

## SUB TO THE RESCUE

On August 10, 1945, the dawn broke cold and gray in an ugly fog that hung just above the surface of the Pacific and extended hundreds of miles along the Japanese coast reaching the fleet which was then launching early strikes to hit the great targets still alive in the Tokyo area.

Our division, once air-borne, dipped low over the mother carrier Independence, and headed slightly northwest, flying very near the ocean surface, and so tight, planes were at moments barely inches apart. Even in such formation it became almost impossible to make each other out. Pilots were tense, haunted by the possibility of a false move, which here could mean only death. Eyes were riveted to a dark spot which meant comrade. Ears were alert to the steady engine hum which meant safety and home.

The fog grew worse.

Rendezvous with a lifeguard submarine off a coded point known as "Lovey Dovey." That was all we knew. That was our objective.

An hour out we tried radio contact. She answered, "Fog makes it impossible for rendezvous. We advise you, proceed inland and use own discretion, attacking targets of opportunity along the coast."

We turned west and struck land a quarter of an hour later, just north of Tokyo Bay. The fog had

cleared some here and visibility was improved. Suddenly a great black glob of fire exploded just to my right. I shot the throttle forward and stood up on my wing. Not far below, just off the shore was a Jap <sup>was hit</sup> ~~ship~~. Her radar had evidently tracked us in. We were in for something.

Red Hoosier (5-1), our leader, gave us the "Tally-Ho" and swung around for the attack. In we went. Our rockets and tracers tore her well. One stack blew, coughing flames and smoke; then I was over and climbing away. We circled at six thousand feet, still dodging AA. She was badly hurt. Again we went in, strafing from six thousand and closing to mast height, racking her from stem to stern. As I crossed above, a shell struck and cut into the engine. There was no explosion. Quickly I glanced at the instruments—everything O. K. A chill passed through me. I pulled the nose up.

Suddenly Red Leader's voice, "Hoosier (5-2) you're on fire—engine smoking badly." I glanced again at my instruments—oil pressure negative.

"Hoosier 5-1, this is 5-2; I'm out."

"Ditching!"

"Davey, you bastard, here I come."

Someone answered: "Right behind you; take it easy, good luck."

My plane was still running smoothly. Altimeter read one thousand. I headed east, away from the coast and into the fog. In a second a tremor caught the plane. The engine became violently rough and began tearing

apart. I dropped the nose and headed down, falling like a brick. The fog closed quickly. I could see nothing.

All emergency procedure, drop tank, lower flaps and hook, open hood, tighten shoulder straps, unhook chute, shoot guns—all this I did. There was no time for other thoughts. All my actions were automatic.

I glanced at the altimeter—ZERO!

I looked out and down—nothing but fog—yet in that instant I yanked back on the stick. The plane struck hard and tore its way through the water, slashing and turning. Suddenly the nose went under and water came crashing over me. A quick flash of pain creased my head. My hands fought the safety catch of my belt, and I was free—swimming—dragging myself back. The large Grumman tail slipped out of sight and disappeared into the sea. A peace settled over the water.

Somehow I inflated the Mae West and rested my head back. Over me the boys searched devotedly. They had lost contact in that great cover of haze. I could hear them—and hoped. They stayed for over an hour, flying barely above the water, risking their own necks; but finally gas got low and I could hear their engines fade away. They were heading home without me. I knew they had called Hoosier Base and that others would be over. The subs would be alerted. They would get me out. . . . If only they could find me.

Back in the water I struggled, trying to release my life raft. It was stuck. I couldn't force it open. My chute, soaking with water, was gradually pulling me under. I kept repeating, "Don't tire yourself. You're

all right. Take your time." I was hard-pressed now, slowly wearing out. Water kept beating me under. About half an hour passed. I spread green dye marker in the water and soon was covered with a green oily slime mixed with the blood from the wound in my head. Sharks, I knew, were drawn to blood. I must hurry. Finally, with an effort, I tore the canvas pack open and the boat was free. I grabbed for the pump. It wouldn't work! Something was fouled; not really, but because I was excited it seemed so. Then, at last, the gadget worked and I had my boat. Not a fancy thing, but it looked mighty sweet, and this duck just crawled in and took a breath.

Sometime later I raised my head and looked around. It was all very still and I felt sick. The salt water I had taken caused me to vomit—and I thought of New Year's. A long ways off, but I just thought.

Remembering a buoy I had caught a glimpse of while still in the water, I started looking, hoping to find it again, lash on and thus prevent the current from changing my position. My gang would be back, and this is where they would look first. But no luck, I was floating in a little room all my own, enclosed in fog, and desperately lost.

It was rather smooth now because of oil left from the plane. A few parts floated by—two recognition lights; why they floated is beyond a guess. I caught sight of something large and paddled in that direction. It turned out to be a big four-man life raft, identical to the one we carried beneath our wings. At first I thought one of the boys had dropped it, but on inspec-

tion I found the rubber torn and the pump broken in half. This must have been the one carried on my plane, which would have broken off on impact with the water. Struggling, I opened the case, tied the whole business to a line and threw it back in, making use of it as an anchor.

