



## PREPARE TO DITCH!

*These words were sure to alarm any airman, but especially those aboard B-24s. In Remembrance of the Missing, Col Bob Vickers documents the fates of 392nd BG crews who did not return from a mission. His research shows that 19 of our planes were presumed to have gone down over water. There were no survivors from 15 of those planes. Four crews successfully ditched, with 26 of 39 men surviving.*

*This article focuses on the reasons why the Liberator fared so poorly in ditching situations and the crews who beat the odds. Also in this issue is information on ditching procedures from the Pilot Information File and the Pilot Training Manual.*

### Design issues

Many of the features that made the Liberator a superb bomber worked against it in ditching situations.

The Liberator's wings and support structure were at the top of the fuselage. In a water or belly landing, all the stress was born by the underside of the plane, which was neither designed nor enforced to withstand the rigors of impact.

The immense bomb bays with their roll-up doors were a major concern. When a Lib hit the water, its center section, and thus the bomb bays, usually bore the brunt of the impact. The doors were not made to support the weight of the ship (over 18½ tons when empty) and almost never remained intact in a water landing. When they collapsed inward, the narrow catwalk was not strong enough to keep the plane in one piece; thus, it usually broke apart at the bomb bays. Both halves then quickly filled with water. As a result, B-24s rarely stayed afloat more than a few minutes.

The two life rafts were housed on either side of the fuselage above the wings. Delays getting out of the plane to the wings or in deploying the rafts might result in the life rafts sinking

with the plane.

Another issue was the top turret. In many ditchings, it dropped onto the flight deck, trapping or killing any crewmen nearby.

### 1/Lt Douglas S. Rogillio and Crew

The first ditching by a 392nd crew in which there were survivors occurred on 13 Dec 1943. While flying to Kiel, 579th Sqdn pilot 1/Lt Douglas S. Rogillio Jr. had engine trouble all the way to the target. Moments after bombs away, he had to feather #3 engine.

As they flew alone over the North Sea, attacks by two Ju-88s damaged the ship and wounded three crewmen. The #4 engine had to be feathered.

Rogillio dropped to 12,000 feet as his men threw out everything they could, including guns, ammunition, oxygen bottles, and



This fuzzy photo of War Horse, a/c #42-7479, shows that the bomb bays accounted for about one-fourth of a Liberator's length.

the Norden bombsight. As engineer T/Sgt Anthony P. Mazzei later put it, "Thousands of dollars worth of equipment was dumped into the sea in an effort to stay airborne."

It made no difference. Down to 8,000 feet, the plane entered an overcast and the pilot alerted the crew to take ditching positions. Mazzei wrote, "All of the crew, apart from S/Sgt Walter F. Bryan, one of our waist gunners, came forward to the flight deck. He decided to stay in the rear of the airplane. We never saw him again."

When the a/c finally emerged into clearer skies, it was only 100 feet above the North Sea. Rogillio barely had time to turn the Lib into the wind before impact.

Mazzei had opened the escape hatch door and was crouched behind the copilot. He wrote, "Rogillio flew the airplane with two over-heated, failing engines on the port

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**This issue.** Most of this issue is about ditching—preventing it, preparing for it, and surviving it. Much of the information came from Bob Vickers' book, *Remembrance of the Missing*, and our anthology, *Twentieth Century Crusaders*. Kelsey McMillan, 389th BG historian, sent me the Pilot Information File and Pilot Training Manual that spelled out ditching procedures. A companion article concerning Air-Sea Rescue operations will appear in the March 2010 issue.

**New members.** Our website got an email about 578th pilot 1/Lt Robert E. Fletcher, now 91. The author asked permission to download some photos from [www.b24.net](http://www.b24.net). The ok, and several more photos of Fletcher and his crew, were forwarded. Also sent was information about Fletcher's heroic action during a plane fire on 5 Dec 1943, for which he was awarded the Soldier's Medal. Best of all, I was able to put Fletcher in touch with Joe McNeil, his tail gunner. The two men hadn't spoken since 1944.

M/Sgt Walter Meeker was a crew chief in the 576th. His plane was #42-95299. Daughter Margie and husband Mike have also joined.

Landon Studer is a reservist with the 8th Air Force and a volunteer pilot with the Commemorative Air Force. His plane: the oldest B-24A in existence. In fact, it was the 25th of the more than 18,000 B-24s built. He says, "It's a real pleasure to meet all the veterans, especially when they find out that I am the youngest current B-24 pilot in the world at 26 and that was old for any crew members back then."

Also: relatives of 577th radio operator T/Sgt Albert Perlberg; gunner S/Sgt William B. Sheppard, 578th, KIA 3 Mar 1944; 2/Lt Nicholas D. Bondar, 577th, KIA 13 Nov 1943; 578th navigator 2/Lt Milton Planche; and 578th gunner S/Sgt Perry Onstot. We're glad to have you on the crew.

**Thanks!** Many thanks to everyone who has opted to receive the News via email as a pdf. The Association saves money on printing and postage while the members get their News faster and without damage. It's a win-win situation!

**Membership Renewals.** If the number "09" is next to your name on the mailing label, please send in your dues for 2010. The renewal form is on page 4.

**Correction.** In the September 2009 issue, I said the memorabilia from the Ploughshare was now housed in the Wendling Village Hall. John Gilbert, our representative in England, says the material is actually in the Beeston Village Hall.

**Mural in the Combat Officers Mess.** Anyone who ever visited the Combat Officers Mess—now the home of Jagspares, a used Jaguar car parts dealer—will remember the magnificent artwork (see photo below). It is one of the best examples of WWII wall paintings in the Norfolk, England, area. A photo of the mural—covering almost a full page—was featured in an April 1993 *American Heritage* article aptly titled, "American Graffiti." Until recently, though, the artist's identity was not known.

An email from a proud grandson identified the painter as Cpl Richard G. Merchant, who was assigned to 579th Sqdn Intelligence. Before the war, he attended the National Academy of Design in New York City. Merchant's mother was nurse

to Norman Rockwell's mother, and Rockwell encouraged him to study art. Merchant says the mural in the Combat Officers Mess is the only one he painted at Station 118, but he also painted lots of signs. More information about this artist is on page 6.

