

C O N F I D E N T I A L

HEADQUARTERS
73RD BOMBARDMENT WING
APO 237, C/O POSTMASTER
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

373.92 AKOPN

30 May 1945

SUBJECT: Ditching Report #11.

TO: See Distribution.

1. Mission Number 19, 14 January 1945. Date of Report: 18 January 1945
2. Wing: 73rd. Group: 497th. Squadron: 869th. Aircraft No 42-24595
3. Cause of ditching: Fire in #3 engine.
4. Trouble: Fire started in #3 engine and enveloped the entire airplane.
5. Ditching: Time, 0916K, 13 January 1945 on way to the target.
6. Rescue: Between 1900K and 2000K, 13 January 1945, at 17-58N 144-03E. Rescued by a USN Destroyer
7. The crew:

<u>POSITION</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>LAST SEEN</u>
Ap Com	LEONARD L COX	Capt	0-422385	Lost in ditching
Co-Pilot	CHARLES C DONHAM	2 /Lt	0-683665	Lost in ditching
Nav	JACK R EHRENBERG	1/Lt	0-793992	Rescued
Bomb	ELVIN E HANSEN	2/Lt	0-739093	Lost in ditching
Engineer	CHARLES C CONTOS	2/Lt	0-868100	Lost in ditching
Radio Op	Melvin L Griffith	S Sgt	15342793	Lost in ditching
CFC Gnr	Frank J Crane	S Sgt	16007692	Lost in ditching
Left Gnr	George E Wright	S Sgt	38043873	Rescued
Right Gnr	Lawrence W Beecroft	Sgt	32069587	Rescued
Tail Gnr	William P Stovall	S Sgt	65633342	Rescued
Radar Op	William W Roberts	S Sgt	37245181	Lost in ditching

8. Interrogation by Group and Squadron staff personnel and Wing Air Sea Rescue Officer. Report prepared by 497th Bomb Group.
9. Narrative Report.

a. Cause of Ditching: When heavy smoke of unknown origin started coming out of #3 engine making it impossible to continue on the mission, the Airplane Commander dropped out of formation and started to return to the base. After it was decided that they would have to ditch, the bombardier attempted to salvo the bombs, but found that the system was inoperative and the bombs had to be toggled out individually. After the bombs were dropped it was noted that fragments had hit the plane causing large holes in the wings and in the fuselage. The engineer then called the pilot and informed him that there was a fire in the No. 3 engine and in the right wheel well. Unsuccessful attempts were made to extinguish the fire in the wheel well but this was unsuccessful, and they were then raised. The fire spread rapidly, enveloping the entire plane.

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b. Preparations for Ditching: There was insufficient time to prepare for ditching as the plane was at an altitude of approximately 900 feet when the trouble developed. However, the airplane commander's, pilot's engineer's and rear escape hatches, the bombs, the aerial camera, and the astrodome were jettisoned before the plane struck the water. The men in the rear compartment were not braced properly as they heard no signal prior to the impact. The navigator gave the course, position, and ground speed to the radio operator, but he does not know whether this message was sent. The airplane commander, pilot, and flight engineer remained strapped in their respective positions. The navigator stayed in his position leaning over his desk and padding his abdomen against the edge of the desk with his parachute. The radio operator and bombardier were lying on the floor with their feet braced against the step in the middle of the forward cabin while the CFC man was in the tunnel with his feet braced against the upper forward turret. The left gunner, right gunner, radar operator, and tail gunner assumed a sitting position in the rear unpressurized compartment with their backs braced against the bulkhead. All of the men in the rear had to crowd to the left side of the plane as the right side was too hot as a result of the fire.

c. Ditching: The wind velocity was not estimated, and it is believed that the sea was moderately rough. The aircraft hit the water at a speed estimated to be about 140 MPH and headed into the wind. Immediately before hitting the water, it was noticed that the right blister was in flames and a few seconds later the rear unpressurized compartment seemed to be a mass of flames. The navigator stated that he believed there was an explosion in the mid-wing section at about the time the plane struck the water. He then lost consciousness and does not recall anything until he gained consciousness and found himself in the water with his seat still strapped to him. The plane hit the water tail first and one of the gunners stated that the impact was about the same as experienced in a normal landing. The plane broke in two near the radar compartment, and the entire front section was in flames.

