

## **Norman Dwight Smith**

**Captain, Army Air Corps, United States Air Force**

**420th Bomb Squadron, 90th Bomb Group, 5th Air Force  
New Guinea and Australia in the Pacific Theater, World War II  
Sole survivor of a B-24 crew on a mission which went down  
off Northern New Guinea on January 9, 1943  
Drifted at sea for nine days before landfall and final rescue**

Interviewed on May 16, 2001  
by Martha J. Ryan in Mr. Smith's home in  
Carlsbad, California



**Norman Dwight Smith**  
2nd Lt. - Army Air Force  
S/N - 0-661983  
Aviation Cadet - Class of July 1942F  
Graduation - Lubbock, TX

Introduction: Norman Dwight Smith was interviewed by Martha Ryan on May 16, 2001, in Mr. Smith's home in Carlsbad, California, as part of the Oral History Program of the Veterans Museum and Memorial Center as well as the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Ryan: This is the interview of Norman Dwight Smith. His address is in Carlsbad, California. Norman, when were you born?

Smith: 1921.

Ryan: And where were you born?

Smith: Loma Linda, California

Ryan: And which conflict did you serve in?

Smith: Several were in the Southwest Pacific.

Ryan: And today's date is May 16, 2001.

Smith: Right.

Ryan: OK, the interviewer is Martha Ryan, and we are interviewing in Norman's home in Carlsbad, California. Norman, tell me how you heard about World War II. What were you doing when you heard about everything getting started?

Smith: Well, I was in the first class of Aviation Cadets, and we were about half-way through in . . . well, I went down there about the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.

Ryan: And what year was that?

Smith: '41.

Ryan: '41.



*Norman Smith during his interview in 2001*

Smith: So I was in the midst of training. It was essentially boot training for aviation.

Ryan: So you had enlisted?

Smith: Yes. Well, I guess you'd call it that. There was a special category. We weren't enlisted then as such. It was a special designation; Aviation Cadet is what they called us. So I joined the Aviation Cadets. Before they had another training program called Flying Cads, and they were being phased out. And the Aviation Cadets were coming in. I was in what they called the Class of '42 F. That would be the sequence of graduation, so in '42, the F month. Count them on your fingers up to F.

Ryan: So you learned about Pearl Harbor then while you were in this training school?

Smith: Yes , in San Antonio, yes.

Ryan: San Antonio, Texas?

Smith: Yes.

Ryan: Okay. Do you recall the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Ryan: What were you doing?

Smith: We were drilling with a 2 x 4 on our . . . (laughing)

Ryan: Out on the field?

Smith: On the field. That's all they did. We would just march up and down, up and down. Take orders. About six weeks of it. It was kind of a boot camp-type operation.

Ryan: So what time of day was it when you actually got the news?

Smith: Oh, I don't know. I don't specifically remember what I was doing, but I knew war was coming. So it was a surprise to me that they would hit there and the way they did again, but I knew that we were gonna have trouble in Europe. That was pretty well understood.

Ryan: So when you went into training you pretty much figured you would ultimately be in conflict . . .

Smith: I figured that I'd go to the European Theater. I didn't really think the Japs would have the nerve to start it.

Ryan: Uh-hmm. What was the political environment in your hometown when everything got going at Pearl Harbor?

Smith: Well, I wasn't near hometown until a long time after that. But previous to that the German American Bund had been stirring up a lot of trouble. There was a lot of Fortress America stuff going on. So Roosevelt had a pretty tough time trying to bring the country around and become aware of what was going on in Europe.

Ryan: How old were you at the time?

Smith: Well, at which, at the time that I joined? I joined in '41, and I was 20 the January before that. I was 21 . . . 20 years old.

Ryan: So you decided to enlist?

Smith: Yes.

Ryan: And why did you decide to do that rather than wait for the draft?

Smith: Well, you didn't just enlist. You applied. (Laughing)

Ryan: Uh-hmm. For Aviation School?

Smith: Yes. And when did I do that?

Ryan: Why did you enlist rather just sit back and wait for the draft?

Smith: I knew we were gonna have a war.

Ryan: And did you know that you wanted to fly planes in that war?

Smith: That's what I had hoped to do, yes.

Ryan: Uh-hmm. Had you had any previous flight training or anything prior to that?

Smith: No, I'd never been in an airplane.

Ryan: So that was brand new to you.

Smith: Yes. Yes.

Ryan: And you said you went to basic training in San Antonio. Was that your first training?

Smith: Yes. Pre-flight they called it.

Ryan: Pre-flight, okay.

Smith: And then we went on up to Stamford, Texas, which in the upper center part of Texas, then down to Randolph Field for Basic, and then out to Lubbock for Advanced Flying. Then we went down to Orlando (Florida) to take transition in a B-17. As long as we were there I began to believe everything the Chamber of Commerce ever said . . . that the capture of Florida was a requirement. (Laughing) Man! It was hot down there!

Ryan: And you were there in the summer?

Smith: Yes. July and August.

Ryan: I don't imagine there were a lot of things air conditioned back then, were there?

Smith: Oh, no. We're out in a public park and not a breath of air. I swear it was better in New Guinea, later on.

Ryan: Is that right?

Smith: 'Cause the wind blew! High humidity and plenty of heat, but no air in Florida.

Ryan: Now, when you started into aviation training, was that a big culture shock for you? Or did you pretty much fit in pretty well, or do you recall any instances where . . . ?

Smith: No, I didn't have any particular problems with that.

Ryan: Everything went okay. How long did it take between the time you actually started your training and when you were actually in a unit, in a flying unit?

Smith: Well, actually it was in June when I graduated from Class 42 F, and I started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. So, I'm not sure of the two dates, but it would be from November until the following June.

Ryan: Uh-hmm. Okay. Then you got assigned to a unit then?

Smith: No. Then I went in to Florida for a couple of months for transition . . . to learn how to fly a B-17.

Ryan: Okay. And how long did that last?

Smith: Oh, a month-and-a-half, two months, something like that, and then they shipped me up to Geiger Field which is diagonally across the United States, up in eastern Washington. The word got out that Geiger Field was going to switch to B-24s, and I wanted to stay on a B-17 'cause I liked them while a lot better.

So a special order came through, and about three crews of us took a train over to . . . maybe it was Boise . . . and what it is is they had three aircraft they wanted to take to Topeka, the B-17s. So we walked in to the Operations Officer and told him we were there to pick up some planes. He said that he didn't know anything about it. But he did have three B-17s out there that were probably ours; but if we wanted them, we'd have to sign the papers for the parachutes because they were there. The last time he didn't have his paperwork on it; so we took off, signed for the parachutes, and took off for Topeka, which was a B-24 base. (Laughing)

Ryan: Now, was there any friendly rivalry between the people who flew the B-17s and the B-24s?

Smith: No, 'cause we were based together. I mean you'd have a squadron or a group of four squadrons into a group, and they would all be the same aircraft. I was in what they called the 90<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in New Guinea. The B-17s were in another outfit, and I don't know what their number was. We didn't have very many B-17s.

Ryan: And that was the one you preferred, the B-17?

Smith: By far, yes.

Ryan: And why was that?

Smith: Another thing . . . it comes right out later on, just thinkin' about it . . . the B-17s . . . you can ditch a B-17. The thing lands just real easy because it's got a low wing, and a B-24 is no good to ditch in because it's got a soft underbelly and a high wing. So in our case the only thing that could have happened was when we hit the water the bomb bay doors, which are just flexible aluminum, panels that are hooked together . . . anyway, we must have sprouted into the swells, broke through, and water hit the rear bomb bay where all the people in the back would be up against for a crash position, and water just destroyed the tail. So they're not very good to land in water.

Ryan: To ditch in, okay.

Smith: In the B-17 you had a much better chance. The B-24 was an excellent aircraft as far as performance went.

Ryan: Now, how did you feel?

Smith: The B-24 was . . .

Ryan: . . . and we've talked about this before, how did you feel when you realized that your training meant that you were going to have to eventually kill somebody? How did you feel about that?

Smith: Well, I didn't even look at it that way. I figured we had to do some work and that was the job. And that's what it meant that we were just doing our job.

Ryan: So you didn't put any kind of personal spin on that for yourself. You just kind of looked at it as a job you had to do.

Smith: You had to do what was necessary.

Ryan: Uh-hmm. Okay. Do you have any specific memories of Basic Training that really stick with you? As far as when you were in . . . not Basic, but in the Aviation School?

Smith: Oh, well in basic I had one experience that we were supposed to get in some extra time, and I ended up deciding I'd do a barrel roll. I got oil splattered all over the windshield.

Ryan: Were you by yourself?

Smith: By myself, yes. But it finally cleared up, and you could see pretty well.

Ryan: So you had oil splatter on your windshield and you couldn't see?

Smith: Yes, with oil you turn upside down, and the oil just fell out and then moved back and right into the airplane.