**A Personal Note.** I would like to thank all the veterans who sent me their stories, answered my questions as I did research, and provided feedback about the News.

I extend my best wishes for good health and great happiness in 2010 to everyone in the 392nd BGMA family.



# President's Message



Jordan Uttal has died in Dallas at the age of 94. He and the late Evelyn Cohen were the heart and soul of the Second Air Division Association. The Association began in Chicago in 1948 when six former members of Hq. 2nd Air Division met there. Membership climbed to over 9,000; a one-of-a-kind Memorial Library was established in Norwich; and reunions were held

on both sides of the Atlantic. A memorable one was held in Norwich shortly after the terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon on 9/11, 2001, when the 2nd Air Division again crossed the Atlantic in the face of the enemy.

Matthew Martin, the Chairman of the 2nd Air Division Memorial Trust, has written a brilliant obituary for Jordan, which was reproduced in part in the Norwich *Eastern Daily Press*. Both Ben Jones and I have a copy of Martin's work and if anyone would like to see it, please let one of us know.

On a much brighter note, Dan Tison, son of newsletter editor Annette and husband Don, was commissioned Ensign, U. S. Navy, on Dec. 4. Remarkably, Dan is fourth generation U. S. Navy, on both sides of the family. Annette's grandfather was USN in WWI; Don's father was in the naval submarine service in WWII; Annette and Don were post-Viet Nam War naval officers.

I haven't had much feed-back from the troops. However, we heard after a long silence from Joe Westbrook, 578th Sqdn Bombardier. He's in a retirement facility in Greensboro, NC, getting around as best he can on a walker. Wife Mary passed away a few months ago.

And Jim Marsteller, second generation researcher and 392nd BGMA Director, reported that he's had his last therapy session for a broken shoulder. He can play his guitar but can't render a good salute. Jim lost an uncle on the Friedrichshafen raid, and he completed a thorough research of it, including a personal visit to the crash sites.

And here it is December and Christmas will soon be upon us. Annabelle and I wish the 392nd community a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Blue Skies,  
Jim Goar

## FROM THE FILES

*This story comes from an account that 578th Sqdn copilot Jesse D. "J.D." Long, now deceased, wrote to Jim Goar in the early 1990s. He was a member of 1/Lt Harold E. Schildknecht's crew.*

A few of you may remember that we had three gunners with the same name on our crew, all spelled differently and all distinct characters. One was S/Sgt Burwin P. (B.P.) Reed, one was S/Sgt Harry A. Reid, and one was S/Sgt George J. "Junior" Reade, who was only 19. B.P. was credited with three Me-109s and eventually received a battlefield commission as squadron gunnery officer. Our other gunner in the waist was S/Sgt George P. Gegere, very serious, quiet and sane, in contrast to the others.

I remember that on one mission we lost an engine and were limping back over France pretty well alone. Our engineer, T/Sgt Riley S. Sadler, came up to the cockpit and told us that the sight gas gauges indicated that we did not have enough fuel to make it back across the Channel.

Knowing how the B-24 ditched, Hal Schildknecht and I were discussing what to do when the intercom interrupted and we heard one of the men in the waist saying something like, "You move your arms and legs this way, and when you get tired, you roll over and move your arms and legs this way."

I called the waist and asked what was going on. Junior answered that Gegere did not know how to swim and Harry was teaching him. All this at 18,000 feet. We were glad the gauges were inaccurate and we made it back to base.

*Editor's note: I called George Gegere and asked him about this tale. He said he doesn't remember the incident and in fact was an excellent swimmer. But, why should the truth get in the way of a great story?*

## FROM THE HISTORIES



Per the 577th history, "Thanksgiving Day 1944 shuttled back and forth between Nov. 23rd and Nov. 30th depending on the prospective ability of the quartermaster to furnish the necessary turkeys but it finally settled on Nov. 23rd and everyone had a fine turkey dinner." This photo shows one of the dining halls as the men enjoyed their holiday feast. Photo from Cpl Richard G. Merchant's family

From *Target Victory* (published by HQ, 2nd Bomb Division) for the week ending 11 Nov 1944: "In the two years of its existence, from a tiny force to a major combat organization, 2BD has averaged in bomb tonnage—a thousand pounds of blast every four minutes onto axis targets. Since November 7, 1942, the first combat operation (using only 6 planes!), the Division's Libs have attacked with 130,418 tons of bombs, completing 342 missions, 55,500 sorties.

The Division has hammered at targets as far north as Norway and as far south as Libya, and from France in the west to Poland and Rumania in the east.

Only 76 missions were flown in the first year, 266 of the total occurring since Nov. 7, 1943, with infinitely greater numbers of planes participating on each mission. The third year, if it must be completed, will see an incalculable concentration of target destroyers directed onto Hunland."

## PX ITEMS

\*Anthology, *20th Century Crusaders* (hard cover book) \$36.50 .....\$  
 Anthology, *20th Century Crusaders* (CD) \$15.00 .....\$  
 \*Book, *Remembrance of the Missing*, by Col. Bob Vickers, \$35.00 .....\$  
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 Black 392nd Bomb Group cap with gold braid, summer, \$10.50 .....\$  
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*After The Liberators, A Father's Last Mission, A Son's Lifelong Journey* by Bill McGuire,  
 son of 579th navigator Bill McGuire Sr., who was KIA on 18 Mar 1944. Available via pdf or  
 CD, \$10.00.....\$

Postage (price includes U.S. postage; add \$5 for international mail)....\$  
 TOTAL.....\$

\*Because of the limited quantities we have in stock, these items are available only to 392nd BGMA members or relatives. We also reserve the right to limit the number of books sold to any single purchaser.

