approximately a minute. I found it quite difficult to unbuckle my chest strap so I decided to inflate my Mae West. After I unbuckled my chest strap, I pulled my dinghy out of the container and inflated it. I became entangled in the chute but I managed to get loose after I climbed into my dinghy.

During the time that I was inflating my dinghy I heard the radar operator weakly calling for help at some distance. I paddled as hard as I could to his direction and got to him in about fifteen minutes. He was semi-conscious retching, so I held him over the edge of the raft until he had strength enough to crawl about half way on the raft. In about twenty minutes we were picked up by the searchlights of a DE. We were finally taken aboard the DE after having been in the water for approximately 45 minutes.

c. Bombardier's narrative: As soon as I got the bomb bay doors opened with the switch next to the automatic pilot control panel on the pilot's aisle stand so that the engineer, navigator, and radio operator could bail out, I bailed out the nose wheel well by diving through the opening.

The parachute opened satisfactorily. On hitting the water, the first thing I did was to get out of my parachute. I inflated the inner section of my Mae West but the outer section would not inflate. I found the parachute in the water nearby with the one-man dinghy still attached. In attempting to open and inflate the dinghy still attached, my feet became entangled in the parachute shroud lines. It became necessary either to forget the dinghy, to get untangled, or to sink. I elected to free myself of the shroud lines. When I attempted to find the raft again it had disappeared.

I saw a destroyer escort approximately a mile from my position with its searchlights sweeping the water. I started swimming toward the DE so that I could get in the range of their searchlights. Enroute I went through a wreckage of the crash and found an oxygen bottle filled with oxygen and covered with grease and oil. I used the oxygen bottle to get closer to the destroyer but the ship soon left the vicinity. In about one hour the oxygen drifted out the cylinder and my Mae West was completely deflated. I decided that I would have to wait until daylight before being rescued.

At dawn I saw the first Dumbo and it was not long before they made a run close to me. On about the second approach when I felt that they had a good chance of seeing me. I swam on my back and kicked my feet to produce as much of a wake as I could and at the same time waved my white handkerchief.

The Dumbo definitely spotted me on about the fourth or fifth approach he dropped some flares. The first two flares were duds but the third flare worked satisfactorily. About thirty minutes after the Dumbo spotted me I saw the destroyer escort on the horizon, heading in my direction. It took the DE twenty to thirty minutes longer to arrive at my position and pick me up. I was in the water for approximately three hours before being rescued.

d. Engineer's Narrative: When airplane commander gave us the order to prepare to bailout, I checked my generator switches for 'ON' position and opened nose gear hatch. The dzus fasteners were the slotted head type and only one opened. The other could not be opened so that I could get to the nose gear emergency switch. I turned to the bombardier and shouted, "Bomb bay doors". The airplane commander looked at me and said, 'Get the hell out of here'. Then I made my way around the turret to the front bomb bay.

The bomb bay lights were on so I checked my parachute and my dinghy. The radio operator was standing by the bulkhead door. I checked his parachute and dinghy and then told him to jump. He shook his head negatively so I tried to hold on to him and pull him out

with me. I didn't know whether I was successful or not because at the next moment my body was falling through space. I pulled ripcord, however the chute seemed to be along time opening. Falling was practically without sensation. I looked toward my feet to see how close I was to the water, but instead of seeing the water I saw the sky—I didn't notice my parachute above either. Hurriedly I looked over my shoulder and saw that the sea was quite close and coming up very fast toward me. I made a grab for my ripcord and gave it a terrific yank. No sooner had the chute opened and pulled me upright when I hit the water.

I was slightly dazed as I went under the water, but the chute pulled me to the surface of the water – and along it – and as a result I took in quite a bit of salt water. I tried to get my leg straps undone but without success. I was not familiar with the type of release handle and I had difficulty trying to remove the pin. By this time I was pretty well entangled in the shroud lines of my chute so I decided to forget the raft and concentrate on getting out of the shroud lines. After what seemed like hours I finally managed to free myself from the parachute.

I swam away from the parachute and into the waves. The sea was quite rough and I was drinking a lot of salt water swimming into the waves, so I turned my back to the waves. My Mae West supported me satisfactorily and I did not feel excited or that I would not be rescued.

Just before dawn I saw lights on the water, which I decided must come from a surface craft. A little later I could make out a black object coming in my direction. When I saw it was a surface craft I waited until it came alongside before I called out. The surface craft came so close that I had to push against the boat to stay clear. I was caught in the wake of the boat and had a difficult time remaining afloat. I was caught in the aft searchlights, but only momentarily. In a few minutes the surface craft was out of shouting range. Sometime later another surface craft came along side and picked me up in its searchlight. After a little maneuvering the surface craft (A00) took me aboard.

e. Radio Operator's narrative: I was the third man to bail out of the front bomb bay. I pulled my ripcord after clearing the aircraft and the chute opened immediately. When I hit the water I inflated my Mae West. In the process of inflating my dinghy I got my legs entangled in the shroud lines of my chute. After I climbed into my dinghy I had no difficulty getting my legs free from the chute.

I took an inventory of my equipment and found that I had water, a sail, a paddle, a mirror, a sponge, a cup, a small pump and several packets of sea marker dye. I used my chute as an anchor so that I wouldn't drift too far from my bailout position.

Shortly after I climbed into the raft I noticed several planes circling above me and searchlights scanning the horizon. When the searchlights        in my direction I held the illuminating side of the paddle toward the light. I noticed that the searchlights stayed

focused on me as I continued to hold the paddle above my head. At 0430K, approximately 40 minutes after I had bailed out, I was taken aboard the surface craft.

f. CFC Gunner's Narrative: When the airplane commander told us to prepare to bailout, I left my station and went into the radar room. The radar operator kept his head phones on and when the airplane commander told us to bail out I stood up and moved forward in line to the rear escape hatch.