Ryan: But you got through that okay? You landed okay?

Smith: Oh, yes. No problem. Yes, it surprised me when the windshield turned black.

Ryan: Did you get teased about that?

Smith: Well I figured I'd better get down in a hurry because the thing didn't have as much oil as it should have.

Ryan: Ah, that makes sense. Okay, Norman, tell me the story about your other incidents . . .

Smith: The wheels up and where I got the nickname . . . well . . .

Ryan: Now this was while you were still in Aviation School, right?

Smith: Yes this is at basic training at Lubbock flyin' a T-6.

Ryan: Now what is that?

Smith: It's a wonderful little bi-plane. At that time it was one of the better airplanes. I can't describe it except it was an all metal . . .

Ryan: And it's called what now?

Smith: AT-6.

Ryan: AT-6.

Smith: It's an all metal.

Ryan: So what does the AT stand for?

Smith: Advanced Trainer.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: Anyway, I'd been checked out on landings with an instructor. They're two double-seaters, in tandem, and I'd been checked out on landings. Then I was supposed to solo. So we went out to a strip away from the main field, and I came in to make a standard approach. You come in and get on the initial approach, and then you turn on what they call base leg. Then you make a turn and come in on parallel. In other words, you parallel going away from the way you're going to land, and you make a 90 degree turn the other way. And on based leg you put the gear down. Well, I'm flying along, and all of a sudden the radio starts making all this racket! I take it off and it was deafening. So I go ahead and make a turn on the final approach, and I see my instructor pilot down there waving his arms, and I think, "God, he must be happy with me."

So I came on in and just skidded in with the wheels up. Well, ninety-nine-and-a-half percent of the people that go in with the wheels up get out in a hurry. And I had to go down and see the CO of the base

Ryan: Did you think your wheels were down?

Smith: Yes!

Ryan: You assumed they were down?

Smith: Yes! I had made lots of landings with the gears down.

Ryan: But he was trying to tell you . . .

Smith: Yes, why worry about it, and the radio . . . that was the alarm horn! Now I didn't know what an alarm horn was from anything else. It just sounded like a loud noise on the radio to me. Well, anyway, I went down and talked to one of the people in higher command at headquarters, and we talked for quite a while. He kept going over and over and over what had happened, what had happened. And finally he said, "You go out there and you see those buildings across the way?" It was a big grassy area. "You go over there by those other buildings, then you march back and forth for . . ." I've forgotten if it was for one hour or whatever it was . . . so I went out there and marched. It must have been a time, then I went back to my barracks, and I was grounded.

Ryan: Did you tear up the airplane?

Smith: Oh, God! It was a mess! (Laughing)

Ryan: Was it fixable?

Smith: I told them I'd pay for it. It needed a new engine. See the prop was all bent. The underbelly was just scratched.

Ryan: Were you pretty surprised when you hit the ground and you didn't have any wheels?

Smith: I absolutely couldn't believe it! Couldn't believe it! 'Cause then once we started skiddin' along I realized (laughing) . . . stupid kid. Well, anyway, I was grounded for a while and then got word to go fly again. So I don't know what happened then.

Ryan: You don't remember how long you were grounded?

Smith: They must have needed pilots real bad.

Ryan: You don't remember how long you were grounded, huh?

Smith: A day or two. I think they must have really needed pilots because the standard operating was "out they go."

Ryan: Uhum. So, after . . .

Smith: My wife would bring that up.

Ryan: Now, you were a single man during the war, right?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: We had to sign an agreement to not get married for twelve months after we were commissioned.

Ryan: Is that right.

Smith: Because they didn't want a lot of widows or children from airmen, dead airmen.

Ryan: Did you know your wife at the time you were in?

Smith: No.

Ryan: No. Didn't know her yet.

Smith: I didn't meet her until I came back from the South Pacific.

Ryan: I see. Okay. Now tell me what happened after you got out of your flight training. Let's go through that sequence from then . . . and I'm just gonna let you just tell me all about it . . . exactly the sequence of where you went and then how you ultimately wound up in the Pacific Theater. Okay? So you just go ahead and pick up there after training.

Smith: We finished training at Lubbock, Texas and were then sent to Florida, to Orlando to take flight training into B-17s. From there I was sent to Geiger Field in Washington, and I was only there for a short time. Then I flew back down in a B-17 to Topeka, Kansas. In Topeka they were putting together combat crews, so I was assigned to a group as a co-pilot. The rest of these raw people . . . people that had gone to gunnery training or navigation training or bombardier training, they were all gathered together; and then they were just at random assigned to a pool.

Ryan: So that's basically where they put their groups together?

Smith: Yes.

Ryan: For a particular aircraft?

Smith: Yes. One crew, a flight crew. There'd be nine people that were put together.

Ryan: Now, tell me what that would consist of . . . a flight crew.

Smith: Well, you have your pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, and navigator. Those are your four officers. Then you have engineer, a tail gunner and two waist gunners.

Ryan: Now, what's a waist gunner?

Smith: Well, on the side of the B-24, about halfway between the trailing edge of the wing and the forward edge of the stabilizers in the back, there are two big windows. They're probably, oh at least three foot square, and in the center of that, on each side, there's a mount . . . one single mount with a single 50 caliber machine gun that's completely free. These people, it takes the most experience because it's like shooting birds. You have to lead. You have to know where the guy's gonna be by the time the bullet get there, so you put your best gunners on the waist . . . what they call a waist gunner.

Ryan: Okay. So you had two waist gunners . . .

Smith: And then one back in the tail gun . . . he has twin 50s there. The turret gunner, behind the flight deck, or the rear of the flight deck, would have twin 50s in the turret that can turn 180 degrees. In the nose are the bombardier, navigator . . . they had two guns, fixed . . . not a really satisfactory gun position. In later models . . . I flew the B-24D. Later on they put a ball turret in the bottom of it, and then they put a turret on the nose also. But we didn't see any of those in the Pacific, or I didn't, anyway.

Ryan: Did those come along later?

Smith: Those went to Europe.

Ryan: Oh, okay.

Smith: Yes, the people in the nose had just two 50s to protect them, but if they had another turret up there they'd have four for a head-on attack.

Ryan: Okay. So you were there in Topeka putting the crew together . . .

Smith: Right. And we trained, and then they put us on a train as a group . . . all these what we now call a crew . . . and they put various crews on this train that headed for San Francisco, I guess it was, just north of San Francisco on the Peninsula, north of the Golden Gate. And there we were outfitted with heavy cold weather gear. We were over there for a week or so. They outfitted us with this real heavy leather stuff.

Ryan: Did that give you a feeling you were going to Europe?

Smith: Yes. We were going to go to a cold country. Now this wasn't regular flight gear. I mean this was cold weather stuff.

Ryan: So, what time of year would this have been?

Smith: That would have been . . . oh, gosh . . .

Ryan: Maybe in the Fall?

Smith: . . . maybe in October . . . probably.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: . . . September, October of '42. Then all of a sudden things changed, and they said, "Drop all your gear. Just come as you are and get on these trucks out here." They took us down. They put us on a flying boat down at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay and flew us to Hawaii, and then they sent me and my crew out to just a little strip up on the north side of Oahu. We flew anti-submarine patrol for six weeks, and come to find out there'd been a snafu. Our aircraft had been diverted. The ATC had been ordered to pick 'em up, and then orders were changed. We had an aircraft that had been assigned to us while they flew them all over the Pacific, and it took 'em six weeks to find a plane that we were supposed to have and get it out there.

So then we finally took off, fully loaded, to Christmas Island. Then we flew down to Fiji, and from Fiji we flew into Brisbane, Australia. And we got hung up in Australia in Brisbane because there were some problems with the nose gear collapsing . . . defective forging on some of them . . . so they were magnifluxing all the nose gear which was kind of a slow process. You have to take them out and put them through this machinery, quite a process.

So we were in Amberly Field for around two, three weeks. Then we got our airplane back, and we flew on up to the north tip of Queensland. The Australians had gone in there. They were afraid they were gonna lose New Guinea and the Solomons. They were afraid that they might because the battle in the Solomons had not been completed yet, and the Japs were coming. They were on the north side of Kokura, and they were coming across at the top, and the Aussies had them stopped at Kokura. But anyway the Aussies were afraid. They built this dirt strip for us at a place called Iron Range, which is, oh, I don't know, a hundred miles or so on the east coast . . . south from the north tip. We flew some missions out of there. We'd fly from there over to Port Moresby, gas up and then take off on a mission, whatever it was. And there weren't sufficient air strips for us. They were busy putting in some; and when they finally got Seven Mile strip paved, well then the whole group moved up into the area surrounding \_\_\_\_\_ . We flew missions out of there.

Ryan: Now, how many aircraft were in a group?

Smith: Oh, I think there were supposed to be a full complement of eighteen per squadron . . . four squadrons. Now one of our squadrons was based over at Darwin to keep a watch over there, so we only had three squadrons in the 320<sup>th</sup>.