d. Escape: The right, left and tail gunners and the radar operator escaped through the escape hatch in the rear unpressurized section bringing along two individual life rafts. They stated that they had insufficient time to remove the large life raft. The navigator does not know how he escaped.

e. Survival: The life rafts, carried in the two wells above the wings, were inflated, but one was on fire and the other one had floated away, possibly due to the static line being burned. It was impossible to remove any other equipment except the two individual life rafts as mentioned before, because the tail section sank almost immediately. One crew member took his canteen of water and individual first aid packet with him. All life vests functioned properly. All survivors suffered burns swimming away from the aircraft. The left gunner [Wright] had multiple lacerations about the face and scalp. The navigator suffered multiple fractures and lacerations on both hands; also multiple lacerations about the face and scalp. After getting out of the flames, the tail gunner [Stovall] located the two individual life rafts and secured one, placing the right gunner [Beecroft] in it. He then swam back and secured the second raft. He started after the radar operator [Roberts] when the right gunner called to him to pick up the left gunner as he was injured, so the tail gunner changed course and picked up the left gunner. The radar operator was seen only once after that and they were unable to get to him. In the meantime they picked up the navigator. Considerable difficulty was encountered keeping the two life rafts lashed together as the patches to which the rope was secured would tear off. The lashing of both rafts so close together was necessary due to the extensive injuries received by the navigator. First aid was administered to him and the left gunner. The medical supplies they had were insufficient to take care of the injured parties. All of the survivors, with the exception of the tail gunner [Stovall], were extremely nauseated as a result of swallowing sea water and gasoline, remaining in that condition until picked up [by] the Navy destroyer.

f. Rescue. The life rafts were first sighted by Lt Colonel Northrup, Squadron Commander of the 877th Bomb Squadron, 499th Bomb Group. Col Northrup circled the rafts until Dumbo arrived (about 1500K). Dumbo dropped a raft and some emergency equipment, however, the raft was faulty and could not be fully inflated. The equipment was dropped before the raft and as a result most of it was lost because the men could not reach it. They did manage to get an emergency radio and one survival kit. Dumbo circled until the destroyer arrived (about 1830K) and picked up all survivors.

10. Suggestions by the crew:

- a. More medical supplies be packed in individual life rafts.

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- b. A better method to secure life rafts together should be devised.
- c. It is believed that if life rafts were dropped inflated, there would be less damaged to the raft when it strikes the water.
- d. Life rafts should be dropped first and equipment afterwards by the rescue plane.

11. Comments and Criticisms:

- a. If it is necessary, as it was in this case, to drop the bombs under 1500' altitude, they should be salvoed, if possible, so that they will be dropped safe.
- b. The explosion and fire of the forward section of the aircraft was unquestionably the major reason why of all the people riding there only the navigator escaped. However, the positions taken by the bombardier and radio operator were not the best, and may have been one of the reasons that they did not escape. Lying down with only the feet braced and with no provision made to withstand lateral movement in a ditching can easily lead to serious injury.
- c. This ditching shows the advisability of each man having his one man life raft at his ditching position, and of using the wrist lanyard to prevent its loss.
- d. If the gasoline floating on the surface of the water ignites, serious, if not fatal burns, can be received while swimming through it. The best technique to be used is to leave the Mae West uninflated and to swim under the water as far as possible, preferably in an upwind direction; when it is necessary to surface, to do so with an outward sweep of the hands and arms, and then while at the surface, to push and splash the water away from you. This will force the thin film of gasoline away. As soon as a breath is taken, dive and continue to swim under the water. An alternative method is to swim a surface breast stroke, sweeping the burning gasoline away with each stroke of the arms.
- e. If it is necessary to tie two one-man rafts together it may be possible to do so by reversing the ends of the rafts and passing two ropes around both rafts, using further rope to tighten down on the main ropes between the rafts.

12. Action taken by this headquarters:

- a. A better method of dropping life rafts and emergency equipment is under consideration by Naval Air Sea Rescue and Wing Air Sea Rescue.
- b. Strike and search Superdumbo crews are indoctrinated as to the proper sequence of dropping gear.

BY COMMAND OF BRIGADIER GENERAL O'DONNELL:

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

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See attached sheet

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