I was the fifth man to bail out from the rear of the ship. As I reached the escape hatch, I observed three parachutes below me. I rolled out the door and I noticed that my feet were above me when I pulled the ripcord. I thought the chute was slow in opening so I pulled open the cover and the pilot chute popped and I started my descent normally. I lifted the straps under my legs and unfastened my chest strap buckle. Then I unbuckled the leg straps and waited until I hit the water.

There was noticeable shock when I entered the water. I immediately removed my harness without difficulty. When I finally did get clear of the harness, I had the sensation of being dragged through the water. It was then that I noticed my dinghy was still attached to my Mae West. I released my dinghy and inflated my Mae West. I removed my flashlight from my pocket and found that it was still operative. Then I swam over to my parachute, removed my dinghy and inflated it. The raft contained some drinking water, a sail, a reflector paddle, a signal mirror and sponge. I settled down in my dinghy and flashed my light intermittently until a destroyer escort spotted me and came over and took me aboard.

g. Left Gunner's Narrative: I was the last man to bail out from the rear of the aircraft. I went out the rear entrance hatch head first. I pulled my ripcord after clearing the plane but my chute failed to open. Then I gave my ripcord another pull and my chute opened a few seconds before I hit the water.

I didn't have time to unbuckle my chute straps until after I was under water. Then I unbuckled my chute straps with a great deal of difficulty and inflated my Mae West. I took my dinghy out of the case but before I could inflate it, I became entangled in the shroud lines of my chute. I managed to free myself but in doing so I lost my dinghy. I took off my shirt and shoes to give myself freedom of movement. Then I called for help as loudly as I could every few minutes. I saw searchlights sweeping my area but I could not judge how close the ship was to me. I continued to call for help. Every time I called I would gulp down a mouth full more water.

The surface craft kept following my voice until I was spotted in the searchlight. The ship slid by once as its speed was too great to keep me in the glare of the searchlight. The second time they came alongside and I was pulled aboard.

**h. Radar Operator's Narrative:** I was the second man to bailout from the rear entrance hatch. I went out the hatch head first and pulled my ripcord after clearing the ship. As soon as my chute opened I unbuckled my leg straps.

I hit the water and was about three feet under the water when I finally managed to unbuckle my chest strap and get clear of the chute. As soon as I came to the surface of the water I inflated my Mae West. My dinghy was tied to my Mae West but when I tried to reach it I was pulled under the water. Finally I cut the lines connecting my Mae West and my dinghy. In the process lost my dinghy. Then I floated on my back and yelled for help to see if anyone was in the vicinity. The Navigator heard me calling and answered me. He said that he was in his dinghy so I kept calling so that he could locate me. The Navigator finally found me after almost fifteen minutes.

I became very sea sick after pulling myself across the Navigator's dinghy. About twenty minutes later we were taken aboard a destroyer escort. I was so sick that a sailor had to get down in the water with me and tie a rope around my waist so that I could be pulled aboard.

**i. Report on missing crew members:** The body of the tail gunner was recovered but the right gunner was never found.

### **III. COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS OF CREW**

**a.** A different type of release should be put on the one-man life raft. A cord should be put on it instead of a pin, with a head similar to a CO2 cylinder in a six-man life raft.

**b.** A Mae West should have a light and mirror attached.

**c.** Each individual dinghy should be marked on the outside what type it is, with direction on how to operate the dinghy.

**d.** A yellow cloth flag should be attached to all Mae Wests to be used by survivors in the water to signal surface craft.

### **IV. COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS OF THE INTERROGATING COMMITTEE**

**a.** The bail out procedure of this crew was good.

**b.** Crew members seemed to lack adequate knowledge how to open and inflate their dinghy.

- c. **Crew members should be instructed how to pull their ripcords and how to get out of their chutes upon hitting the water after bailout.**

**V. ACTION TAKEN BY THIS HEADQUARTERS**

**No action has been taken by this Headquarters as a result of this emergency report.**

**FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:**

**W. W. FARQUHAR  
Lt. Col. Air Corps  
Adjutant**

MACR 14595

CHECK STATUS ON: 1 June 1945

Status Date

ABBOT, ORVILLE L.	1/Lt.	0-771-546	RTD Date N.S.
CAMPBELL, WILLIAM C.	1/Lt.	0-724-517	RTD Date N.S.
FESQ, HOWELL K.	1/Lt.	0-864-732	RTD 2 June 45
GILMOUR, HUGH B.	Major	0-112-938	RTD Date N.S.
MCKENZIE, FORDON D.	T/Sgt.	11-136-404	RTD Date N.S.
MARTIN, ROBERT E.	S/Sgt.	33-496-159	KIA 1 June 45
MEYER, MARTI F.	S/Sgt.	27-469-486	RTD 5 June 45
ROACH, JOSEPH R. JR.	S/Sgt.	0-695-969	RTD Date N.S.
SCHNECKER, CLAYTON A.	S/Sgt.	35-791-515	KIA 1 June 45
STEIGER, CHARLES A.	S/Sgt.	19-015-227	RTD 6 June 45
ZIMMERMAN, RICHARD E.	S/Sgt.	13-098-303	RTD Date N.S.

27 April 1948

\_\_\_\_\_ Return to L. A. Cauffman, Mem. Div. Ident. Br.  
Search Information, 1535 B. Bldg.