Ryan: How many are in a squadron? How many planes are in a squadron?

Smith: Eighteen.

Ryan: Eighteen, okay.

Smith: Eighteen in each squadron and four squadrons per group.

Ryan: Okay. Okay.

Smith: So that was the organization.

Ryan: Okay. And what island was this you were kind of . . . ?

Smith: This was put on New Guinea.

Ryan: New Guinea, okay.

Smith: Now, New Guinea is about a 1500 mile long island. When we first got the orders to go to New Guinea, I thought that meant we were gonna go to South America because the only thing I could imagine was Guyana. But I found out where New Guinea was later on. Anyway, Papua, the country was spread . . . the island was split into Dutch New Guinea and Papua. Up until the First World War, Papua had been under the domination of the Germans. It had been a German mandate.

After the First World War, it was taken away and given to the Australians as an Australian Mandate. So they were in charge of administrative as a rule, regulation and enforcing the laws in Papua. The way they organized the village . . . they have a chief they called the Lulaway, and under him in seniority are police boys. There'd be several police boys, and they'd been given them armed training . . . training in arms. And they carried rifles, and they just do police work. And that's about it.

Ryan: So you were flying missions out of Papua?

Smith: We were flying missions out of Port Moresby. What they call Seven Mile strip, which about seven miles from the Harbor.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: North and west of the Harbor. But we had to get over the \_\_\_\_\_ to get over to the other side. They were fighting in Buna and Gona. The Aussies had stopped them up at the top of the ridge, and they had pushed them down in to two little settlements over there, Buna and Gona. They were pretty well . . . the Japs had taken a whipping. They cut off their supplies, and they were without all the supplies. They lost a lot of American lives.

The funny thing I was in the hospital in Australia later on. I talked to a man, and he had a thing in his wallet . . . an aviation flight card of some kind, identification. And the thing was signed by Orville Wright. (Laughing)

Ryan:           **The Orville Wright?**

Smith:           One of the real early timers . . . anyway he had the seventh number . . . it was the seventh license issued pretty well at that time. But, anyway, he had been flying a DC-3s or C-47s, and one day he had a load of airstrip material . . . steel mats . . . to fly over the hill, put 'em down in the Buna-Gona area where they could build some airstrips. And the due to weather . . . whatever they called the flight off . . . the next day, well his mission was to take Australian troops over. So he loaded up the plane with troops. When he got on board, the troops were all aboard; and he just walked on up, took off and flew. The plane wasn't doin' very well. It had to circle a couple of times. Usually you could just make one real slow turn, and make it through the pass about 10,000 feet, as I recall.

                  Anyway, he went over and got out of the airplane to go do something there. The Aussies unloaded or the Americans unloaded his cargo, and he flew back home to get another one . . . brought some wounded or whatever back with him. But anyway a few days later an operations Officer came up, and said he'd been doing some figuring, and the reason the plane was so loaded up was they had never removed the aircraft or landing ballast. So he took off with a double load.

Ryan:           So that's why it wasn't handling well.

Smith:           That's why it wasn't performing very well. But that was a tough old airplane.

Ryan:           And what airplane was that?

Smith:           That's what we call a DC-3.

Ryan:           DC-3. Do they still fly those?

Smith:           We flew one just a few years ago down in the south end of Baja.

Ryan:           Okay. So I know there was a major incident in your career at that time while you were stationed there, right? Am I right?

Smith:           Yes.

Ryan:           And so I'd like for you to tell me exactly what happened.

Smith:           Well, the pilot had been to the briefing, and that we would have a mission. So we went down, and the bombs . . . to get in the bay you use a flashlight . . . it's still dark in the morning . . . and you get in there, and the dew has formed on the bombs before they loaded them, and we had four bombs. So they were glistening. I remember that part.



*Smith's Squadron and Bomb Group was part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force  
As indicated on this patch.*

But anyway we went on up and made a normal take-off and circled around and got altitude and went on over the top. And I didn't know what the mission was. Altman didn't say very much about it, and we figured we were on a normal re-con mission because we were carrying only four bombs. So we knew we weren't on a specific mission. Usually on a re-con mission they give you four five hundred pounders for targets of opportunity. Well, anyway, we spotted this convoy coming on our right, and they were a pretty good sized convoy. In the biggest ship in the group . . . military ship . . . were the cruiser. So Altman decided we could go and take a run on it, so we got squared away to make a decent run. Because of the cloud cover, you have to move around, maneuver around to get visibility.

Ryan: Now, how many planes did you have? Just yours?

Smith: Just a single ship.

Ryan: Just the one? Okay.

Smith: Yes. So we started on a run, and we hadn't gotten wings level and turned . . . when you get on course, the auto pilot is turned over to the bombardier and his bombsite. And the bombsite is guiding the aircraft. Now the pilot can over-ride that if he feels like it, but we had just turned controls over to the bombardier. Then somebody yelled, "Aircraft! 12 o'clock high!" I looked up. I'm the co-pilot . . . looked up there at 12 o'clock . . . about 12:30 and up a little bit, are eight Japanese airplanes! Now I

thought they were probably Zeros, but later on we learned they were Zekes, which is a similar aircraft.

Anyway they started coming through in pairs. They had only made about three passes, and about five or six airplanes had fired on us when a burst came through the windshield. And immediately we were just surrounded by nothin' but sound . . . a racket! So I looked back and see the pilot's been hit in the head, just above the ear, and the engineer is the top turret gunner, so they were pulling him out of the turret. I could see a lot of blood, and I was busy trying to fly the airplane. I looked out the right hand side at the #3 engine, and I'd start counting from the left . . .

Ryan: How many engines did you have? Four?

Smith: We had four engines. #1 and 2 are on the left side and #3 and 4 are on the other side. The #3 engine . . . the in-board on the right hand side, was on fire! A real fierce fire. In fact the cowling was all gone, and then you could see the wings spars, the structural, heavy structure, lateral pieces of aluminum . . . they hold the thing together . . . and the CO2 . . . finally it pretty well burned out. But it was a big drag. Hoyt, the navigator, was yelling at me in my ear, and I couldn't understand him. So he just held up two fingers and pointed at #2, and I figured well, it must be on fire, too . . . the co-pilot has his controls to the CO2 system . . . so I pulled the control for #2.

Ryan: So at this point you were in command of the aircraft?

Smith: Yes.

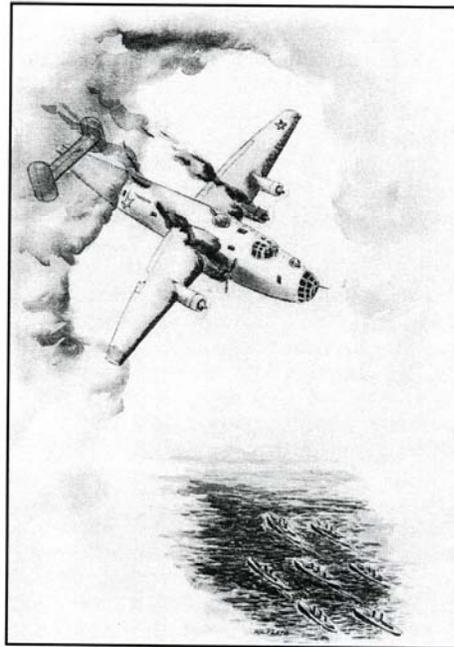
Ryan: Because the pilot was . . .

Smith: Yes, well, as soon as that burst came through and I saw blood, I took over.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: And I just put it in a big . . . dropped the wing down and headed down in straight down low. We were up about 10,000 probably, or down around two, three, four thousand, a big cloud layer down there. There were clouds all the way up and down, but anyway I was heading for the low ground because it was thicker. And we made good time, and everything seemed to be flying pretty well. But it went downhill. So when I started to level out, as I tried to maintain level flight, she slowed down, down, and finally it was ready to stall. So I could, with maximum power, superchargers were on right next to control arms, emergency power, the thing flying straight level. I mean, altitude . . . try to maintain altitude at minimum air speed. We were losing 500 foot a minute.

Ryan: Now were you heading back to your field?