Send check payable to 392nd BGMA to Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045

392nd BG Commemorative Coin (shown at right), \$13.00. Send check payable to Bob Books to Bob Books, 1432 Little Creek Dr., Pensacola, FL 32506

**A Note from John Gilbert:** *I would like to wish all the 392nd veterans and second generation a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. It's been a great year for visitors from the States! I would also like to say thank you to everyone near Station 118 for their kindness in allowing me to take 392nd visitors around their work places. At Ben Burgess Farm Machinery, which is built over the top of the mission briefing building, John the manager always makes us very welcome at any time. And JagSpares, which was the Combat Officers Mess, also makes us very welcome. Keith and Edor Rowland, who own the land where Site 6 was located, let us tour the few Nissen huts left on the base. This hospitality enables visitors from the US to get a good understanding of where the men in the 392nd lived, flew, and worked and helps the veterans re-connect with their pasts.*



Front and back of the Crusader coin. 1 3/4 inches round, hand-painted in vivid color and gold-plated, in a clear plastic case.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please take a moment to look at the mailing label on this issue. Your membership status can be found right after your name. LM means Life Member and FRND means that you receive the News with compliments of the 392nd BGMA. If the number is 10 or higher, your dues are current; if the number is 09, please renew ASAP.

If you feel that you are in a position to help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below. The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial difficulty, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box.

Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Ground [ ] Air [ ] Sqdn/Unit \_\_\_\_\_  
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Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

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### Dues:

[ ] \$25 if you wish to receive the News by postal mail OR [ ] \$20 if you wish to receive the News by email  
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## **DITCHING from page 1**

side and skillfully mashed our 30-ton Liberator onto the surface of the sea, nose high. We felt the shuddering thumps as the wave tops brushed against the tail section, then the nose section dipped down and plowed into the water at approximately 100 mph. That's all I remember about hitting the water because the next thing I knew I was under the surface of the intensely cold sea, drowning."

Mazzei inflated his Mae West and surfaced near the starboard wing. Crewmen already on top of the plane released the life rafts. Radio operator T/Sgt Aloysius J. Malak and ball turret gunner T/Sgt Alexander Takacs then paddled over to Mazzei and hauled him aboard.

The four officers were in the other raft, most injured: bombardier 2/Lt Richard J. Hughes had a fractured pelvis, Rogillio had cuts on his head from going through the windshield, copilot 2/Lt Lewis R. Worker had cuts on his face and his mouth was split open. Only navigator 2/Lt William E. Kelly was unhurt.

Mazzei later wrote that they heard many a/c in the sky and fired countless flares to attract their attention. Presumably the bombers couldn't see the flares through the overcast. When all was quiet again, the men tied the two rafts together and covered themselves with the canvas they found inside. The emergency food rations and cans of drinking water were a welcome sight.

Survivor accounts are unclear as to whether they spent the night at sea or on the West Frisian Island of Ameland. Regardless, the next day they were captured and became POWs.

Gunners S/Sgt Marshall S. Yorra and S/Sgt Joseph G. Reljac were killed when the top turret collapsed on them. S/Sgt Walter F. Bryan, who had been wounded in the fighter attack, went down with the plane.

### **2/Lt Clifford J. Hunter and crew**

On 5 Mar 1944, the target was an airfield near Cognac, France. Just after crossing the coast of France on the return trip, 577th Sqdn pilot 2/Lt Clifford J. Hunter had to feather the #2 engine, and almost immediately after, #4. The engineer then saw that 100 gallons of fuel remained in #4 and he asked that it be restarted, which was done. Fuel for the three working engines was leveled.

Hunter told the crew to prepare for ditching. The gunners threw overboard whatever they could while radio operator T/Sgt Walter R. Sichau sent distress signals on all radios and SOS by Morse Code key, as well as IFF on the Emergency setting. Copilot 2/Lt Paul N. Huston sent distress messages over VHF radio. Sichau also fired red flares to alert nearby US planes.

With everything done that could be done, the crew assumed ditching positions.

At about 7,000 feet, the engines began cutting out. The plane's descent was approximately 1,200 feet/minute with an estimated speed of 140-145 miles per hour at impact.

Engineer S/Sgt Cecil D. Macklin and Sichau exited the plane through the top hatch and inflated both life rafts. Despite severe bleeding from his head, Sichau maneuvered one raft to the left waist window and hauled two men aboard, both with broken arms. A third, navigator 2/Lt Jack P. Gilman, was tangled in the shrouds of his opened parachute. Sichau had to grab onto Gilman's clothing with

his teeth to get him into the raft.

Macklin, in turn, got Hunter onto the wing and inflated his Mae West. He also pulled ball turret gunner S/Sgt Ellwood J. Mills out of the water but saw that he had already drowned. Macklin then hauled tail gunner S/Sgt Verne A. Nelson aboard the raft.

Sichau and Macklin repeatedly yelled at Hunter to swim to the rafts, but to no avail. As the ship started to sink, Hunter finally left the wing but swam away, rather than toward, the rafts. The men paddled furiously after Hunter, but he disappeared into the waves.

P-47s, alerted by the flares, circled overhead. Within moments, an Air-Sea Rescue (ASR) Walrus float plane arrived and picked up the six survivors. Despite an extensive search by the float plane and a rescue boat, the bodies of pilot Hunter, copilot Huston, bombardier 2/Lt James N. McBrayer, and ball turret gunner Mills were never found.

Of the six survivors, only Nelson and Sichau flew combat missions again. Nelson flew one mission; Sichau flew five, then became a POW on 18 April 1944 while flying with 1/Lt Dexter Tiefenthal's crew.

### **F/O Edmund J. White and crew**

On 11 Sep 1944, the target was an ordnance depot near Hannover, Germany. Just after crossing the Rhine River, the formation was attacked by 20-30 Me-109s, which caused five ships to abort due to battle damage. Three more ships were later shot down near Koblenz.

579th Sqdn pilot F/O White's plane was heavily damaged by the fighters or flak at the target. Navigator 2/Lt William S. Long recalls that the #1 turbo regulator was shot away; the #3 engine was shot out, on fire, and streaming gas and oil; the interphone was shot out; the bombsight damaged; and there was a huge hole in the left wing.