I was tired again and laid back in my boat—legs hung over the side, water covering about half of me, helmet on, harness on, gun and knife in place. I closed my eyes. I was cold. My mind drew blank. It didn't seem so bad . . . it was just a joke. Was it real? I opened my eyes. It was damn real! Slowly I quieted down and tried to rest. I wanted to think and remember. I prayed. With confidence I repeated the Lord's Prayer, the 23rd Psalm.

The throbbing in my head grew worse. In the distance I heard planes. They were looking. I grabbed some flares. For an hour or more they flew back and forth. I could hear them clearly, sometimes even see them; they passed so close. Always they missed me. Even they had to turn back. Again I was alone with my thoughts and the strange silent power of the sea.

For the first time now, I became conscious of noises along the beach—a train whistle, the sound of exploding bombs striking their targets, a great rumble like thunder moving up and down the entire coast.

"Christ, they're really dishing it out."

A butterfly flew by and a lone horse fly lit on my chest. Without thinking I brushed him off. I felt sorry then; we were both in the same boat. He came back and I found myself talking to him. It was very

quiet again. I shouted. The comparison caused me to jump and scare the fly away.

I asked a question: "How far can a fly navigate over water?"

Suddenly I realized a new danger—CAPTURE!! I was close, too close to Japanese shores — maybe two miles at the most.

My fears soon materialized as I realized I was being hunted by Jap fishing boats. I could hear them. One passed about fifty yards astern, a black ghost, barely visible, ploughing along blindly. I could see they had no better chance of spotting me than my own boys, but I ducked low and held my 38 ready. For the first time I was thankful for privacy.

It was nearly thirteen hundred now. I had been out six hours. Small fish swam near and hid under the shadow of my raft. A large turtle stuck his head up and made eyes at me. I thought to myself, if he expects me to wink back he's crazy. So there I sat, a 38 in one hand and a knife in the other . . . somewhere south of Lovey Dovey and north of Tokyo, Jap fishing boats hunting me, and a turtle and a fly for companions.

At fifteen hundred the haze began to lift and it became possible to make out houses along the coast. Then the planes came in again. Now I used my mirror. Back and forth they flew. I could see their tail markings. They were my boys.

Still they did not see me. I shouted, "This way guys just over here. I'm right here."

Still the fog was holding them up. Most of my flares were gone.

"Please try again."

And then, out of nowhere, came an angel, heading directly past my starboard quarter. I lobbed a red star over him. He turned, dropped his wing and flashed by. But back he came and in a minute I had the full division above. They flew low, raising their arms together above their heads in a fighter's victory grasp and just grinned. What a sight! I fired my 38, waved my arms, kicked my legs, and all but swamped. Finally, I quieted down. I folded my arms while they flew a circle watch. Two hours later the boys started zooming again. This time towards the sea. The greatest thrill of my life awaited. A submarine rose out of the waters. I was saved.

There was no room in my tired body to hold the meaning of that moment. They pulled alongside. I thanked God for such friends.

A hatless captain greeted me, smiles and beard covering his face.

"Kinda wet. Glad to have you aboard, son. Get below and into some dry clothes—let's get the hell out of here."

Down into the interior of a giant submarine I stumbled. It was the "USS Scabbard Fish" out of Saipan.

Below, they went all out in stripping me of everything I had. These would make great souvenirs for the families back home. ~~The boys were all smiling and laughing as they stripped me of my gear. They were all smiling and laughing as they stripped me of my gear. They were all smiling and laughing as they stripped me of my gear.~~ Then I was pushed into a warm shower. When I came

out they gave me clean clothes, a stiff drink, plenty of coffee, and I met some of the finest companions a man could hope to know. They eventually even returned my gun after oiling and cleaning it—an unheard of gesture in most nautical circles.

That night as we headed back for Saipan, the Captain told me over my sixth cup of coffee:

"You had us worried, son. Your position as reported (16 Lovey Dovey) meant that you were in a Jap mine field. It was a chance, I wasn't sure any of us would make it." And as I looked at this man and felt the security of his ship, I could not help but ask. "Why should I be spared at the risk of all these good men?" He answered me, and these are the words I shall always remember.

"There is some brief interlude in history for which each of us was meant to live. You can repay us by doing your best when your time comes. We were meant to be there because that is our job. You were meant to live because your job is not yet done. One who has faced death so close cannot accept God's pattern for less."

I knew then that it was my part, as it is the part of every man living to direct his life toward the same unselfish consideration so completely symbolized in this soldier's devotion to his comrade—to have faith in mankind and to know that each man has some ultimate good which this world must nourish and mankind respect.

Peace followed very shortly. The Japs had seen enough. And we, who were still below the sea, drank a toast to the peace of the world, praying, as soldiers pray, that we had seen the last of war.

*Gay Van Dyke*

THE END

*Calvin - Class '1941'*