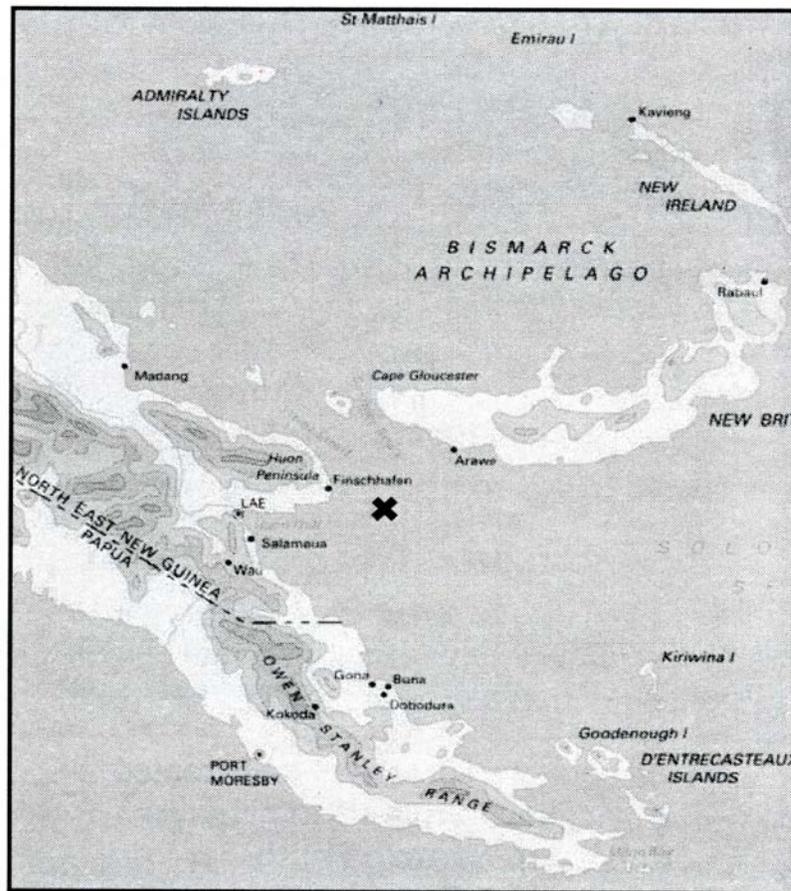


*Going down*

Smith: We were heading down. Yes, the idea was to get down into the cloud and head on for home. That was my intention because we were certainly in no condition to do any more battle, or to get into a battle. Anyway, when we were 500 foot a minute descent, was the best I could get it to do. I yelled in the microphone . . . we had a little coat mic . . . I yelled to the bombardier to salvo the bombs, and I don't know whether he did or not. I don't know to this day whether we landed with bombs or without it, whether the bomb bay doors were open or closed.

But we kept losing altitude, and we should land in the trough of the swells which I lined her up to do. As I lost air speed, so that we could settle in to the water, the right wing . . . we came in to land in the trough between the crest of the swells, and we were doing okay until I started approaching stall speed. At that point the right wing started dropping, and I couldn't get it up. I feathered the #4 engine, and I thought maybe it was pulling us . . . givin' us torque.

But, anyway, by the time we hit the water we were about 20 or 30 degrees off from being parallel (to the swells) which meant that we hit the first swell, and I remember feeling good because this was gonna be easy. We hit the first swell and bounced up in the air slightly, and then we hit the second one. It was just like hitting a brick wall. The next thing I knew I was someplace I didn't know where I was. And I finally figured . . . I knew I was under water . . . and so I thought I'd better get out. I made a lunge to go up to the back . . . the normal exit way, and couldn't move. So it ended up, well, the trouble, what's the matter . . . well, the seat belt was tied. I undid it and I figured I haven't got time. I'm getting short of breath now.



*Area of the South Pacific where the story takes place.*

*“X” marks the approximate location where  
“Little Eva” went down.*

Ryan: So the cockpit was filled with water at this time?

Smith: Oh, yes. I guess I hadn't measured it, but from looking at these model aircraft, it broke at about. well, at the rear bomb bay, evidently. And from the rear of the rear bomb bay to the co-pilot's window is at least 25 feet, I would say. And I thought the only way I could get out of here was I went through a window, and I'd often wondered whether a person could even get through it. But I got through it and came on out.

When I first got out, I didn't know which way it was up. But then you look around and pretty soon you see a lot of bright glare and figure that's the way the sun is. So you go that way and came up alongside of it. I grabbed a life vest, got a hold of one, put it on . . . I don't know . . . I didn't have one on for some reason. And when I put it on

and went up the airplane . . . it was floating vertically . . . and the life raft handles were right at the water level. I jerked on them and nothing happened. so I swam away from the plane. This thing was just a tube . . . that's where the bomb bays . . . there was fire inside, and it was melting the metal. It was getting too hot to be there, so I backed off. When I turned around to go, I saw a life raft aways away. I went over to it, and the thing was upside down. I got to wondering how I was gonna get that turned over, and lucky I hadn't because I had just gotten to it and heard a noise. I looked up, and I see a Jap coming down . . . a fighter . . . no doubt one of those that had jumped on us. It turned out Intelligence told me that they were Zekes, and they were out of \_\_\_\_\_. They were Marines, and they were good. But anyway, he came down and made a little pass over and didn't come back.

Ryan: Was he shooting when he came down?

Smith: No, there was nothin' to shoot at. There was just a lot of debris . . .

Ryan: So he didn't realize there was somebody alive there in the water?

Smith: Well, both rafts were upside down, and no sign of life. If he had come thirty minutes later, I would have been sitting in the life raft. It's all orange, and he could see the orange. But he could see the dark on the belly of it. So I lucked out on that one. Anyway, you'd climb up on the thing and get your feet in to . . . it has a rope that goes on the edge of it . . . get your feet on that and reach across the top of it and get to the rope on the other side, and then you just plain pull on it.

Ryan: Now were these rafts?

Smith: And the rafts will plop over.

Ryan: Were they meant for one person or several?

Smith: No, no. They're big rafts.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: I would imagine inside they're three foot wide and at least six foot long, but then the tube is probably eighteen inches in diameter. So where it's three it's about six foot on the outside. And then it's another three feet on the outside dimensions. But the place you have to live in is about three feet wide and oh, probably six foot long, maybe seven foot, something like that. Anyway I picked up a bunch of . . . I kept thinking well there are some other guys around here, and I paddled around there. That happened in late morning, and I paddled around there until dark and picked up some odds and ends. Never did find anybody. I saw a glove floatin' in the water and was wondering what I should do about it. I finally decided well I'd haul him up, and it was empty.

Ryan: So you just didn't see any of the rest of the crew anywhere. Okay.

Smith: So then among the things I found floating around in the water was some wood. I don't know where the wood came from, but there was a piece of wood, probably an inch thick and a couple of inches wide. It had been split off of something. So I had both rafts, and I tied them together to begin with and that gave me four oars.

Ryan: So you had two rafts. You found two.

Smith: Two rafts.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: And as far as supplies goes, all they have on them is rations . . . I forgot what . . . anyway, chocolate bars which is nothing but dessert . . . anyway, but I threw 'em all out. I found some survival gear and a first aid kit, and that's what the life rafts have embedded in them . . . stuff that comes with them is flares. So I had two flare guns, and I don't know, about half a dozen flares for each one.

Ryan: Now, should these rafts have had food on them, and it just got knocked off or lost or something? Or did they simply not come with any food?

Smith: Food?

Ryan: Uh-hmm.

Smith: Well, they had the . . .

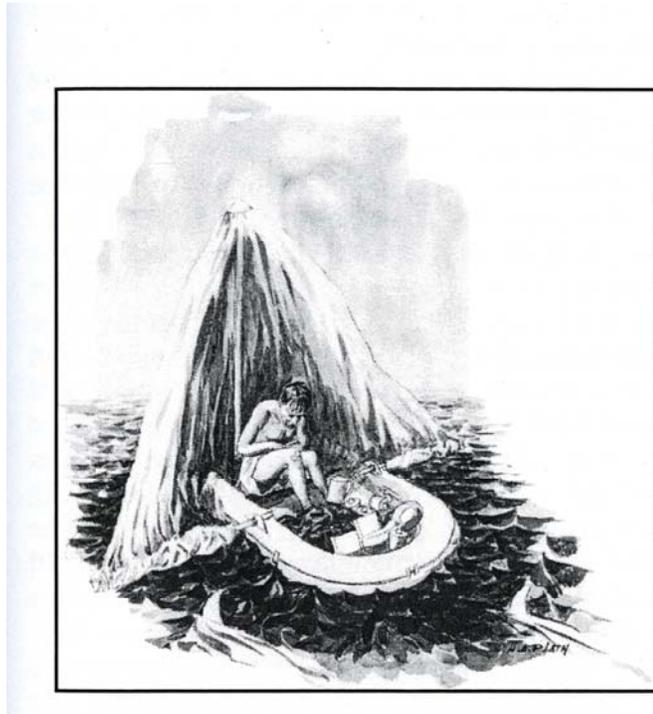
Ryan: Or water?

Smith: No. No water.

Ryan: No water.

Smith: No water. And in the first aid equipment they had a line and they had hooks, but they had no lures. So there's no way to get started for fishing, and there was lots of fish around, anywhere from medium sized to great big ones. I had one run of . . . I don't know what they were . . . the fish that looked somethin' like a tuna fish, probably oh, four foot long, and they were churning. You could feel 'em ripple underneath the raft. They were churning so fast, coming up and just . . . I had a knife at that time, and I held it down and hoped that one of 'em would run into it. Well, they were too smart for that, so I wound up empty. I never did catch any fish or birds.