Four P-47s escorted the damaged Lib toward England. The crew began throwing equipment overboard to lighten the ship. When a waist window cover was tossed out, it hit the right horizontal stabilizer and got stuck, causing a lot of drag. After that, the ship was almost completely out of control—climbing, descending, and banking at random.

The crew had periodically practiced getting into the correct ditching positions and attaching the ditching belt. It was a heavy canvas strap that would be hooked to either side of the fuselage. The men in the waist would sit facing the tail with their backs braced against the belt.

In the excitement of the moment, though, they hooked the ditching belt too tight and not everyone fit. So, they improvised—some crewmen held others in their laps.

F/O White ditched the plane about 30 miles from Great Yarmouth, England. He did a masterful job of landing, setting the badly damaged ship in a U-shaped swell at 105 mph. The a/c stayed afloat for 15 minutes, well past the norm.

The bottom half of the plane was ripped off from the bomb bays to the camera hatch. It must have nosed in because the rear was abruptly lifted in the air, causing the entire tail and turret to be torn completely off. The top turret dropped into the plane, leaving a hole through which engineer T/Sgt Ralston Hayden escaped.

Bombardier 2/Lt Richard W. Alexander had been holding on to radio operator T/Sgt Robert W. McAllaster, but the

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# ARC CHRISTMAS PARTY FOR KIDS, 1944

S.J. "Sandy" Elden was a Sergeant in the 577th Sqdn's ordnance section. He provided this article about the Christmas party for local school children in 1944 and his memories of Birdie Schmidt Larrick:

Birdie and I had developed a friendship in the planning and execution of the 1944 Christmas Party at the Base, which Birdie wrote about in the December 2008 issue of the News.

We arranged to have "collection plates" at the Post Exchange and raised a good deal of funds for the purchase of gifts and other ancillary expenses in connection with the party.

Then on one extremely foggy evening, we arranged to use a truck and a group of us headed off to Kings Lynn for our shopping tour. We were driving on a cement road and the fog was so thick that I was drafted to sit on the front fender of the truck to be on the lookout for anything that might deter our mission.

Suddenly, I saw nothing but total blackness and I yelled out for the driver to stop! He slammed on the brakes and I was hurled out into space. It turned out that we had come upon a stretch of asphalt highway which accounted for the "blackout." I ended up on the ground, and fortunately, was not injured. A good laugh was had by all!

In Kings Lynn we found an excellent toy store and after a

few hours went back to the Base with a good portion of the store's stock. Of course, we had as much fun as the kids as we had tried out many of the toys before we purchased them. We turned all the merchandise over to Birdie and Jane Mallory, who with the help of the GIs, sorted everything out and assigned the gifts to the recipients.

And of course, we all had a ball on Christmas Day itself as the host of kids arrived at the Base to celebrate the holiday. A wonderful time was had by all, especially at the grand finale when Santa handed out the gifts.

There was a chap by the name of Sid Stevens who was the only male on the staff of Dr. Bernardo's Home. We had a common bond in our service to Boy Scouting, and we had become good friends. Sid invited me to spend the next day, "Boxing Day," at the Home. So on the next day I cycled over to Lexham Hall,

the site of Bernardo's, and spent a delightful afternoon with the 33 boys and five staff members. Sid passed away many years ago, but to this day I still correspond with Ken Gray. At 14 years of age in 1944, he was the oldest "youngster" living at the Home.

Dr. Bernardo's Home had been evacuated from the East End of London during the war due to the heavy bombing by the Germans.



Left photo: Birdie Schmidt and Sgt S.J. Elden. "Thanks to gals like her," Elden says, "there was a lighter side to the war!" Photo from S.J. Elden. Right photo: Santa delivers gifts to delighted English children. Photo from Bob Harned



## CPL RICHARD G. MERCHANT

Richard Merchant tried to enter the service three times but was turned down due to poor health and blindness in one eye. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, though, he was miraculously considered healthy enough to be drafted!

Following basic training (with Clark Gable), radio school, and combat intelligence school, he joined the 392nd in Biggs Field, Texas.

A member of S-2 (Intelligence), Merchant says he got up at 3 am for breakfast and then started his workday. "My duties," he recalls, "involved mapping out routes for the planes as well as briefing and interrogating flying crews." He also did drawings of enemy flak batteries and catalogued files in the S-2 Library.

He learned to drive at Wendling and then took combat crews to their bombers after mission briefings.

He married Grovene Lindsay in 1945 and worked mostly in

paper mills. He and Grovene had been married 55 years when she died in 2001. He now lives in the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville.

Even 64 years later, he remembers the English people he met. "They were very kind and friendly. They didn't have much, but would still offer a meal in their home. If someone had chickens, they would give you eggs. There was a farmer whose property bordered the base and he was very generous."



Cpl Merchant and his fiancée, Grovene Lindsay, in July 1943.

## **DITCHING from page 5**

current pulled McAllaster away. He went down with the ship, as did nose navigator 1/Lt Orville W. Shelton Jr.

The P-47 had notified ASR and a launch was sent to intercept them. Eight crewmen were picked up within 15 minutes, a critical factor in their survival since only three (White, copilot F/O James M. Whalen and Hayden) had managed to get into a raft.

White, Whalen, Alexander, and Hayden finished their combat tours. Long and tail gunner S/Sgt Ralph W. Ziehm were excused from further combat duty due to their injuries. Waist gunners S/Sgt George Sabolish and S/Sgt Martin G. Egler were killed in action on 22 March 1945.

Long says he was too busy to even think about "what happens next" until he was in the water. He still remembers finally starting to feel warm again, after he was picked up by the ASR launch and given dry clothes and something hot to drink.

### **1/Lt John B. Kelly and crew**

On 15 March 1945, 30 bombers were sent against the German General Staff Headquarters near Zossen, 20 miles south of Berlin. 1/Lt Kelly's crew encountered flak, but everything seemed fine. Then, as nose gunner Sgt Marshall D'Ambrosio Jr. later wrote, "Our engines started to sputter. We had checked the gas previously before coming over the North Sea. We had 625 gallons. But when we tried to level the tanks while we were crossing the North Sea, all the gas seemed to build up in #2 engine and we couldn't get it out. Then all the engines started to sputter and conk out and start again."