Ryan: So the first day after this happened late morning, you just kind of hung out there in the water to see if you could find any one of your crew, and you didn't.



*Norman in life raft with parachute sail*

Smith: Well, that up until dark.

Ryan: Until dark.

Smith: Dark. That night I figured well if there's nobody gonna . . . there isn't anybody.

Ryan: Yes.

Smith: By this time everything had sunk, except some of the junk . . . floatation stuff.

Ryan: So you gathered up what you could that you thought you'd need and put it in the raft.

Smith: I gathered up everything that I could possibly need, and that included an old turret cover. It's a bulky piece of canvas that's got two long tubes on it that slide over the guns to keep the weather from getting to the guns while the aircraft is in storage. And, of course, I had my parachute.

Ryan: Now you had that on at the time of the crash?

Smith: Well, no. You have it with a seat pack. You sit on the thing, and it has a strap around your hips and then two loops that you put your arms through . . . well, I didn't . . . in the warm weather you just throw all that stuff off, so I got out of there with all that junk trailin' me behind me.

Ryan: Oh, okay.

Smith: And I didn't hook on anything so there was a lot lost. Anyway I had a parachute and that had two real good pins there . . . it had lots of nylon lines . . . the shroud line and all this nylon. Well, it wasn't nylon in those days it was silk, I guess. In fact that's what they used to say, "Hit the silk".

Ryan: Uh-hmm, I've heard that expression.

Smith: So, a lot of good stuff.

Ryan: But no water.

Smith: But no water.

Ryan: Did that panic you a little bit realizing you didn't have any water?

Norman: Yes. You soon notice it.

Ryan: I mean, you had chocolate, but the water thing is critical.

Smith: Yes. Well, the difficulty that the military and quarter master had is you put water in a can. and it has a shelf life. If you have toxic stuff for survival, that's not good too, so I can't blame it on the quarter master.

Ryan: Did they have such a thing that would take the salt out of the water at all? Nothing like that?

Smith: No. No. The aircraft carry what they call a Mae West. No! That was the vest. I forgot what they called . . . there was a radio, about a foot cube . . . must have been a cube . . . and with it came . . . it was a radio, hand-cranked generator to power the radio. You had a kite so you could fly the antennae up with. We had a hydrogen generator that you could blow a balloon up with. The trouble is I never could find one of them. So it went down with the plane. If I'd have had that, it might have called some Japs in there, too. I don't know. But, anyway, I finally tied the two rafts together and rigged up the sail and tied one oar to the piece of wood and lots of nylon line, shroud lines that tied everything together and put the parachute up to form the sails, and then tied them back to the side of the thing. The wind was blowin' pretty good. I was makin' pretty good mileage.

Ryan: Now, when you did all this, rigging this stuff up, was that something that had been taught to do to survive in the ocean, or did you just kind of dream it up yourself?

Smith: Oh, I don't know . . . been around mechanics all my life. My father was a salesman and mechanic, a maintenance man.

Ryan: So you were kind of mechanically inclined anyway?

Smith: Yes. I guess that would be it. I was always raised around tools, so it helped me out.

Ryan: So you pretty much figured out what you had and what you were gonna do with it in order to survive?

Smith: No, I just put it in inventory. (Laughing) How much things can you save anyway?

Ryan: Well, that's good. It saved your life, I think.

Smith: Oh, one thing that I later on wished I had done . . . the sea was full of tech orders on B-24s; and if I had picked a couple of those up, I could have been an expert and become an engineering officer. I had lots of time to read, but I didn't have anything to read as it turned out.

Ryan: So that night when dark fell, did you try to head somewhere? Or did you just wait for daylight?

Smith: No. I didn't do anything but sleep that night, and the next morning I could see . . . visibility was pretty good . . . I could see which way I needed to go. I didn't know which direction was which, but I've forgotten what tech time the . . . you couldn't see the North Star because we were below the Equator. but you could see the Big Dipper. I never did understand at that time how to use the Southern Cross, because the Southern Cross makes a loop almost as big as the Big Dipper does. It isn't like our North Pole. It would have been fortunate to have the North Pole to guide me. But, anyway, I could see the outline of islands, and so I headed for the biggest one because I knew the mountains were the biggest on New Guinea, on Papua. Well, they get bigger yet, I guess, up in British New Guinea. But, you know, those peaks have snow on them year-round. And we're six, seven degrees below the Equator.

Ryan: What was the temperature during the night? Did it get cold?

Smith: Yes.

Ryan: You were probably wet.

Smith: Oh, God, I got cold. I shivered all night. I don't know what the air temperature was. The air temperature was fairly mild . . . 70 degrees or something like that but well below body temperature.

Ryan: Yes. But because you were wet, that probably made it feel really cold.

Smith: Yes. Miserably cold. But anyway, the second day a aircraft, B-24, came . . . I guess he was to the west of me . . . directions aren't too good . . . anyway, he came up from . . . say the west side . . . and he couldn't see me. It was too far out. He was over a bunch of black clouds over that way, and he made a 90 degree turn. I didn't . . . the way the sunlight was, I figured there's no use shootin' any flares off because he'd get nothing but the glare of the sun . . . the way the sun was out that way, but when he made a 90 degree turn and got over there, that would put the ocean . . . he got up towards the sun, and I was in his shadow. I mean, he wouldn't be . . . the glare of the sun on the water wouldn't disturb him. And that one flare was probably the best flare of all I used. The thing went right on up there and opened at the top and just burnt beautifully. And right at the time a Japanese waist gunner was lookin' out there and he saw it.

So this was my flight commander, and he came down and dropped me some supplies, checked around until he was running low on gas. He probably had to leave, but he dropped me a total of four canteens of water and a map showing my position and the drift that had occurred during the time that he had been with me. The navigator had plotted it all out . . . a good map showing me where I was. Unfortunately I lost the map . . . disintegrated probably later on. But he gave me a compass but in those days they didn't . . . in these compasses they gave us they weren't sealed, so in a few days it rusted and became worthless.

So the storms would come and the clear weather would come, and, I don't know, it was kind of a dreamy time.

Ryan: So were you headed in one directly for a particular island?

Smith: Yes, I was heading for New Guinea in general, the island with the big mountains. At one time I'd be close to one point, so I'd row towards it. Then the storm would come down, and another point would be closer so I'd go for it. I'd go for any of 'em! But I was real close to one point one night when a storm broke. I was kind of a short distance . . . a mile or so off shore . . . a couple of miles maybe . . . I've really forgotten how far I did judge it . . . but it was attainable. I could do it in an hour like, but this storm broke. and it was a big one. Probably waves something like \_\_\_\_\_ the English sailor? He had something like a 70 foot sailboat that pitch bowls down in that area on the other side of New Guinea. Now a pitch bowl means a wave big enough to take a 70 foot boat, flip it end for end, upside down. That's the kind of . . . they were really mountains. I tried to tie . . . I had a . . . I don't know what that bag was for. There was a little bag made out of this oil cloth that was probably six, seven inches in diameter and the better part of a foot deep, and it had a bale handle on it, collapsible, of course, and I tied a line on it. I'd use it as a drag so it would help me navigate when I was sailing

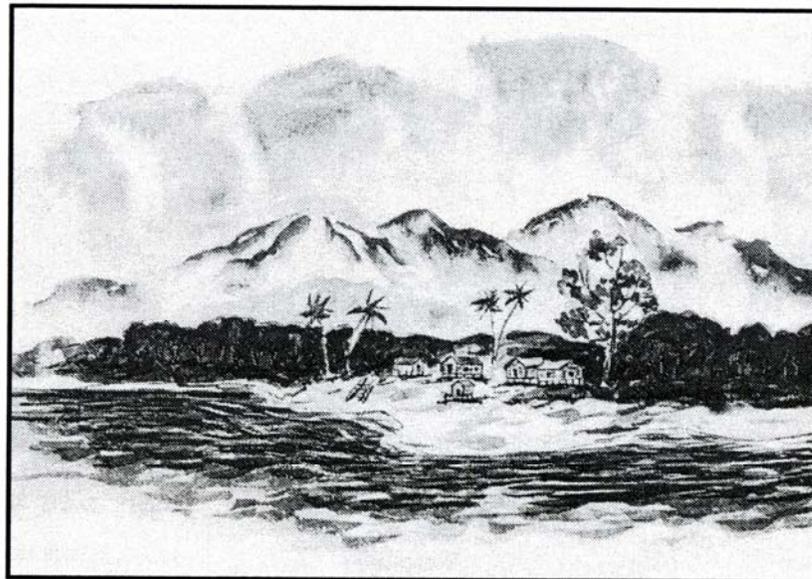
it. It would grab a little bit and it didn't help much, but it helped some. I don't know why I bring that up for . . . get lost in details here.

Ryan: Now, even though they spotted you and they knew where you were, they couldn't actually rescue you?

Smith: Well, they could have, but the next day . . .

Ryan: So, this is the third day now we're talking about?

Smith: Day three, day three, I guess it was. They had a big search pattern. I could see them. They were about 20 miles away. Evidently they had searched . . . come to find out later . . . they were searching the area that I was last known to be in, and they found the other raft. So they assumed that I'd been picked up, probably by the enemy or else they'd (think) I'd been heard of, so they gave up the search. So, anyway, I messed around out there on that ocean for nine nights and ten days and finally made land. A good wind came up and sailed me right on into shore. I landed on a little island called Bao right opposite the village called Bao, Bao Island. Anyway I landed there and went on over to the mainland, but on this island there were a lot of pigs . . . no people . . . pigs and guinea fowl. Abundant. Lots of coconuts. So I jumped out of the thing to go get some coconuts and fell on my face. I can't walk. I went out in the water . . . crawled out of the water and practiced walking in the water, and I finally got enough strength to pick up several coconuts. I had a pair of pliers as part of the gear.



*The village on the beach as seen from  
a nearby small island*

Ryan: You think you were weak from hunger or just because you hadn't been on your feet for nine days?

Smith: Well, yes. Just no exercise for those days, I think, together with exposure. My legs just didn't want to work at all.

Ryan: So that helped when you walked around in the water to get your strength back?

Smith: Yes. You could flex the muscles. They hadn't been . . . they'd just been cramped and hadn't been utilized, both legs. But anyway, I walked around in this water until I could walk in the shallower and shallower water, and finally I could walk on the shore. Tiring but went in and got some coconuts and tore the husks off and with the pair of pliers, punched out the eyes, and drank the milk, and then crack them open and eat out of 'em. Not good food as far as balanced nutrition, but it's high in fat. So it was pretty good food.

Anyway, then the next morning I went . . . I see this village over there, and I rowed over there and got out and tied the boat up with a little of my shroud line and went on in to a . . . there was a village there. I went on in to the village and there was the Germans . . . so I found a house that was close to the boat, and I brought the parachute over and had a kind of a mosquito netting and got ready and went out to the native villager there and I looked around couldn't find 'em. Did find some stagnant water, so I filled up my canteens with that, but I had a lot of iodine in these medical kits. So I used a lot of iodine in it, but I don't mind the taste of iodine, I guess it tasted pretty good.

Anyway, then I went to sleep that night, and the next morning I woke up. There was a black man, you know, got a little fire, and anyway he's got his spear and his knife. I don't know whether he's gonna be friendly or not. But, anyway, I finally let him know I was awake, and I don't remember that man's name. But, anyway, I talked with him for a while.

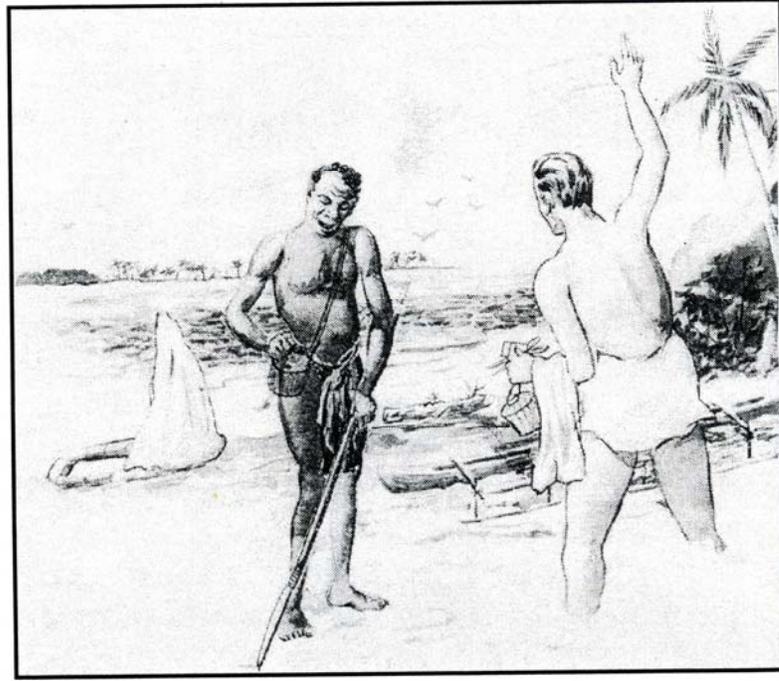
Ryan: Did he speak English?

Smith: He spoke what they called pidgin. Pidgin is a language that the sea coast people have learned from traders. They grow a lot of coconuts and have a lot of coconut groves there . . . I don't know who they're owned by, but it's commercially harvested. That must be the only reason that they plant such huge ones because it's more than they need for food.

Ryan: So, you woke up and he was there.

Smith: Okay. Well, anyway, I tried to communicate with him, and did some sign language, one way or another and finally kind of picked up his lingo, this trader's language. I asked, well, if there were any white man around? And he said, yes. How far away? Well, I couldn't understand what he meant. He'd shuffle his arms and made some

motions, and I figured it was a couple days' walk. I asked him how far Buna was, and he said it's a long ways the other way. So I didn't pay much attention to it.

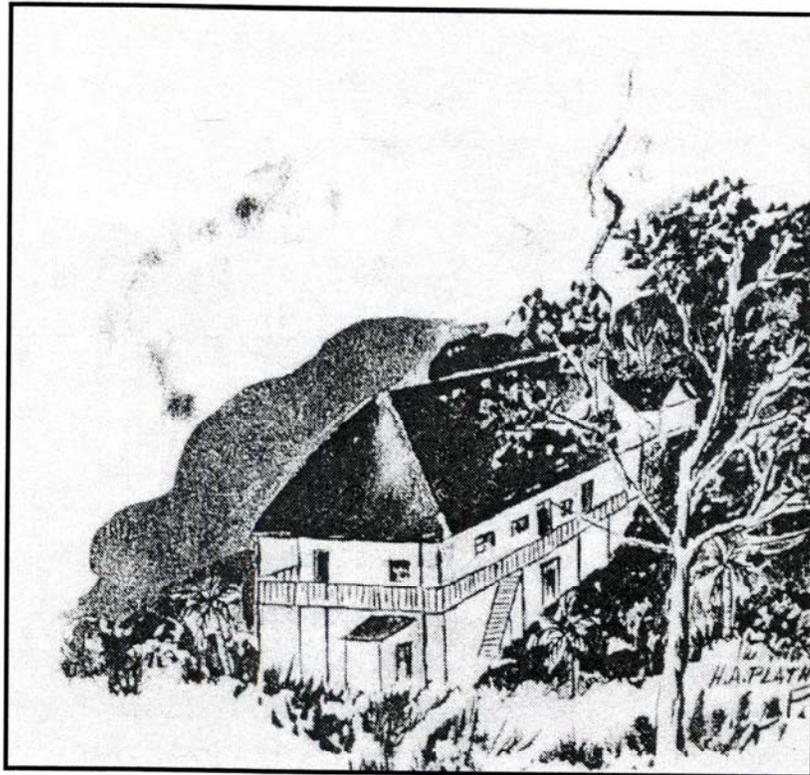


*The first native I met*

So, anyway, finally I decided that he must be talking about hours instead of days, so we headed out and my legs didn't take it. And we hadn't gone about a hundred yards probably so we came back and spent the night again in the same place. Of course, it's a little building that's up about four feet in the air. It's got pieces of wood, branches maybe an inch in diameter laid parallel to each other, and then matting. They build up this thing, and they leave the floor open. They put down some palm fronds and a lot of dirt and gravel, and that way they can have a fireplace in the middle of it. If they drop any food, it goes through the cracks and the pigs get it. The fire . . . they cut wood . . . the tall slender trees, they cut 'em, lean 'em up . . . they trim 'em . . . lean 'em up in the forest, and they dry. Then they cut 'em off into, oh, chunks three, four feet long; and when they build a fire . . . they'll have a fire . . . they'd have a small fire . . . and they bring this thing in . . . bring one of 'em in to the fire . . . catch the end on fire. Then as it burns away, they keep moving it in. And if they needed a bigger fire they'd have more than one of 'em. They might have several of 'em to cook a meal, I suppose. And then at night they throw a bunch of green stuff on there to chase the monkeys out.

Anyway, then the next day I woke up in the morning and the chief of the village that's a short distance down the coast was there, and he had agreed to help me get on out

to the German Mission which is up on the northwest bank of the Waria River. It's an old German Lutheran Mission left over from World War I and now occupied by three Australian aircraft spotters. And we went on up there and got introduced to them.



*Mission Priest's Home*

Ryan: How long did it take you to get up there?

Smith: The better part of one day is all. The tired you get the steeper it gets.