D'Ambrosio went on, "Kelly's words then were, 'prepare to ditch men.' These words are words every airman dreads. Only a few ever live to tell about it. We had no flaps. The auxiliary hydraulic pump had failed us, too. We threw everything in the waist out. Then we took our ditching positions waiting for the plunge. We all seemed a little calm but our grips on one another's arms showed the tension going through our bodies."

He wrote vividly about what happened next. "Well, I felt one bang. Everything was black—must have been knocked out. We hit at 110 mph and made a dead stop. I thought I was drowning. I was in shock. Tons of water were on me and I gasped and hollered for breath. I was weaker than a dead man. The water pushed me all over the inside of the ship. I was trapped it seemed. The waist was a mass of tin. It looked as though a hundred cannon balls hit it and tore holes in it. We came to the conclusion that the rest of the crew must have been hurtled through the body on impact. I heard copilot F/O Dieudonne Vaughan all of a sudden say 'try kid, try kid.' Then I turned to see him. He was a mass of blood. His whole face seemed to be skinless. When I saw him like that I figured if he could do it, I could too.

"I didn't have the strength to climb through the waist. I crawled through a hole in the waist. I paddled about 3 strokes and was just going down when Vaughan grabbed my arm and held me on the wing. Then Kelly held me while engineer Sgt Douglas A. Yost and Vaughan tried to get the dinghies out."

All nine men got out of the ship. The five who came up near the front section—Kelly, Vaughan, D'Ambrosio, Yost

and waist gunner Sgt Wallace P. Zielke—were eventually able to get into the life rafts.

The others—navigator 2/Lt Alvin D. Coleman Jr., radio operator Sgt Virgil E. McElroy, waist gunner Sgt Stanley J. Poremba, and tail gunner Sgt Daniel J. Reardon Jr.—came up near the tail. Despite herculean efforts, the men in the life rafts were unable to reach them before the currents pulled them away.

"We tried like all hell to row the dinghies to get the other boys," D'Ambrosio wrote, "but it was useless. We drifted one way and a current seemed to carry them in the opposite direction. About 2 hours or something went on. I can't remember. Then a Wellington flew over us. We shot flares up and he saw us. He dropped acetylene torches on the water around us and sent a signal out. It was dark now and the flares really lit up. Then we saw a bright spotlight searching the water. More flares went up and then the light like a message from heaven shined on us. We were saved."

Poremba's body was retrieved two days later. The other three men were never found.



## **GUNNERY TRAINING AT WENDLING**

*By the time gunners had a few combat missions under their belts, they might think they knew everything about how to shoot down enemy aircraft. Not so. Here, 579th Sqdn gunnery instructor Sgt Jack R. Rotzien describes the training program at Station 118.*

The first aboard was T/Sgt Robert C. Elston from the 577th; S/Sgt Burdett B. Bennett (576th) was the next one added. I came along a few weeks later as did Sgt Gilbert R. Teske (578th).

New techniques and improved electronic gunsights were being introduced. Our job was to keep crews abreast of the latest technology and to have them practice to gain proficiency in gunnery. We also ran regular classes using "Jam-Handy" projectors and film on reels to sharpen the gunners' skills in fighter aircraft identification.

A large semi-circular screen was built in our Quonset-style building. We used projection equipment showing enemy fighters flying pursuit curves. All turret types and swivel-mounted guns were mounted facing the screen. As the gunners aimed at the fighters, the rings of their gun sights were projected on the screen. This allowed the instructors to evaluate the changing amount of lead they were giving the target.

Most were skilled; however, in numerous cases the need for additional practice was pronounced and appreciated.

Our first officer was Capt Sullivan, a remarkably astute and considerate man who was an expert in midnight requisitions, which were much needed during the start-up. The Captain had numerous missions but had refused to go stateside as his crew was lost on a mission he missed because of illness. Later our officer was Lt Peters, an armament officer.

All of us instructors flew some combat missions as substitutes, so we had actual as well as theoretical knowledge to pass on.

## RAH, RAH, RAH!!

What is a football game without cheerleaders? While college football dates to the early 1800s, cheerleading didn't come along until the end of that century. College cheerleading as we know it began on 2 Nov 1898 when University of Minnesota (U of M) student Johnny Campbell directed a crowd in cheering, "Rah, Rah, Rah! Ski-U-Mah, Hoo-Rah! Hoo-Rah! Varsity! Varsity! Varsity, Minn-E-So-Tah!"

At age 92, 578th Sqdn radio operator Bill Braddock is the oldest U of M cheerleader. He cheered between 1935 and 1940, when the Gophers won the national championship three times and the Big Ten championship all four years.

During the school's Homecoming activities on 10 Oct 2009, all its former cheerleaders were recognized, with Bill getting tremendous applause from the capacity crowd.

Bill notes that back in his day, only men could be cheerleaders as "women needed to be protected from jumping up in the air and showing too much skin." He says few of the cheers he yelled are used any more because the current style highlights gymnastic-type maneuvers.

He remembers seeing Johnny Campbell at football games, still cheering.



Bill Braddock. Top photo: 3rd from left, as a cheerleader at the University of Minnesota. Above left: as radio operator on Capt Cliff Edwards' Ford's Folly crew. Above right: as the oldest U of M cheerleader. Top and above right photos from Marge Braddock.

## DITCHING PROCEDURES

*From the Pilot Information File 8-3, revised 1 Jan 1945:*

Some day you may be forced down at sea. You won't have time to look up the answers then, so now's the time to start preparing for such an emergency. Here's how to do it:

1. Know the proper procedure for ditching your airplane.
2. Know the use of emergency equipment provided for ditching purposes.

As pilot, you must not only learn your own ditching duties thoroughly, but must make sure that your crew members know theirs. Success depends on the speed and efficiency with which each member of the crew executes his assigned job, and upon the coordination of all efforts.