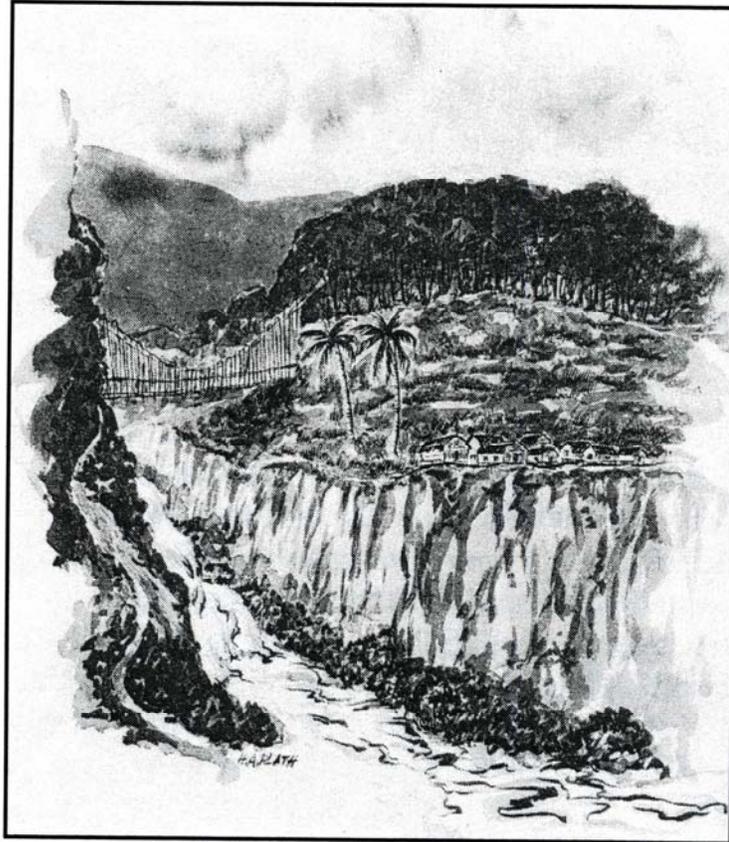
Ryan: Were your legs working pretty good by then?

Smith: They were getting plenty tired by the time we reached the top. But we made it. They had a beautiful location for a spotter station because you could look out. You couldn't see the beach itself, but you could see the tops of the trees that were at the beach. So they had a wide sweep of the ocean, and their mission in there was to twice a day make a report as to any activity they'd seen in the air, or on the ground, or in the water. They called in twice a day. So when I got there they called in that night and told the Australians, New Guinea island communications that I was there. And they evidently relayed that information to the 5th Air Force, probably the 90th Bomb Group.

I don't know which. But later on . . . I'm getting way ahead of the story . . . I was there with them for, oh, a night or two . . . a couple of nights . . . and one of the natives came up the hill and said the Japanese down at the bottom of the hill, at the mouth of the river, and they put their glasses down there and they could make out the outlines and some landing barges. We didn't know whether they were in there to pick up people that were escaping from Buna and Gona Battle, which was down the coast thirty miles, a hundred miles, whatever it is, or whether they were commandos coming in to take another stand. We decided we had to get out of there, so we headed down the hill goin' the other way. This young Australian said, well, he'd volunteer . . . no, I guess it was Jacques, the old guy. He just said he'd go down and take a look. And then he'd catch up with us. We'd meet him at a certain village up the river in a day or two. So Jacques had a rifle, and he also had a pistol. It was a 45 pistol but the only ammunition he had was 44, but he said by pinging the cartridge it didn't fall through the barrel, so as a last resort it was better than nothing. So he loaned me that. (Laughing)

But, anyway, we went on down, and we all got together. The word was the Japs were coming up the river. They were in a boat . . . a powered boat. The power boat was coming up the river. It couldn't be the natives. So we headed out on up aways, and then the natives were supposed to report back. And then they gave me a police boy and a cook boy. The cook boy found some good food, some supplies, and I headed on up. They had figured that they could pick me up at the mouth of the river with a PT boat that ran up and down routinely. The PT boats were working reconnaissance . . . recon missions. Or they could maybe bring in a helicopter or bring in a submarine, but with the Japs in there that was the end of that. So I had to go on up to the upper end of the Waria River which took about nearly three weeks to get up there. And it was really a messy climb. The banks were in most places were very steep and very muddy and mucky. There were lots of roots in this place . . . pull yourself up and then slide back down.

We crossed the river several times on some native-made suspension bridges, and they were really quite an engineering feat. They had been taught the technique no doubt by either Germans or the Lutherans that came in . . . the Lutheran Missions that were later with the Germans. But the biggest one was probably a hundred yards across from cliff to cliff. And the bridge must have drooped a hundred feet as it just came way down. Then they had vertical suspensions on it. They had a vine tied at about waist height to keep your balance, and then they had two poles, side by side, clear across it. You could walk on them, but you had to be careful and not walk in a regular step because the thing would get to jerking. So you walked with an irregular step, only one on the narrow bridge at a time. But it was a huge chasm underneath us. The Waria River was a pretty good sized piece of water, but we crossed several of those. Anyway we finally got on up to the far end, and there was another station up there. Well, I went by one other aircraft spotter station up there. Then when we got there to the upper end, there was a third airfield; and they called in for an aircraft. I was there for about five days, I think it was. And they sent a little puddle jumper in for me.



*One of the great suspension bridges woven of vines*

Ryan: So there was a strip there . . . an airstrip there?

Smith: Yes, there was a little airstrip, just cut out of the grass. The vegetation was kind of saw grass. The natives kept it cut back, and they made a pretty good landing surface. So then we took off and got up to altitude and went on across and on to home. They asked when we got into the camp . . . the Australian camp, they said, "Where do you want to go?" And I said, "I don't know. Probably better to go down to the 5th Air Force Headquarters." So I went in there, and I had on an old torn Australian shirt . . . my shirt had given up and been thrown away, and my pants were cut off above the knees because they'd been ripped up . . .

Ryan: And you must have looked like Robinson Crusoe at that time.

Smith: I had my shoes . . . I had one 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant bar that I had this Australian shirt, and I walked in there and saw the captain . . . or the lieutenant colonel, whatever he

was. Anyway I walked up to him, and he looked at me and listened to . . . a minute and I could see the way he was squinting at me. He figured I was one of those goofballs, but I kept talking. Pretty soon he said, "Wait here a minute." And a guy came out with the chickens on, an old chicken colonel, and he talked to me for a minute. Then he said, "Come this way." And we went on up and General Kennedy . . . Kenny . . . oh, Dr. Kenny . . . he was the CO that was there, but there were a couple of other generals there. Then they wanted to know all about it, and they gave me some booze and loosened me up. I told them everything. When I got through, he said, "We'll write up a report and send it in. In the meantime we'll re-assign you back to your unit." So I go back to the unit.

And then I had trouble with malaria. I went in the hospital.

Ryan: So you caught that malaria while you were on that island do you think?

Smith: Oh, yes, while I was over in the bush. It's all one island.

Ryan: I mean, when you were on the . . .

Smith: . . . on the north side.

Ryan: Right. Yes. When you were . . .

Smith: Yes. The Australians had . . . we used atabrine. That's what the military had . . . the best advice with a synthetic called atabrine, but these Australians had a bottle that looked similar to it, the old fashioned ketchup bottle. It was filled with black liquid, and that's what they were being issued was pure quinine. And they took a little sip of it once a day, but they still had malaria. But it was more benign. There's still different kinds of malaria, and the kind I had was one of the benign ones . . . but I ran into a problem in the hospital. He'd been through what you call black, blackwater fever, and it is usually terminal. It affects the brain. This man recovered from it, but he lost his sense of balance.

Ryan: Okay, Norman, tell me a little bit about your hospital experience after you got back and you were rescued.

Norman: I went back to the squadron and then I had malaria, only episodic. So I turned in at the hospital.

Ryan: Were you flying again by this time?

Smith: No. No. I hadn't flown an airplane for a long time after that even. But, no, I didn't have a crew for it. I had to fly relief for somebody. But when the malaria came, I had to go to the hospital. That was standard procedure. I turned in then, and then I had malnutrition. So they wanted to fatten me up a little bit.

Anyway, one night a couple of nurses said they had some kind of a ball game . . . I've forgotten what it was . . . and this one nurse said, "I'd like to take you." We'd gone down and were coming back from this game, and my knee caught and I jerked and hurt her back. I always felt bad about that.

Then they decided that they'd send me to Australia for whatever reasons. Malnutrition evidentially. So anyway they put me on a DC-3, and I didn't know anything about who's on board. So I get on board, and we no sooner get the gear up and we're climbing and a guy across the seat from me starts yibbering and yabbering and shouting numbers and jockeying around. A couple of ward boys come down there and try to start wrestling with him, trying him to get him to sit down and trying to put a straight-jacket on him. And I got up to help out, and, man, that was a mistake! The whole plane was full of psycho eight.

Ryan: And you. (Laughing)

Smith: (Laughing) The fact is he said, "You sit down and you stay there and be quiet!" And I was a really good boy.

Ryan: So they were sending you all to the hospital in Australia.

Smith: Because by this time I began to look around at the other guys and then . . . they looked almost as strange as this guy that was making the fuss. So anyway they finally got a straight-jacket on him and made it over to Townsville. And then they decided I would go to Katoomba, which is a town up the river from Sydney, and we took a big long train ride. While we were still up in . . . oh, I don't know where we were . . . we were way out in the woods, but anyway, one night . . . it was a several day trip . . . one night while we were still up in the far north . . . the train, right in the middle of the night, the next stop . . . next stop . . . pretty soon you could hear some rustle. Something was moving in the brush, and then some men are shouting and then all was quiet. Nobody . . . what happened? What happened? Pretty soon the train starts going again. What happened? Well, the next morning we had fresh beef for breakfast, and the story was the train had killed a cow on the track. So they had butchered the cow, and they had been out chasing this nursing calf. That was what all the rustling was about.

Ryan: That was the noise?

Smith: Well, anyway, we finally got in to Katoomba and, oh, I don't know . . . I took leave one time and went down and bought some opals. Do a lot of opal mining in Australia, and I bought some of that to bring home. I also brought some real good quality wool cloth there, and I bought some of that. I mailed it home to my folks. And anyway they finally released me from there, and I went on up to Brisbane. They put me in a replacement depot.

Ryan: Did you ever get back . . .

Smith: I still had malaria. Anyway I told the doctor I wanted to go home, and he said, "Well, I can send you home the next day or so, but you wouldn't like it." I decided I wouldn't do that. So I just sat in the Repo Depot waiting for reassignment. And some of the fellows came down, and they knew who I was. So they'd come by once in a while.

Then one day \_\_\_\_\_ his crew showed up. There were several . . . two or three of the guys came down and they had been up to see General Kenney, the commanding officer of the 5th Air Force, which is a part of General MacArthur's forces. Anyway, they mentioned that I was in a Repo Depot, and they wanted to know why I was there. And they were the first crew to go home because they had so much time in, and we finally were getting a few extra airplanes. At that time the war effort was pushed to win the war in Europe first. And we were just getting the bare essentials and no crew replacement . . . no aircraft replacement. In fact we lost so many ships that they took one of the squadrons and disbanded it and put two or three of the remaining airplanes in the other groups. But you have to give a lot of credit to the engineers and the engineering officers. A plane would come back from battle . . . it had battle damage . . . the first thing you have to do would be the engineering officer go down and assess what's to be done about it. And if he says it's to be repaired then they go ahead and start making parts for repair. But if he said this is for salvage, then all the crew chiefs in the whole crews would come like they're a bunch of flies. They fly in there, and the airplanes just disappear.

Ryan: You strip it?

Smith: They take it down in the brush. And then they get together later on at some dark meeting some place and they'll say, "I'll swap a tire for some of your beat up tubes or . . ."

Ryan: They were that desperate for parts, huh?

Smith: Yes. Who needs the part real bad? What do you got? I'll trade with you. That was our quarter master's corps. 'Cause there was nothing coming.

Ryan: So did you ever get back into another squadron before the war ended?

Smith: No. When I came home, I was assigned to Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson as an instructor pilot; so I trained crews for B-24s there for a couple of years, I guess it was. No, it wasn't a couple of years. I get there on June I guess it was of '43 . . . yes, '43. We flew B-24s for several months, and then just before Christmas of '44 I was told to go on up to Clovis, New Mexico and take transition to B-29s because Davis-Monthan was switching over. So from some time in December through the end of the war I was a pilot that helped train combat crews for overseas duty.

The raw recruits would come, the people just out of school, would come there and be put together as a crew, the same as I had been put together as a crew. And then we

would give them so much flying time. They had a table of what the mission was, how many missions and what did they would do, whether they would have gunnery mission or bombing mission or navigation mission or whatever combination. So I did, I flew B-29s until . . . I applied for the regular Army, and then I got a brochure from Davis saying that they weren't gonna start classes until October . . . the end of October or the first part of November or somethin'. They were gonna to start classes way late.

Ryan: That's '44?

Smith: Yes. '44. '45!

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: '45. So I had plenty of points. It only took a day or two to get out, and so then went on up to Davis.

Ryan: This was after the war by this time?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Ryan: The war was over by this time?

Smith: Yes, the war was over. At the end . . . I was in the Army for, oh, a couple of months after the war.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: I don't when VJ Day was.

Ryan: Wasn't it in August?

Smith: Well after that. What kind of turned me off was we had all these officers on board . . . crews . . . I mean a lot of officers, well, men, too. We had these crews there, and if the guys didn't four hours in a month, they wouldn't get flight pay. And the flight pay was . . . I think it was 60% of the base pay, so as a courtesy to these guys we were taking B-29s on go on an eight hour mission and you up and fly four hours, come down and land, and don't turn your engines off, and then you take off in a total of eight hours off the ground, the total time from the first take-off to the last landing. And that would give these guys their flight pay. But in the meantime they were tearin' airplanes up because we had high temperatures and high head temps in Tucson. We had terrible problems. We ordinarily would take off to the northwest which put us over the town; and when you got to 200 feet, the rules were that you leveled off, flew straight and level with . . . not full power, but maximum power . . . except for take-off . . . in order to get enough air speed to cool the engines off. Here we were taxiing around on the ground in the heat of the summer just to give these guys flight training time, and that disturbed me.

Then the thing happened . . . I don't really know whether to talk about this . . . I had a crew up on night flight, and the guy made a good turn. He came in down one leg and base leg and made the final approach, and he came in and he didn't lose altitude. And I'm telling him, "Pull the throttle back." I'm tellin' him, "Pull back, pull back," and I thought he was gonna make it. So he dropped the gear, and I decided, "We ain't gonna make it! We're gonna land way down the runway. And the rules are that if . . . the standard operating procedure . . . if you're under 500 feet and you pull the gear down, and pull the flaps, you gotta land. I decided: We have one engine feather on landing, so I grabbed the control . . . the Army engineer . . . to get that engine on line . . . told the pilot lift the flaps up, and it was put on full power and hedge-hoped through the cactus, on the southeast end of Tucson. Came around and I have friends in the tower, and evidentially he never told anybody. I sure didn't tell anybody and that was the end of it.

Ryan: Okay. So Norman, when the war ended you were married by that time, is that right?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Ryan: And had a child.

Smith: Yes. I only had one child.

Ryan: Okay. So tell me where you were and what happened when you heard about the end of the war.

Smith: Well, my wife and I and the baby had been up at Mt. Lemon, which is a mountain just north of Tucson a few miles. It dominates the northern landscape of the area, and we were coming down. We'd been up there and we were coming down. We heard it on the radio that it had ended.

Ryan: Now, were you still officially in the military at that time?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Ryan: Okay.

Smith: Yes. I flew for several weeks after that. Immediately they started mustering people out.

Ryan: Okay.

Norman; But I figured well it's finally over, and we won. And everybody was grateful, not particularly happy, but grateful.

Ryan: Okay. Do you feel that you accomplished something as part of your service to your country during World War II? Do you feel a sense of accomplishment?

Smith: I think it cost more than I paid.

Ryan: When you came home . . . well, actually you were in the states when the war ended, right?

Smith: Oh, yes. We were in Tucson.

Ryan: Okay. And how long after that was it until you actually left the military?

Smith: A few weeks.

Ryan: Uh-hmm. Okay.

Smith: I don't really recall when the war ended or when we left.

Ryan: Did you have any trouble getting back into civilian life?

Smith: No. I just became a student.

Ryan: So you went back to school?

Smith: I went right back to Davis. We had six hundred kids on the campus out of 20,000 or more.

Ryan: You mean U.C. Davis?

Smith: Yes.

Ryan: Is that right?

Smith: Yes. Six hundred kids signed up.

Ryan: Wow!

Smith: The dormitories were . . . the old wooden dormitories . . .

Ryan: So that was probably for the fall semester of 1945?

Smith: Yes, fall and then the spring.

Ryan: What do you think is the greatest lesson you learned from your experience in the war?

Smith: I don't know . . . I learned many of 'em. I couldn't say about any one in particular.

Ryan: I think you're a survivor. That's a big one that I've learned just from talking with you. You're a real survivor.

Smith: That's innate. If you don't learn that, you haven't any choices . . .

Ryan: I think you have. Do you think there are any positive lessons to learn from the war experience?

Smith: Do I have any . . .

Ryan: Do you think there is a positive . . . did you get any positive experiences, uh, lessons out of it?

Smith: Well, I don't know is there any lessons particularly. There were tasks to be done, and I tried to do 'em and everybody . . .

Ryan: Okay. Thank you very much for your time Norman.

Smith: Oh, you were recording that.

Ryan: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Smith: No, I think I've unloaded all the dirty laundry and everything else.

Ryan: Alright. Thank you.

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