Conduct ditching and dinghy drills regularly. Your Personal Equipment Officer will help you work out a drill procedure.

### Inspections

Before taking off on an over-water mission, make the following checks:

1. Emergency equipment—See that it is complete, properly stowed, and that it has been inspected as required.
2. Escape hatches—Make sure that they operate properly.
3. Life vests—Check your own and your crew members. Blow the vests up by mouth and check the adjustment of waist and leg straps. Inspect CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge and see that valves are closed.

As soon as you have the slightest doubt that you can make land, give the order: "Prepare for ditching." Give your crew as much time as possible to carry out their ditching duties and get in position.

In addition to verbal warnings over the interphone, use the standard ditching signals: six short rings—"Prepare for ditching;" one long ring—"Brace for ditching."

### Radio Procedure

Start emergency radio procedure immediately. Your best chance of being rescued lies in early and correct emergency radio procedure.

Specific radio procedure differs in various theaters of operations. Learn the instructions for your theater and make sure your radio operator knows them. If you have transmitted ditching signals and then find you can make land, notify the Air/Sea Rescue Unit as soon as possible so as to prevent useless search.

### Jettisoning

Lighten the plane by jettisoning bombs, guns, ammunition, extra fuel and anything not essential to operation of the airplane. Throw out any objects lying loose or likely to be torn loose by the impact. Hold or firmly secure emergency equipment that you are going to take with you.

### Emergency Exits

Close bomb bay doors after jettisoning bombs. Close all lower hatches to keep water out. Keep open top or upper side emergency exits through which you will escape. If closed, they may jam on impact. Close all bulkhead doors to stop the flow of water through the plane.

### General Crew Preparations

Remove oxygen masks as soon as you are below 12,000 feet. Take off neckties and open collars. Remove heavy boots, but keep on flying clothing and helmet for protection.

**See DITCHING PROCEDURES on page 9**

## DITCHING PROCEDURES from page 8



Sgt Gil Bambauer exhibits the one-man dinghy.

Remove parachutes, except when you need the one-man life raft attached to the harness.

Do not remove life vests. Keep them on at all times. *Do not inflate until out of the airplane.*

If you inflate your life vest while still in the airplane, you will find it difficult, if not impossible to get out through the hatches.

### Ditching Positions

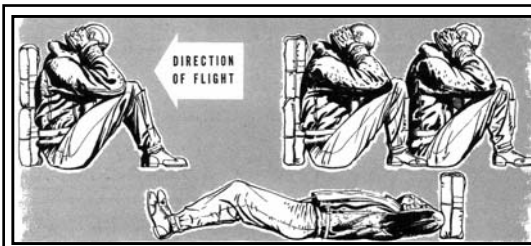
All crew members must follow the standard ditching positions recommended for various combat planes in the AAF ditching posters. If there is no poster on your airplane, or you can't use the positions recommended because of

differences of stowage or structural variations, remember the following:

### General Rules

1. The best ditching position is to sit facing the tail of the plane, knees drawn up, back and head braced against a solid structure. If your head extends above the support, clasp your fingers tightly behind it to hold it from being snapped back.

2. The second position is to lie on the floor of the plane, head to the rear and feet firmly braced against a solid structure. Bend the knees slightly. The best position for an injured man is the seated one. If such a position is not the injured man's regular one, have him trade places with someone. If there is not enough bulkhead room for all to brace against, if there are extra people in a compartment, it will be necessary for some to sit, facing aft, back braced against forward man's shins, feet and knees drawn up, hands clasped behind head.



Ditching positions per the Pilot Information File, 1 Jan 1945.

3. Another position, in airplanes which are equipped with ditching belts, is to brace against the belts.

4. Pilot and copilot must have seat belt and shoulder harness fastened. Warn the crew five seconds before the impact so that they can brace for the shock. Stress that positions must be held until the airplane comes to a stop; casualties occur when men relax immediately after the initial impact.

### Wind and Surface Conditions

The sea is a tricky landing strip. So it is important to determine the wind's direction and velocity for a successful ditching. This is not easy to do, and it requires practice. Get in the habit of studying wave and swell formations on every flight, so that you'll become adept in estimating wind and sea conditions by surface disturbances.

### Wind Direction

Waves are created by the wind and move downwind. Thus the line of the wind lies at right angle to the waves. Watch for white caps, or breaking waves. Waves break downwind. But the foam and spume of the breaking wave has the appearance of sliding down the upwind side of the wave. Usually you cannot determine wind direction unless the wind is strong enough to form white caps.

Look for wind lanes—series of alternate strips of light and shade. These are parallel to the wind.

It is easy to misjudge the direction of the wind by 180°. If possible, fly the plane parallel to the waves and watch the direction of the drift.

### Altitude

Altitude is extremely difficult to estimate over a calm, glassy sea. One way to judge altitude is to have the radio operator reel out the trailing antenna until the weight hits the water. The radio operator advises when the current drops.

### Use of Flaps

The amount of flaps to use depends upon the type of airplane and its condition. In general, when you have sufficient power to maintain control, you can safely use full flaps. When ditching without power, use lesser flap settings, particularly crosswind.

In aircraft with Fowler Type flaps, which usually do not tear off on the initial impact, the use of full flaps may cause severe ditching tendencies.

The ideal flap setting is that which gives minimum rate of descent with minimum forward speed.

### From the Pilot Training Manual, Undated

The best procedure for ditching any airplane is to conduct your flight in such a way that ditching is not necessary. Repeated ditchings have occurred because of improper fuel procedure and improper use of boost, rpm, lack of understanding of anti-icing and de-icing equipment, poor navigation, and improper technique for 3 and 2-engine operations.

Remember, if you aren't maintaining altitude on 3 or 2 engines, lighten your load: 1. Jettison the bomb load. 2. Jettison guns and ammunition if not in danger of attack. 3. Jettison camera and all equipment not necessary for navigation or for survival on the sea.

If possible, be ready to ditch before you get below 1000 feet. But don't give up flying the airplane if you have sufficient fuel. When your load is lightened, you still may be able to keep 'er in the air with smooth flying and proper control. If you can hold it, a few hundred feet is as good an altitude as 10,000 feet. As you use up fuel, it will become easier to hold your altitude and you may even be able to climb.

Enemy fire, weather or other circumstances may force you to ditch. That's when advance planning and drill are life savers. A margin of 30 seconds may mean the difference between life and death for some of your crew. At the order "Prepare for ditching" each crew member must know his specific duties so well that in the emergency he will perform them almost automatically.

### Ditching Officer and Drill

Designate one member of the crew (usually the copilot) as ditching officer. Require him to brief your crew (including  
**See DITCHING PROCEDURES on page 10**

## **DITCHING PROCEDURES from page 9**

yourself) on the problems of ditching and to keep track of the latest available information. At least once a week conduct a ditching drill as you are coming in from a practice mission. Require the entire crew to take ditching positions and simulate a ditching operation. After propellers are stopped have them exit in the correct order through the proper hatches with all the equipment (except life rafts) that they would have if there was water out there. Time the operation. Inspect crew members with your ditching officer to see if equipment has been forgotten. Check the crew as to the duties they would have performed and their knowledge of the use of equipment. This will pay dividends if you ever run into the real thing. All members of the crew must wear their life vests at all times on over-water flights and understand their use.

### **Ditching Procedures for the B-24**

The moment a ditching emergency arises the pilot gives the signal for crew to take ditching positions, the altitude, and the approximate number of minutes before impact. This should be acknowledged by the crew in this order: copilot, navigator, bombardier, nose gunner, flight engineer, radio operator, right waist gunner, left waist gunner, belly gunner, and tail gunner, with the words, "Copilot ditching, navigator ditching," etc.

All positions are mentioned as a guide. Each airplane commander will have to adapt procedures to his particular needs and equipment.

Alarm Bell ditching signals: Crew to ditching positions—6 short rings. Brace for ditching—1 long ring just before impact.

#### **Procedure**

Immediately, all crew members should loosen shirt collars and remove oxygen masks unless above 12,000 feet, in which case oxygen continues to be used until notification by the pilot.

All crew members wearing winter flying boots should remove them, but remove no other clothing. Then each crew member performs his specific duties. Have life vests on but do not inflate them before landing.

Upon specific order from the pilot, crew members will remove parachutes and parachute harnesses.

#### **Duties Before Landing on Water**

*Pilot:* After giving the warning he remains in the normal flight position for ditching. Fastens safety belt and shoulder harness but unfastens parachute straps. Shortly before

impact, he gives a long ring on the alarm bell to notify the crew to brace for ditching.

*Copilot:* Remains in normal flight position. Unfastens parachute straps and fastens safety belt and shoulder harness. Assists pilot as necessary.

*Navigator:* Calculates position, course, speed, and estimated position of ditching and gives information to radio operator. Destroys secret papers. Gathers maps, compass, and celestial equipment. Goes to flight deck and takes ditching position.

*Bombardier:* Jettisons bombs and closes bomb doors. Destroys bombsight. Goes to rear compartment; checks position of others and takes ditching position.

*Nose Gunner:* Jettisons ammunition, locks nose turret in forward position, and goes to ditching position.

*Flight Engineer:* Turns guns aft. Shoots out or jettisons ammunition. Avoid getting shell cases jammed in the bomb doors. Opens and removes top hatch and jettisons it and loose equipment through the bomb bay and checks it closed. Closes floor door and rear door to flight deck after navigator comes up. Takes up emergency ration box, attaching rope to arm, and takes ditching position.

*Radio Operator:* Turns IFF to distress, switches on liaison transmitter (turned to MF DF frequency) sends SOS, position, and call sign continuously. On order from the pilot he clamps down key, hinges up radio table and takes ditching position after attaching rope of emergency radio equipment to his arm (if radio is located on flight deck).

*Left Waist Gunner:* Opens left waist window and leaves it open, jettisons left waist gun, ammunition and all loose equipment, preferably through the belly hatch to avoid damaging tail surfaces. Gets emergency ration box and attaches rope to arm. Takes ditching position.

*Right Waist Gunner:* Opens right waist window and leaves it open. Jettisons right waist gun, ammunition and loose equipment, preferably through the belly hatch to avoid damaging tail surfaces. Secures water or supplies, goes to ditching position and remains on interphone.

*Belly Gunner:* Retracts turret and jettisons ammunition, preferably through belly hatch if time permits. Takes ditching position.

**See DITCHING PROCEDURES on page 11**

## **FOLDED WINGS REPORT**

Please report the death of a member or spouse and provide a copy of the newspaper obituary if possible.

Name of deceased \_\_\_\_\_ Unit/Sqdn \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Date of death \_\_\_\_\_ Survivors \_\_\_\_\_

Reported by \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

The 392nd BGMA is engaged in a fund-raising effort to financially support our website, [www.b24.net](http://www.b24.net). It contains the history of the 392nd Bomb Group. You could make no greater tribute to your loved one than a donation for this living and ongoing memorial to the 392nd. Please send this report, hopefully with your check payable to the 392nd BGMA-Website, but send it with or without it, to: Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039

## **DITCHING PROCEDURES from page 10**

*Tail Gunner:* Lines up turret directly aft and locks. Comes out of tail, helps jettison ammunition and check belly hatch firmly closed, secures emergency radio rope to arm (if stored in rear compartment). Takes up ditching position.

*Warning:* If time permits, waist windows should be removed and jettisoned through the belly hatch to avoid danger of their closing and jamming shut on impact. It is most important that all bottom hatches be closed and that the top hatch and waist windows be open.

### **Ditching Positions**

It is difficult to specify exact ditching positions for each crew member because location and type of equipment will vary. Ditching officer should study recommended positions and check them during drill. There are 3 suitable general locations: the flight deck, the rear compartment forward of the waist windows, and the half deck.

The half deck is one of the best ditching positions in the airplane and as many men as possible should lie there with feet braced forward, protected with coats and cushions against sharp edges. This relieves some of the strain from the ditching belt and the men on the half deck could aid others if injured by water or carried back onto tail.

Lying down with feet braced forward is the best position for bracing. If in a sitting position with back braced against a solid surface, head should be clasped in hands to hold it against the snap of impact.

The dangers from a hard landing are that the top turret can be torn loose, and if bomb bay doors are caved inward, water may fracture No. 6 bulkhead and flood the rear compartment.

Definite position assignments should be made after consultation between the airplane commander and the ditching officer. Usually those on the flight deck will include pilot, copilot, radio operator, engineer, and navigator. Those in the rear compartment or on the half deck usually will include bombardier, the 2 waist gunners, nose gunner, belly gunner, and tail gunner.

### **Technique of Landing the Airplane**

To properly land the airplane, it is necessary to know the direction and velocity of the wind and the character of the waves. Consult Pilot Information File and your navigator concerning how to determine whether this is a calm sea, waves, or a ground swell and the direction and velocity of wind. When flying over water it is just as important to know these things as it is to know the nature of terrain during flights over land. Don't wait until you have to ditch to try to learn them. On over-water flights, require the navigator to supply this information (where possible) along with position reports.

### **In Any Sea**

In the B-24 airplane in particular, it is of the utmost importance to avoid a high rate of sink. That's one of the reasons for jettisoning all the weight possible before impact. Get the airplane slowed down before you start your glide and control sink with power if possible. It is better to glide with half flaps and bring full flaps down to slow the speed as you flare out above the water than to establish a high rate of sink that will bring the airplane crashing down onto the water.

As much as possible, grease 'er onto the water just as you would grease a belly landing on concrete, even though this requires landing somewhat faster. Don't attempt to land tail-low, because this puts too much strain on Station 6. Don't drop it in or you will collapse the bomb bay doors and force water against bulkhead No. 6. The landing recommended above is based on combat experience.

### **Landing on a Calm Sea**

If the surface is calm, without a definite wave formation, and white caps have not appeared, ditch upwind.

### **Landing on a Swell**

If surface is spotted with white caps but foam is not yet being blown into spray, ditch along the top and parallel with swell.

### **Landing in High Waves**

If foam is whipped into spray, wind velocity is too great to land crosswind. Ditch upwind on upslope of wave. This is the procedure for a high wind and heavy sea. *Caution:* There may be more than one impact. Warn the crew to hold positions until the aircraft comes to rest.

### **Procedures After Landing**

The airplane will remain afloat usually from 1 to 5 or 10 minutes. As soon as the airplane comes to rest, engineer will pull releases on the life rafts. Exits will be made as fast as possible with necessary equipment as follows:

**Exits Through the Flight Deck Hatch:** (Each man inflates life vest after clearing hatch.) Navigator first, receives emergency radio (if stored in radio compartment) from the radio operator and goes to left raft; radio operator second, after handing radio to navigator, goes to left raft; engineer third, receives ration box from copilot and goes to right raft; copilot fourth, after handing ration box to engineer, goes to right raft, takes command; pilot fifth, hands out water and other supplies and goes to left raft and takes command.

**Exits From Rear Compartment:** (Life vests should be inflated after individuals are clear of the waist windows so vests won't interfere with exit if hatches are under water.) Right waist gunner (or nose gunner) first, through right waist window to right raft, carrying water or other supplies; belly gunner second, through right waist window to right raft; bombardier third, through right window to right raft; left waist gunner first, through left window to left raft, holding to ration-box rope; tail gunner second, through left waist window after throwing out radio (if in his charge) holding tightly to rope, to left raft.

**Note:** If time and circumstances permit, take out the frequency meter and be sure to keep it dry. By attaching antenna from the Gibson Girl emergency radio to frequency meter, it can be operated as an efficient receiver to provide 2-way communication for several hours.

### **The Time Element**

Speed is important, but so is procedure. Give first attention to injured persons. Don't leave necessary equipment behind or you will face starvation and have no means of signaling for help. Drill to get maximum teamwork.

### **Survival**

Ditching officer should study Pilot Information File and survival booklets and instruct crew so all will know how to make the most of life raft equipment, how to signal, and how to survive on the sea.

## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Tom Perry,  
576th Sqdn Armorer

It is ok to wish me a Merry Christmas, after all, it is the day that the world celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior.

The Bible records for us in the first chapter of Matthew that Joseph was espoused to Mary, that before they came together Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Ghost. Joseph was thinking of putting her away privately, but while he was thinking about this the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said not to be afraid of taking Mary for your wife because that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost and she shall bring forth a son. You shall call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

The Bible says in Galatians 4:4, "In the fullness of time, God sent forth his son to redeem us."

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous new year.

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association  
9107 Wood Pointe Way  
Fairfax Station, VA 22039  
USA

## ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

### First Class Mail



**THE 392ND MEMORIAL  
AT WENDLING**

**But we...shall be remember'd;**



**We few, we happy few,  
we band of brothers.**



**For he to-day that sheds  
his blood with me  
Shall be my brother...**

**William Shakespeare  
Henry VI**

*Almighty God, Who has blessed us with the will and courage to do our duty, we praise You for our comrades whose death kept freedom living. We praise You also for giving us the years we have lived since their departure. We pray that You will strengthen and sustain our devotion to truth and justice, so that we may be faithful beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Continue Your mercy to our comrades; keep them in Your care; and bring us all at last into Your presence there to rejoice Eternally. Amen. — Composed by 576th pilot the Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, retired Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.*

## ∞FOLDED WINGS∞

*Virginia Supp, widow of Joseph Supp, 576, Oct. 13, 2009  
Edward H. Hanley, 577, Feb. 22, 1992  
Jordan Uttal, 2ADA, Nov. 15, 2009  
John A. Samsell, 576/9  
Charlie M. McGowen, 578, Dec. 5, 2009  
Thor R. Hanson Sr., 579, Aug. 27, 2009*